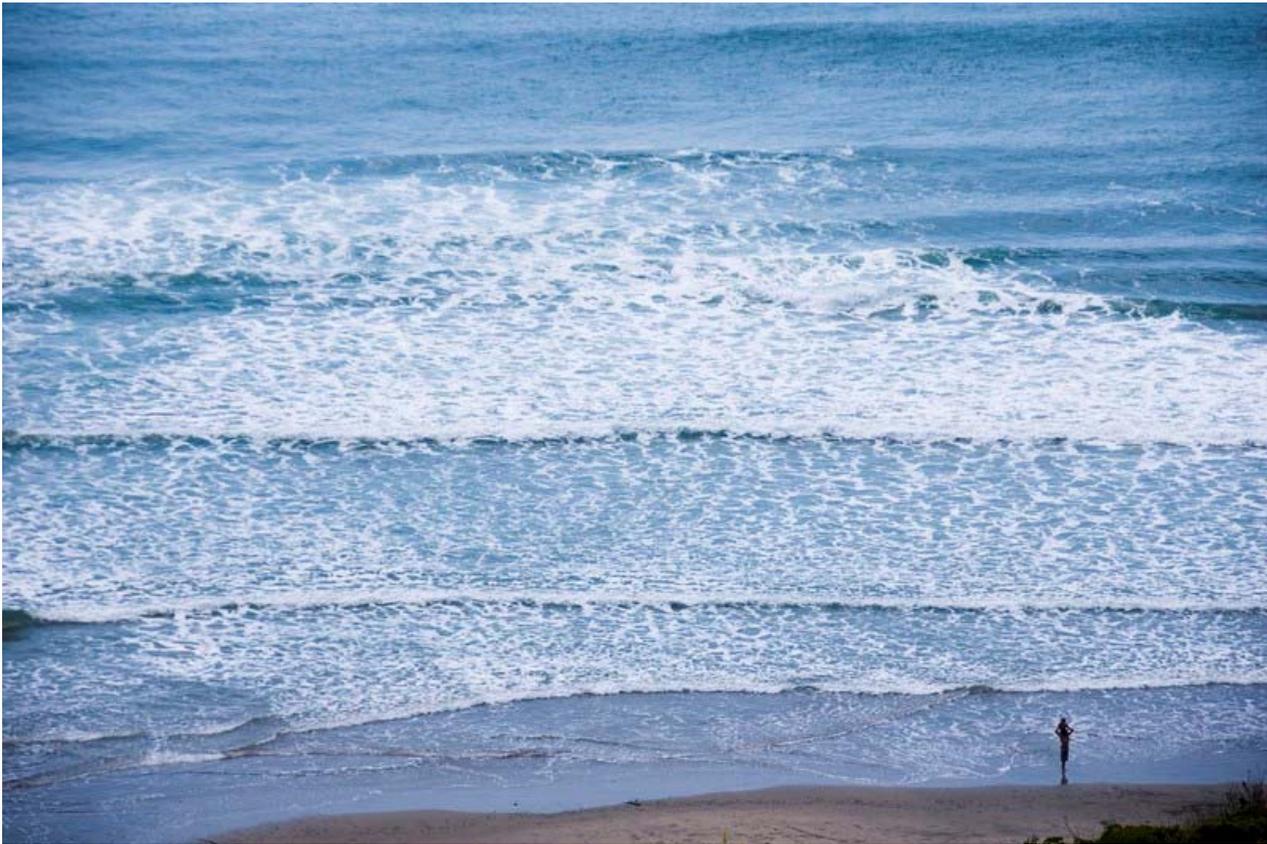


**CIEL**

**Center for International Environmental Law**



**Climate Change & Human Rights**  
Issues for Copenhagen and Beyond



## Introduction

The world's scientific community, convened by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, has concluded that climate change is both occurring and is attributable to increasing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) resulting from human activity. The UN Human Rights Council (Council) has recognized that the environmental changes brought about by climate change can interfere with the realization of fundamental, internationally recognized human rights – including those protected by the UN Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Climate change impacts, and measures taken to mitigate or adapt to it, are already affecting both individuals and communities. At the extreme, climate change and the measures taken to address it threaten to destroy the cultures of peoples around the world, render their lands uninhabitable, and deprive them of their means of subsistence. Particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are peoples whose way of life is inextricably tied to nature and low-lying coastal and island nations that lack the economic resources to adapt to severe changes.

