

34th session of the Human Rights Council
Panel discussion on climate change and the rights of the child
(Concept note as of 1 March 2017)

- Date and venue:** **2 March 2017**, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m., Palais des Nations, Room XX, Geneva
Will be broadcast live and archived at <http://webtv.un.org>
- Objectives:** This panel will address the relationship between climate change and the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child. The objectives are:
- **To enhance understanding** of the effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child;
 - **To identify challenges** faced by States, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in combating the adverse effects of climate change on the rights of the child;
 - **To explore the added value** of a human rights-based approach to addressing the impacts of climate change on children;
 - **To highlight related policies**, lessons learned and good practices; and
 - **To identify opportunities** and points of entry for greater collaboration with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other key stakeholders on fulfilling the rights of the child in climate decisions and actions.
- Chair:** **H.E. Mr. Amr Ramadan**, Vice-President of the Human Rights Council
- Opening statement:** **Ms. Peggy Hicks**, Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Moderator:** **H.E. Ms. Maria Teresa T. Almojuela**, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- Panellists:** **H.E. Mr. Ha Kim Ngoc**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam
H.E. Mr. M. Shameem Ahsan, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
Ms. Marilena Viviani, Director, UNICEF Geneva Liaison Office, Division of Public Partnerships, United Nations Children’s Fund
Ms. Kirsten Sandberg, Member, Committee on the Rights of the Child
Ms. Kehkashan Basu, Founder, Green Hope Foundation
- Outcome:** The panel will provide an opportunity for States, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders to discuss the impact of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child. The anticipated outcomes of this discussion include:
- **A deeper understanding** of the relationship between climate change and the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child, including opportunities and challenges in policy and practice;
 - **Facilitation of action** to identify, address and remedy the negative impacts of climate change on the rights of the child through sharing of knowledge and

good practices between States, civil society and other relevant stakeholders;

- **Recommendations** for a rights-based approach to climate action to fulfil the rights of the child in the context of the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant international agreements.
- A **summary report** of the panel discussion to inform OHCHR's analytical study on climate change and the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child and related work.

Mandate: In its resolution 32/33 on human rights and climate change, the Human Rights Council decided to incorporate into its programme of work for the 34th session a panel discussion on the adverse impacts of climate change on States' efforts to realize the rights of the child and related policies, lessons learned and good practices. The resolution further requested OHCHR to conduct, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, a detailed analytical study on the relationship between climate change and the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child to be submitted prior to the 35th session of the Council.

Format: The opening statement and initial presentations by the panellists, the latter guided by the moderator, will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots and chaired by the Vice-President of the Human Rights Council. The list of speakers for the discussion will be established at the beginning of the panel and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups will be moved to the beginning of the list. States and observers, including representatives of civil society, take the floor for a 2-minute intervention each (total 45 minutes), followed by responses from the panellists (15 minutes). A second round of interventions from the floor (45 minutes) will be followed by responses and concluding remarks from the panellists and the moderator (15 minutes). To make the panel interactive, speakers are encouraged to focus interventions on the themes of the panel, either by asking the panellists questions or sharing relevant national experience. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

Background: Climate change has been demonstrated to have both a direct and indirect impact on a wide range of human rights, including the rights of the child. The Human Rights Council, its special procedures mechanisms and OHCHR have recognized and highlighted the threat climate change poses to human rights through a series of reports, resolutions and activities, and have called for a rights-based approach to climate action. In Particular, Council resolution 32/33 highlights the effect of climate change on the full enjoyment of the rights of the child, which are articulated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other relevant instruments. The CRC, the most widely ratified international human rights instrument (196 States), describes *inter alia* the rights of the child to survival, development, protection, and participation.

Climate change poses a unique threat to children's survival, health, food security, water and education, among other things. From malnutrition and the spread of vector- and water-borne diseases, to physical and psychological trauma, climate change affects children in different and more profound ways than the population as a whole. Further, many of the world's climate-vulnerable countries are also those that have the most children as a share of their overall population.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), more than half a billion

children live in areas with extremely high risk of flooding, 115 million are at high or extremely high risk from tropical cyclones and almost 160 million are exposed to high or extremely high drought severity¹. Around 300 million children live in areas with toxic levels of air pollution and 2 billion live in areas where air pollution exceeds the World Health Organization’s minimum air quality guidelines due, in part, to fossil fuel use². The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) has stated that, “[climate change] is one of the biggest threats to children’s health and exacerbates health disparities” and calls on States to prioritize children’s health in climate strategies.³

On 23 September 2016, a day of general discussion of the CRC Committee highlighted the link between children’s rights and the environment. The discussion considered the impacts of climate change on the rights of the child and the corresponding human rights obligations as well as the need for environmental policies to address children’s rights⁴. The Paris Agreement, signed in December 2015, commits States to rights-based climate action. Its Preamble states that “Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights” including the rights of children and intergenerational equity.⁵ In this context, the panel discussion on climate change and the rights of the child is particularly timely and offers the opportunity to address the implications of climate change for the rights of the child.

Background documents:

In September 2016, OHCHR transmitted to States and other relevant stakeholders a questionnaire requesting inputs for its detailed analytical study on the relationship between climate change and the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child. The informal summary of inputs received is contained in document [A/HRC/34/CRP.2](#) entitled “Relationship between climate change and the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of the child”. The individual inputs received can be accessed at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/HRAndClimateChange/Pages/RightsChild.aspx>

Human Rights Council resolutions on human rights and climate change:

- [Human Rights Council resolution 32/33](#) of 1 July 2016;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 29/15](#) of 2 July 2015;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 26/27](#) of 27 June 2014;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 18/22](#) of 30 September 2011;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 10/4](#) of 25 March 2009;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 7/23](#) of 28 March 2008.

¹ UNICEF, *Unless we act now: The impact of climate change on children* (2015).

² UNICEF, *Clear the air for children* (2016).

³ [General comment No. 15](#) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24), paragraph 50 (2013).

⁴ More information and discussion concept note:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Discussion2016.aspx>.

⁵ The full text of the Paris Agreement: http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php