

**Side Event to the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council**  
**A human-rights based approach to the Sustainable Development**  
**Goals and Paris Climate Agreement**



**Statement by Benjamin Schachter**  
**Human Rights Officer, Thematic Engagement, Special**  
**Procedures and Right to Development Division**

1 March 2017, 15:00 – 17:00 Room XXIV,  
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Excellencies, Friends, Colleagues, Distinguished guests, fellow panelists,

Before tackling the difficult questions posed by Oli, I would like to thank everybody here today particularly H.E. Ambassador Khan from the COP Presidency, our co-sponsors, Civicus, CIEL, GANHRI, Earthjustice, Amnesty International, Center for Economic and Social Rights, and Franciscans International.

As I have said before, we are here for a simple reason. Climate change and its impacts hurt people. In some cases, they kill people. We know this and we know that human action is both the cause and the solution.

The Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offer a roadmap for addressing these impacts but now we must walk the talk so to speak and engage in the heavy-lifting of implementation. There is clearly a long way to go.

In a statement before COP22, calling for urgent action, the High Commissioner stressed that “there is a clear disconnect between the Paris Agreement’s stated ambition to limit warming to less than two degrees and the commitments countries have made.”

OHCHR is working hard to ensure that States do take rights-based action to protect human rights from the negative impacts of climate change and our advocacy is directly relevant to both the work of the UNFCCC and ongoing discussions of the 2030 Agenda.

The Agenda makes clear that the UNFCCC is the forum for addressing climate change but that climate change is deeply connected with the achievement of each of the Sustainable Development Goals and particularly with reducing inequalities because climate change impacts worst those who can least afford it.

The Agenda’s specific targets which address resilience to climate related hazards, integration of climate measures in national policies, improved education, awareness raising and capacity, financing climate action, and focused support for SIDS, LDCs and marginalized communities further reveal these important parallels.

It is clear from these parallels that a number of workstreams at the UNFCCC, for example those related to the global-stocktake, capacity-building, monitoring review and verification, loss and damages, transparency, are directly relevant to the success of the 2030 Agenda as a whole and also to the reviews of High-Level Political Forum. What is not entirely clear is the extent to which the respective mechanisms will communicate with each other and more importantly with the human rights community.

OHCHR has advocated and will continue to advocate for the UNFCCC and the HLPF to take into consideration human rights reporting and monitoring in their work in order to ensure that efforts to promote sustainable development and address climate change are truly benefitting all people and to support operationalization of human rights in development.

Our work on climate change has included high-level engagement and advocacy by the HC; the production of technical advice on a number of issues including numerous submissions to the UNFCCC on integrating human rights in climate action; support to groups of States like

the Climate Vulnerable Forum and the Geneva Pledge for Human Rights in Climate Action; support to the Human Rights Council, its treaty-bodies and special procedures; and multi-stakeholder engagement.

In the last week alone, I have spoken with representatives of NHRIs, the advisory committee to the HRC, CEDAW, CRC, the Geneva Pledge, the Climate Vulnerable Forum, numerous civil society partners, States and indigenous peoples. In the coming year, OHCHR intends to continue to engage with the UNFCCC, to produce a factsheet on climate change and human rights and to draft studies on climate-induced displacement, climate finance, and climate and its impacts on the rights of the child. We can also anticipate and hope to support continued engagement by the treaty-bodies, the universal periodic review and the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment in this area.

And I would be remiss not to highlight that tomorrow, we will have a panel discussion on climate change and its impacts on the rights of the child in Room XX from 9.00 to 12.00 and a side event on climate change and the right to education from 12.00 – 2.00 pm in room XXIV.

I encourage you to attend these events in order to learn more about these important issues.

Friends and colleagues,

All of this work is important but more important will be what we do with it. We know that taking rights-based action to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change is an obligation founded in both the human rights and climate commitments of States. And, pursuant to these commitments, States and other duty-bearers must act to protect rights-holders from harms caused by climate change.

How do we get them there?

I have no easy answers. Continued engagement will be important as will reinforcing and strengthening existing efforts to bring together the climate, human rights and development communities.

In October of last year, OHCHR along with the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice and the Geneva Pledge for Human Rights in Climate Action hosted a two-day expert meeting on human rights and climate change to do just that. The meeting included representatives of numerous States, civil society organizations and international organizations and a summary of the recommendations made was prepared (I will touch more on this later).

More than anything though what is lacking is resources, financial, human, technical, political. As the sole human rights officer working on climate change at OHCHR, I can speak to this on an individual level. And surely improving OHCHR capacity on this issue would be a positive. But OHCHR alone cannot solve this problem and indeed, the lack of resources at OHCHR and elsewhere reflects a more profound emptiness.

Because failure to act in the face of a preventable harm whose effects include starvation, drowning, diseases, displacement and death for our fellow human beings reflects a lack of compassion, a lack of solidarity and a lack of commitment that must be addressed globally.

This is where those of us in the room today can step in. In many ways we already know what needs to be done. Going back to OHCHR's meeting last October, the participants called for States to take action to, *inter alia*:

- 1) Uphold international human rights obligations in climate actions
- 2) Promote policy coherence and link climate, development and human rights communities
- 3) Raise the ambition of nationally determined contributions.
- 4) Include human rights in nationally determined contributions, adaptation communications and national communications.
- 5) Integrate human rights considerations throughout measurement, review and verification processes including the transparency framework.
- 6) Establish and support social and environmental safeguards for climate financing mechanisms.
- 7) Strengthen and extend the Lima Work Programme on gender.
- 8) Ensure that the traditional knowledge platform established by the Paris decision respects indigenous peoples' rights.
- 9) Guarantee the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders in UNFCCC processes.

We need to fight for follow-through on these recommendations and to create the base of knowledge, resources and empowerment that will make it possible at both the national and international levels. Part of this can be done through engaging with the Human Rights Council and its mechanism as well as NHRIs on climate change and linking this work to that of the larger development community.

In this way we can see follow-through on the commitments made in the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and in fulfilling all human rights including the human right to development.

If each of us could do our part to make these objectives a reality this would be an excellent start toward a more sustainable future for all persons.