States have a duty under international human rights law to cooperate to prevent the violation of human rights, including the duty to take effective action in the fight against climate change. Furthermore, States must take adequate measures to respect and protect human rights when working to mitigate climate change or adapt to its impacts.

Increased attention to the human dimension of climate change, including in the current negotiations, can improve the likelihood that climate change-related measures respect human rights. Accordingly, understanding and addressing the human consequences of climate change lies at the very heart of the climate change challenge. Moreover, linking the climate change negotiations and structures to existing human rights norms enables States to use indicators and mechanisms anchored in the well-established human rights system to address the challenges posed by the changing climate and response measures.

The linkages between climate change and human rights (CC&HRs) are beyond dispute. The challenge now lies in introducing a rights-based approach to the negotiation and implementation of an effective and equitable solution to climate change.

## Climate-Related Human Rights Concerns

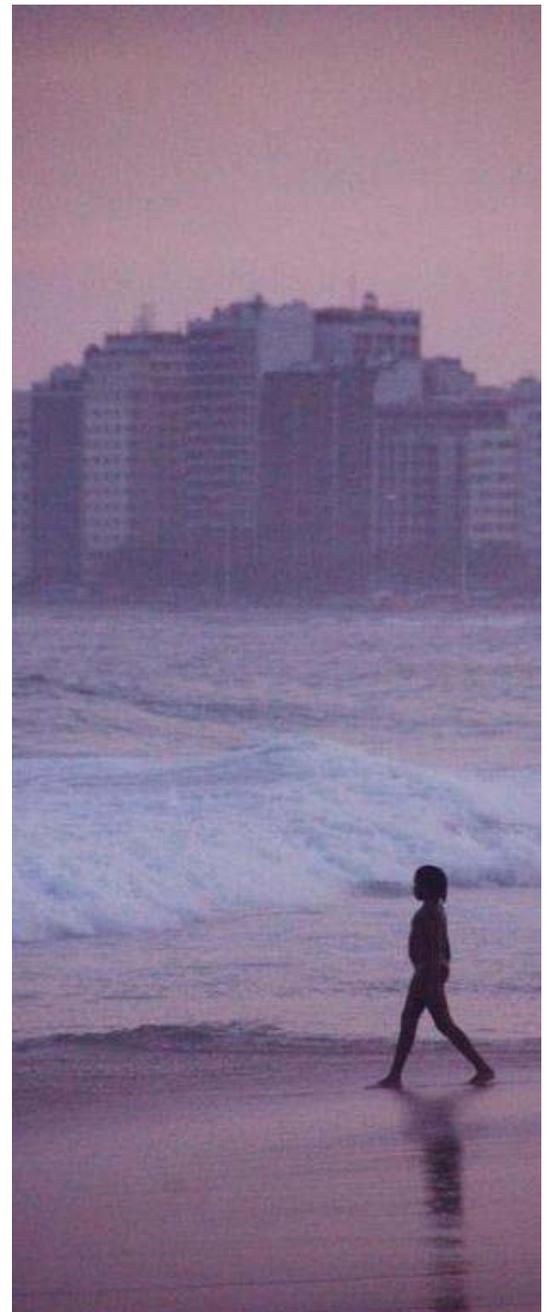
Manifestations of climate change include rising sea-levels, increasing temperatures, extreme weather events (such as storms, droughts and cyclones), receding coastlines, melting permafrost and changes in precipitation patterns. These climatic phenomena have direct impacts on human populations and their livelihoods.

- Rising sea-levels and storms cause flooding, population displacement, salination of fresh-water resources, and the diminishment of habitable or cultivable land.
- Rising surface temperatures lead to greater occurrence of diseases such as scrub typhus, diarrheal diseases and other mosquito-borne diseases.
- The increasing number and intensity of weather events endanger life, health, and housing.
- Changing coastlines and melting permafrost cause damage to land, houses, and other infrastructure.
- Changing precipitation patterns and the melting of glaciers affect access to water, which in turn affects the ability to irrigate lands and secure access to food.

