28th session of the Human Rights Council  
Full-day discussion on human rights and climate change  

Friday, 6 March 2015, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Concept note  
(as of 3 March 2015)

Mandate

In its resolution 26/27 of 27 June 2014 on human rights and climate change, the Human Rights Council decided to hold, during its twenty-eighth session, a full-day discussion on specific themes relating to human rights and climate change on the basis of the different elements contained in the resolution. The resolution calls for one panel discussion on identifying challenges and ways forward towards the realization of all human rights for all, including the right to development, in particular those in vulnerable situations, as well as the measures and best practices to promote and protect human rights that can be adopted by States in addressing the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, and another panel discussion on how climate change has had an adverse impact on States’ efforts to progressively realize the right to food, and policies, lessons learned and good practices.

Background

The reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) unequivocally confirm that climate change is real and that human-made greenhouse gas emissions are its primary cause. These reports and other studies document the likely impact of climate change on the lives of millions of people around the world. The adverse impact of climate change includes an increasing frequency of extreme weather events and natural disasters, rising sea-levels, floods, heat waves, droughts, desertification, water shortages, and the spread of tropical and vector-borne diseases.

Climate change-related impact directly and indirectly threatens the full and effective enjoyment of a range of human rights, including the rights to life, water and sanitation, food, health, home and housing, self-determination, culture and development. It also threatens prospects for sustainable development and the rights of future generations. While the negative impact of climate change affects people everywhere, it is disproportionately borne by persons and communities already in vulnerable situations owing to geography, poverty, sex, age, disability, and indigenous, minority, or other status. The poorest individuals, communities and countries that have contributed the least to greenhouse emissions often bear the greatest burden. Populations of small islands and low-lying coastal lands bear some of the greatest adverse impact. For some communities, climate change poses basic issues of survival. International human rights standards should be central to addressing climate change, mitigating its negative impact and equitably distributing the burden of response.

The Human Rights Council has long recognized that climate change has significant implications for the full enjoyment of human rights. In its resolution 7/23 of 28 March 2008 on human rights and climate change, the Council expressed concern that climate change “poses an immediate and far-reaching threat to people and communities around the world” and requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to prepare a study on the relationship between climate change and human rights. The Office submitted this study (A/HRC/10/61) to the tenth session of the Council held in March 2009. On 25 March 2009, the Council adopted resolution
10/4 on human rights and climate change in which it noted that “climate change-related impacts have a range of implications, both direct and indirect, for the effective enjoyment of human rights …”; recognized that the effects of climate change “will be felt most acutely by those segments of the population who are already in a vulnerable situation …”, and that “effective international cooperation to enable the full, effective and sustained implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change … is important in order to support national efforts for the realization of human rights implicated by climate change-related impacts”, and affirmed that “human rights obligations and commitments have the potential to inform and strengthen international and national policy-making in the area of climate change”.

In its resolution 10/4, the Council decided to hold a panel discussion on the relationship between climate change and human rights at its eleventh session in order to contribute to the realization of the goals set out in the Bali Action Plan. This discussion was held on 15 June 2009. In September 2011, the Council adopted its third resolution on human rights and climate change (resolution 18/22). The Council affirmed that human rights obligations, standards, and principles have the potential to inform and strengthen international and national policy-making in the area of climate change, promoting policy coherence, legitimacy, and sustainable outcomes. Pursuant to resolution 18/22, OHCHR convened a seminar to address the adverse impacts of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights, with a view to following up on the call to respect human rights in all climate change-related actions and policies and forging stronger cooperation between the human rights and climate change communities. The objectives of this seminar were to further awareness and enhance understanding of the relationship between climate change and human rights; suggest actions and identify best practices that address the adverse effects of climate change on human rights; and enhance cooperation between human rights and climate change-awareness advocates. The seminar was held from 23 to 24 February 2012 and the summary report was presented at the twentieth session of the Council held from 18 June to 6 July the same year.

In resolution 26/27, the Council emphasizes the need for all States to enhance international dialogue and cooperation to address the adverse impacts of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights including the right to development, particularly in developing countries, especially Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States and African countries. It calls for dialogue, capacity-building, mobilization of financial resources, technology transfer, and other forms of cooperation to facilitate climate change adaptation and mitigation, including to meet the special needs and circumstances of developing countries. The resolution also highlights the importance of addressing the human rights impacts of climate change in the context of ongoing discussions related to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the post-2015 development agenda.

