



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
11 September 2020

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Forty-fifth session

14 September–2 October 2020

Agenda items 2 and 3

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement\* submitted by Brahma Kumaris  
World Spiritual University, Commission of the Churches on  
International Affairs of the World Council of Churches,  
Franciscans International, non-governmental organizations  
in general consultative status, Dominicans for Justice and  
Peace - Order of Preachers, a non-governmental organization  
in special consultative status, Soka Gakkai International, a  
non-governmental organization on the roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **Our collective responsibility to act now to protect human rights from the impacts of the intersecting environmental, climate and Covid-19 crises<sup>1</sup>**

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect the whole of humanity in various ways, it brings to light our collective responsibility to take action now to ensure that we do not return to behaviors that leave the vast majority of the human family behind, and that we forge a healthy future.

At the core, the global pandemic and climate emergency are rooted in an unjust and ecologically unsustainable economic system. This necessitates a new international order and new models of development that empower low-income nations to meet the basic needs of their people according to their contexts and resources; that equitably distribute economic gains across and within nations; guarantee the full enjoyment of their human rights, and that, at the same, safeguard the health of the ecological commons which form the base of sustenance for all life.

The aforementioned crises are interlinked, multiplying the impacts on human rights, especially for marginalized or vulnerable groups, which can include Indigenous Peoples, women, children, persons living in poverty, migrants, displaced persons and persons with disabilities among others. In this regard, States must ensure, inter alia, the full and equal enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights and the transition to a sustainable, resilient, and net zero-carbon economy and society in a post-Covid-19 world. While the twentieth century has experienced wars and economic exploitation, we must now create a century where the dignity of life is the central value of every sphere of society.

Resolutely adopting a human rights-based approach to the intersecting environmental, climate and Covid-19 crises is key to secure the respect for the dignity of life, particularly for the segments of the population who are already in vulnerable situations and feel more acutely the impacts of these multifaceted crises. This is also crucial to achieving the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals towards 2030.

The Covid-19 crisis confirms the need to recognize the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all, and to approach climate change from a human rights perspective.

### **Recognition of the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all**

The Covid-19 pandemic has shed unprecedented light on the fact that most emerging infectious diseases are ‘zoonoses’, crossing over from animals to humans. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment highlighted, “deforestation, industrial agriculture, illegal wildlife trade, climate change and other types of environmental degradation increase the risk of future pandemics, raising the probability of major human rights violations”,<sup>2</sup> impacting especially people who are already in vulnerable situations. A healthy environment is essential for human health, and for human societies to flourish.

More than one hundred and fifty states recognize a right to a healthy environment in their Constitution and laws.<sup>3</sup> It is time to recognize the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all and the Human Rights Council should be the frontrunner of this global recognition.

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<sup>1</sup> This statement is submitted on behalf of the Geneva Interfaith Forum (GIF) for Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights, which is composed of the following organizations: Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, Franciscans International, Dominicans for Justice and Peace and Soka Gakkai International.

<sup>2</sup> “Covid-19: ‘Not and excuse’ to roll back environmental protection and enforcement”, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25794&LangID=E>.

<sup>3</sup> A/HRC/43/53.

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## **Support the creation of a special procedure on climate change and human rights**

During the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council, the Marshall Island issued a joint oral statement on behalf of climate vulnerable countries, especially small developing island states (SIDS), echoing the call made by the Climate Vulnerable Forum during COP25 in 2019, to establish a dedicated new special procedure on climate change and human rights.<sup>4</sup>

This mandate should, among others, include the following: 1. to take stock of the impacts of climate change on human rights, which should entail conducting country visits, receiving communications and organizing consultations with affected communities; 2. to promote policy coherence between climate actions and international human rights obligations; mainstreaming a human rights-based approach in all climate change-related actions and policies; and 3. to be the focal point for dialogue with governments, civil society, international financial institutions, Treaty Bodies and other Special Procedures. We believe that the establishment of this mandate will not undermine the work of other mandate holders but reinforce them as climate change is a cross-cutting human rights issue. We hope that in 2021 this mandate will be adopted, to assist, identify, and engage directly with affected vulnerable groups.

A key role of the United Nations and the Human Rights Council in the twenty-first century must be to stand with the vulnerable segments of society. The time to act is now.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://thecvf.org/president-heine-statement-to-the-cvf-partners-leaders-event-at-unfccc-cop25/>.