To address these impacts, adaptation and mitigation actions, such as those relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), can affect, perhaps profoundly, the livelihoods, lifestyles, living conditions and cultures of indigenous peoples and other local communities.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In the poorest regions of the world, women often bear the primary responsibility for gathering the essential food, water and fuel supplies for their families. Droughts caused by climate change make their work extremely hard as wells run dry, crop production declines and fuel wood has to be collected from farther distances. Similarly, shortages of food and water will increase malnutrition among children and diminish their chances to receive school education. Children are also more vulnerable to natural disasters as they lack physical strength and are often orphaned or separated from their families.

Indigenous peoples are also particularly vulnerable to climate change, since their way of life is often inextricably tied to the natural environment. Consequently, environmental changes impact their ability to access water, food and shelter. Moreover, for indigenous peoples lands are not a mere commodity, but a central element of spiritual and cultural identity. Thus, serious environmental changes resulting from climate change affect both their physical and spiritual survival.



## The Inuit Petition

The CC&HRs linkage was squarely posed by the Inuit before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in 2005. The petition presented by the Inuit from Canada and the United States, with the legal support of CIEL and Earthjustice, avers that climate change, caused substantially by the United States, has had a devastating impact on the rights of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic. While the IACHR decided not to proceed with the petition “at present,” in 2006 it held a “thematic hearing” to begin investigating the connection between CC&HR from a general perspective. The effort by the Inuit before the IACHR illuminated the CC&HRs linkage and helped broaden and re-focus the terms of the climate change debate. [www.ciel.org/Publications/ICC\\_Petition\\_7Dec05.pdf](http://www.ciel.org/Publications/ICC_Petition_7Dec05.pdf).

## The Malé Declaration

During 2007, CIEL supported the Republic of the Maldives to further recognize and clarify the CC&HRs relationship. In November 2007, representatives of the Small Island Developing States, including the Maldives, signed the Malé Declaration on the Human Dimension of Global Climate Change. The Declaration notes that the environment provides the infrastructure for human civilization, and that the impacts of climate change pose the most immediate, fundamental and far-reaching threat to the environment, individuals and communities around the planet. It also notes that the fundamental right to an environment capable of supporting human society and the full enjoyment of human rights has been recognized by the international community, and therefore expresses concern that climate change has clear and immediate implications for the full enjoyment of human rights. The Malé Declaration further calls for the cooperation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Council in assessing the human rights implications of climate change. [www.ciel.org/Publications/Male\\_Declaration\\_Nov07.pdf](http://www.ciel.org/Publications/Male_Declaration_Nov07.pdf).



## UN Human Rights Council Resolutions

In March 2008 the Council adopted, by consensus, Resolution 7/23 on human rights and climate change, which states that climate change poses an immediate and far-reaching threat to people and communities around the world and has implications for the full enjoyment of human rights. The resolution also requests the OHCHR to conduct a detailed, analytical study of the CC&HRs relationship.

The Council adopted another consensus resolution (Resolution 10/4) in March 2009, noting that climate change has both direct and indirect implications for the enjoyment of human rights, and recognizing that vulnerable individuals and communities will be the most acutely affected. The resolution underlined key points made in the OHCHR study and decided to hold a panel discussion on CC&HRs in order to contribute to the realization of the goals of the Bali Action Plan. Further, it requested that the OHCHR prepare a summary of the panel discussion to be made available to the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP).

The Council's 2009 resolution further welcomed both the decision of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing to prepare a report on the impact of climate change on the right to housing, as well as the steps that the UNFCCC Secretariat has taken to facilitate exchange of information on human rights and climate change.



## OHCHR's Analytical Study

The OHCHR study requested by the Council definitively shows that climate change interferes with a wide range of human rights, that States have obligations under human rights law to protect those rights from the effects of climate change - including, in particular, through international cooperation - and that States' efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change must comply with their duties under human rights law. These conclusions should both increase the moral and ethical imperative for governments around the globe to act to combat climate change and inform how States must act in mitigating and adapting to climate change.