**Objectives**

Based on the request of the Human Rights Council, this full-day panel discussion aims to:

(i) identify challenges posed by climate change to the realization of all human rights for all, including the right to development, in particular for those in vulnerable situations;

(ii) consider how climate change has had an adverse impact on States’ efforts progressively to realize the right to food and related policies, lessons learned and good practices;
(iii) identify ways forward, including measures and best practices to promote and protect human rights that can be adopted by States in addressing the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of human rights.

**Speakers and panelists**

**Morning (9 a.m. to 12 p.m.)**

*Challenges and ways forward towards the realization of human rights for all, including the right to development, in particular those in vulnerable situations, as well as measures and best practices to promote and protect human rights that can be adopted by States in addressing the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of human rights*

**Chair:** H.E. Mr. Joachim Ruecker, President of the Human Rights Council

**Introduction:** Video message by Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations

**Opening statement:** Ms. Flavia Pansieri, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

**Panellists:**
- H.E. Mr. Anote Tong, President of the Republic of Kiribati
- H.E. Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh
- Ms. Mary Robinson, President, Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice
- Mr. Dan Bondi Ogolla, Coordinator and Principal Legal Adviser, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples
- Mr. Mithika Mwenda, Secretary General, Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance

**Moderator:** Mr. Martin Khor, Executive Director, South Centre

**Afternoon (3 p.m. to 6 p.m.)**

*The adverse impacts of climate change on States’ efforts progressively to realize the right to food, and policies, lessons learned and good practices*

**Chair:** H.E. Mr. Joachim Ruecker, President of the Human Rights Council

**Video message by**
- Ms. Hilal Elver, Special Rapporteur on the right to food

**Panellists:**
- H.E. Mr. Enele Sosene Sopoaga, Prime Minister of Tuvalu
- Mr. Renan B. Dalisay, Administrator, National Food Authority, Philippines
- Ms. Xiangjun Yao, Director, Geneva Office, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- Mr. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary, World Council of Churches
Ms. Elizabeth Mpofu, General Coordinator, La Via Campesina  
Ms. Ana-Maria Suarez Franco, Permanent Representative in Geneva, FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) International

Moderator: Mr. John Knox, Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment

Closing remarks: Ms. Mary Robinson, President, Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice

Format

• The panel discussion will be chaired by the President of the Human Rights Council. A high-level opening segment will be followed by brief introductory remarks from the moderator and the first panel.

• A 35-minute initial discussion will follow among the panelists, led by the moderator, allowing each panelist five minutes’ speaking time.

• The remainder of the session will be dedicated to interaction among States, observers and panelists:
  - There will be two rounds of discussion of 45 minutes for comments and questions from the floor, limited to a maximum of 2 minutes, followed by 10 minutes for comments and replies by panelists.
  - The delegates representing Member or observer States, United Nations agencies and international and regional organizations may inscribe on the list of speakers through the electronic system installed in Room XX. Non-governmental organizations may inscribe using the online registration system and national human rights institutions may inscribe with the NHRI focal point.
  - States, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and other observers are encouraged to intervene in an interactive way, through questions, comments and sharing of experiences, good practices and challenges as well as suggested recommendations on ways forward, with a view to stimulating constructive debate.

• The second panel will commence at 3 p.m. and will follow the same modalities.

• The full day of discussion will close with remarks by Ms. Mary Robinson.

Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this thematic discussion are that:

• States, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders will learn from sharing challenges, experiences and good practices, and identifying practical steps to better protect the rights of persons adversely impacted by climate change;

• Relevant special procedures mandate holders will give consideration to the issue of climate change and human rights within their respective mandates;
• The discussions will support analysis of linkages between human rights and climate change, and help to explore the potential of human rights obligations, standards and principles to inform and strengthen international, regional and national policymaking to address climate change;
• The Council will be provided with a substantive basis from which to issue follow-up recommendations with respect to ways forward on issues related to the protection of the rights of persons adversely impacted by climate change. The discussions will also provide guidance for civil society in its efforts to address issues of human rights and climate change;
• OHCHR will prepare a summary report, including recommendations stemming from the panel discussion, which will be submitted to the Council at its twenty-ninth session, as mandated by paragraph 9 of Council resolution 26/27.