The OHCHR received submissions from States, UN bodies, intergovernmental organizations, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) during the preparation of its analytical study. The submissions address the human dimension of climate change, including the physical impacts of climate change on society; the implications of climate change for human rights; and the role of the international community in protecting and fulfilling the rights threatened by climate change. Some of the submissions also list approaches for making the CC&HRs relationship operational. CIEL's staff participate in drafting submissions and in the OHCHR's public hearing on CC&HRs.

The OHCHR study will serve as the basis for future discussions in the Council on the CC&HRs linkage. The study, together with a summary of the discussion held during the Council's session, will be made available to the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC for its consideration.

## CIEL's Geneva Experts Meeting

In January 2009, CIEL and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) brought together a group of leading experts from environmental and human rights organizations to discuss practical ways of implementing the CC&HRs linkage. The workshop attempted to identify concrete approaches to operationalize the CC&HRs linkage.

The workshop identified several options for addressing the issue, including:

- 1) Addressing the implications of climate change for existing human rights special procedures' mandates;
- 2) The Council could establish a special procedure on climate change;
- 3) The Council could engage with climate change issues in other ways;
- 4) Human rights treaty bodies could address CC&HRs linkages within their mandates; and
- 5) The UNFCCC COP could recognize the principle that climate change-related activities must respect human rights and task a new or existing specialized body or process with making the climate change and human rights linkage operational.

Comments made by the panel of experts are reflected in CIEL and FES's report "Human Rights and Climate Change: Practical Steps for Implementation." [http://www.ciel.org/Publications/CCandHRE\\_Feb09.pdf](http://www.ciel.org/Publications/CCandHRE_Feb09.pdf)

## UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and The Bali Action Plan

The UNFCCC is the basic international legal instrument for channeling international cooperation to achieve stabilization of GHG concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. The Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC represents the first step in this process and imposes emissions reduction and limitation obligations on industrialized country Parties.

The current UNFCCC's negotiating process is conducted through the Bali Road Map (the long-term plan for negotiating a follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol, the first commitment period of which expires in 2012) and includes negotiations on long-term cooperative action to combat climate change. Within this framework, the Bali Action Plan calls for the Parties to develop a shared vision for long-term action to avoid dangerous interference with the climate system. In turn, the shared vision would rest on enhanced action under each of the four basic pillars: mitigation, adaptation, financing and technology transfer. Human rights are relevant to all four pillars. These negotiations are scheduled to conclude by COP 15 in Copenhagen, Denmark, in December 2009.

In 2008, the Maldives submitted the table below regarding human rights and climate change. The full submission, including references to all of the rights cited below, is available at

[http://www.ciel.org/Publications/Maldives/Maldives\\_Submission\\_29Sep08.pdf](http://www.ciel.org/Publications/Maldives/Maldives_Submission_29Sep08.pdf)



Climate Impact	Human Impact	Rights Implicated
<p><b>Sea Level Rise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flooding</li> <li>• Sea Surges</li> <li>• Erosion</li> <li>• Salination of land and water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of land</li> <li>• Drowning, injury</li> <li>• Lack of clean water, disease</li> <li>• Damage to coastal infrastructure, homes, and property</li> <li>• Loss of agricultural lands</li> <li>• Threat to tourism, lost beaches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-determination [ICCPR;ICESCR,1]</li> <li>• Life [ICCPR, 6]</li> <li>• Health [ICESCR, 12]</li> <li>• Water [CEDAW,14; ICRC 24]</li> <li>• Means of subsistence [ICESCR,1]</li> <li>• Standard of living [ICESCR, 12]</li> <li>• Adequate housing [ICESCR,12]</li> <li>• Culture [ICCPR, 27]</li> <li>• Property [UDHR,17]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Temperature Increase</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in disease vectors</li> <li>• Coral bleaching</li> <li>• Impact on Fisheries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spread of disease</li> <li>• Changes in traditional fishing livelihood and commercial fishing</li> <li>• Threat to tourism, lost coral and fish diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life [ICCPR, 6]</li> <li>• Health [ICESCR, 12]</li> <li>• Means of subsistence [ICESCR, 1]</li> <li>• Adequate standard of living [ICESCR, 12]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Extreme Weather Events</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher intensity storms</li> <li>• Sea Surges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dislocation of populations</li> <li>• Contamination of water supply</li> <li>• Damage to infrastructure: delays in medical treatment, food crisis</li> <li>• Psychological distress</li> <li>• Increased transmission of disease</li> <li>• Damage to agricultural lands</li> <li>• Disruption of educational services</li> <li>• Damage to tourism sector</li> <li>• Massive property damage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life [ICCPR,6]</li> <li>• Health [ICESCR,12]</li> <li>• Water [CEDAW,14; ICRC 24]</li> <li>• Means of subsistence [ICESCR,1]</li> <li>• Adequate standard of living [ICESCR, 12]</li> <li>• Adequate and secure housing [ICESCR,12]</li> <li>• Education [ICESCR,13]</li> <li>• Property [UDHR,17]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Changes in Precipitation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in disease vectors</li> <li>• Erosion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outbreak of disease</li> <li>• Depletion of agricultural soils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life [ICCPR,6]</li> <li>• Health [ICESCR,12]</li> <li>• Means of subsistence [ICESCR,1]</li> </ul>

## Adaptation

Adaptation policies attempt to increase the capacity of societies and ecosystems to deal with the risks and impacts of climate change. Undoubtedly, governments and other actors will take action to face the changes brought about by climate change. In this regard, the duty in human rights law to protect people from harm is universally recognized. However, these adaptation measures have the potential to infringe on human rights.

The UNFCCC Secretariat has designated a focal point on human rights with respect to adaptation. Due to the nature of the climate system and the long-term effects of increased GHG concentrations, climate change will continue over several decades and adaptation strategies are key to protecting vulnerable populations. A variety of adaptation measures implicate human rights, such as measures regarding food, water, and the availability of adaptation resources for vulnerable populations. Similarly, disaster risk reduction could address the particular situation of the most vulnerable and marginalized.



## Mitigation Strategies

The Bali Action Plan clearly contemplates additional emission reduction commitments for industrialized countries and introduces the concept of nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMAs) by developing countries, which are to be supported by technology, financing, and capacity-building. Although the contours of the post-2012 mitigation regime are unclear at this point in the negotiations, the scope of the effort necessary to address climate change will undoubtedly impact human rights.

A brief examination of specific elements of the mitigation regime is instructive. The Kyoto Protocol requires the adoption of mitigation strategies in order to reduce the emission of GHGs into the atmosphere. Certain mitigation mechanisms are operational and established under the Kyoto Protocol, such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Joint Implementation, while others are still under negotiation, such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) programs.

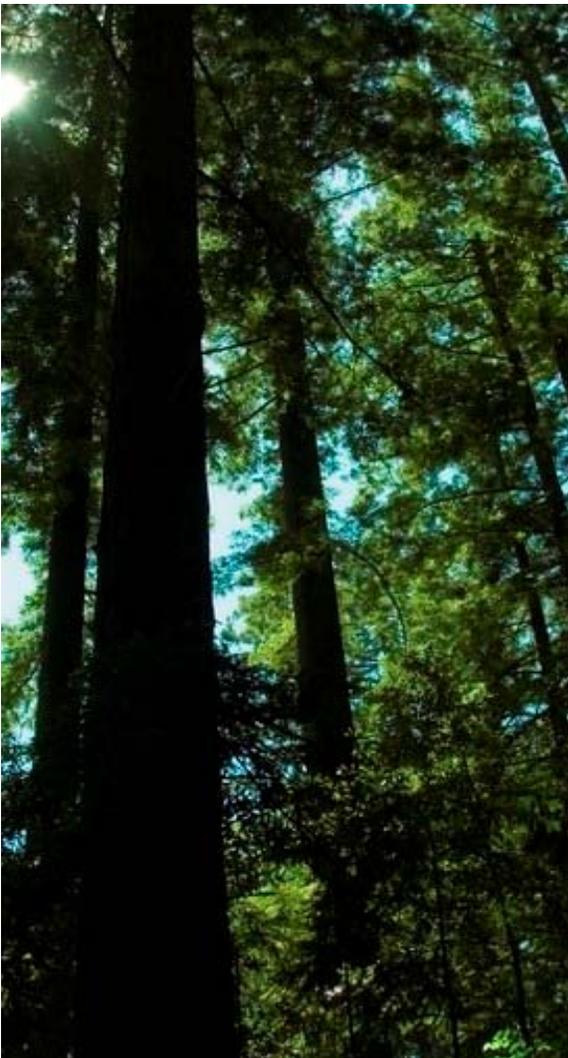
The Kyoto Protocol is the first of its kind to set up a market-based mechanism - the CDM - that allows State Parties to fulfill their treaty obligations by investing in developing countries. The CDM supports projects in developing countries that result in emission reductions, generating carbon credits that industrialized countries can use to offset their own emissions.

REDD has also been advanced in the current climate change negotiations as a potential mitigation tool. In addition to mitigating emissions, REDD could provide a mechanism to advance the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities that underlies the climate change regime by channeling funds to developing countries, indigenous peoples and other forest dependent communities involved in forest conservation.

## CDM

Projects under the Kyoto Protocol's CDM may involve displacement of communities and result in other local environmental impacts. Denial of free and prior informed consent by indigenous peoples and other local communities could further aggravate these impacts, with respect to their rights, lands and territories. Therefore, the human rights dimensions of such mitigation measures need to be carefully considered in designing these policies and projects.

Current CDM modalities and procedures already contain some tools that help promote a rights-based approach, such as disclosure of environmental assessments and channels for public participation. As countries negotiate the future of the CDM, a rights-based approach can avail to ensure that its future operations make a positive contribution to the right to development. Similarly, respect for human rights is an integral element of sustainable development, which is one of the objectives inspiring the CDM's design.



## Forests and Land Use

Policies and measures adopted by national governments in connection with forests and land use can significantly impact indigenous peoples and local communities. Land tenure, traditional use of resources, and benefit sharing considerations may all be implicated by efforts such as REDD. For example, national governments establishing protected areas over forests occupied or otherwise used by indigenous peoples and other forest dependent communities could potentially displace traditional occupants and implicate relocation and traditional resource use rights. Because land and livelihoods may be impacted, it is important to ensure protections for the people most closely associated with the forest.

Keeping indigenous peoples and other forest dependent communities at the heart of REDD is both a moral and legal requirement, and is also crucial to ensure the success and permanence of measures taken on the ground. This means that forest dwellers have a right to participate in and to share the benefits of programs and measures relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. Participation is more than mere consultation, as it involves the right to free and prior informed consent of indigenous peoples and other forest dependent communities, in accordance with their customs and traditions, including their traditional governance structure. In the end, a people-oriented approach to REDD can ensure that climate change mitigation is both more effective and does not come at the expense of the rights of those who have preserved the forest since time immemorial.



## Financing

Industrialized countries have an obligation under the UNFCCC to assist lower-income countries in financing mitigation and adaptation strategies necessary to reduce emissions and protect vulnerable populations. Lower income countries acting alone may not be in a financial position to fully protect their populations from climate change impacts. Financing, therefore, is critical to assisting these countries in fighting climate change and protecting the human rights of their people.

Institutions involved in financing climate change-related activities, such as the Adaptation Fund, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the World Bank, should be transparent, maintain policies and procedures that respect internationally recognized rights, and allow meaningful opportunities for public participation. Other regimes and institutions should also be involved in this effort, including: the United Nations Environment and Development Programmes (UNEP and UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which have partnered in support of REDD projects; and the International Labor Organization (ILO), in connection with ILO Convention 169. The principal efforts and leadership, however, should come from the two most directly involved regimes – climate change and human

## Technology Transfer

Transfer of technology is critical to supporting sustainable development and avoiding the shifting of polluting industries from industrialized countries to the developing world. Establishing a workable institutional mechanism for technology transfer is crucial to reaching and successfully implementing any post-2012 agreement. A rights-based approach can help ensure that beneficial technologies are fairly shared. In terms of effective implementation for adaptation, a human rights approach to technology transfer can help ensure that technologies required by the most vulnerable communities is a priority.

## Recommendations:

It is essential to consider human rights aspects in the UNFCCC bodies and processes, as well as other agencies and processes. Given the effects of climate change, and of measures taken to mitigate or adapt to climate change, on a wide range of human rights, it will be essential to integrate human rights considerations into the processes and the institutional framework of the UNFCCC, including whatever legal and institutional architectures emerge in the agreed outcome of the current negotiations. Specifically:

- Any new agreement should include recognition of the **principle** that climate change-related activities must respect human rights;
- Any new agreement should include a statements in the negotiating **text** about the need to consider human rights in undertaking actions to address climate change; and
- Any new agreement should provide for appropriate **institutions and mechanisms** within the UNFCCC framework to operationalize the CC&HRs linkages and advise the COP accordingly.



## Affirming a Principle and Strengthening the Negotiating Text

Express recognition of the principle that climate-change related activities must respect human rights in the agreed outcome of the current negotiations would eliminate any questions that some actors might have regarding the relevance of human rights in the context of climate change. Recognition of this principle would also provide direction to those involved in mitigating or adapting to climate change about the need for consideration of human rights. A clear statement of this principle, together with the creation or tasking of a body responsible for the integration of human rights within the climate change regime, and the provision of adequate transparency and opportunity for public participation, would provide a straightforward, elegant way to deal with human rights in the agreed outcome. Details of implementation of the rights-based principle would not need to be specified, as they would best be left to elaboration in specific elements (such as REDD), and by the institution tasked with those elements within the climate change regime or other bodies within the human rights regime.

Building upon the recommendation to start with express recognition of human rights in climate, it may be possible to start with preambular text and then build upon this language within different mechanisms of the convention. One example of preambular text which nations have previously negotiated and approved regarding human rights is found in a 2009 Human Rights Council resolution, which states, *inter alia*:

**“Climate change-related effects and response measures have a range of implications, both direct and indirect, for the effective enjoyment of human rights and these implications will be felt most acutely by those who are already in vulnerable situations. Human rights principles inform and strengthen international and national policy-making in the area of climate change and contribute to the realization of the objectives of the Convention.”**

## Institutions & Mechanisms

The UNFCCC COP could task a new subsidiary body with exploring the human dimension of climate change, including the CC&HRs linkage as a necessary element for the implementation of the Convention.

Alternatively, the COP could create an expert group on CC&HRs. Expert groups are constituted bodies that differ from the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) in that their members are individuals acting in their personal capacity, whereas the SBSTA and SBI are composed of State Parties. A COP decision could establish an expert group on CC&HRs, define its membership and specify the scope of its activities. This could include advising the COP or one of the subsidiary bodies on matters relating to human rights and providing a focused forum for discussion of CC&HRs issues .

Independent of any new specialized subsidiary body or expert group, there is room for mainstreaming human rights considerations into existing institutional arrangements and mechanisms. Bodies within the climate regime that could take on the CC&HRs linkage include the two standing subsidiary bodies created in the Convention – the SBSTA and SBI - and the CDM Executive Board with respect to the operation of the CDM.

There are a number of ways in which climate treaty bodies could address human rights issues. For example, they could produce technical papers that identify existing or potential problems relating to CC&HRs, or they could request that the secretariat organize a workshop, produce a paper or call for an expert meeting on the same issues. UNFCCC bodies could also be tasked to consider ways to include human rights concerns in the ongoing negotiations or the post-Copenhagen discussions. They could be tasked with coordinating a common approach or response in collaboration with other international bodies or efforts to address climate change and human rights, such as the OHCHR.



### For Further Reading:

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- UN Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/10/L.30, Mar. 2009.



Founded in 1989, the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) uses international law, institutions, and processes to protect the global environment, human health and human rights. CIEL works to promote a sustainable society that is based on principles of ecology and justice, respectful of indigenous and local communities, and committed to living within the limits of the global ecosystem.

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