

November 30, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Re: Human rights in the Paris Agreement

Dear Secretary Kerry:

On behalf of the following peoples and organizations working to protect the rights of those most vulnerable to climate change, we appreciate your commitment to an “ambitious, durable, and inclusive agreement that will finally put us on the path towards a global clean-energy future.”

As we enter the final stages of negotiation, it is important to recognize that climate change is not only an environmental issue, but also one of the greatest human rights challenges of our time. It is an issue of justice and inequality for the millions who are already experiencing the effects of climate change, the vast majority of whom bear little to no responsibility for its causes. It is also an issue for future generations who will suffer increasingly severe loss and damage.

The international community’s failure to take urgent action to mitigate climate change is further threatening these rights, especially for indigenous peoples, the poor, women and children, and other vulnerable communities. The devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan and the exacerbation of the refugee crisis in Syria are just two examples of how extreme weather and other climate change-related effects can result in severe, and often irreversible, harm to millions of people around the world including loss of life, forced displacement, and loss of livelihoods. At the upcoming climate talks in Paris, **the United States has a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to lead the international community by increasing its ambition and providing scaled-up resources to reduce the very worst climate impacts.**

We support the United States’ position, articulated earlier this year during the 29th Session of the Human Rights Council, calling on States to respect their human rights obligations when responding to climate change, as well as the State Department’s leadership in advancing gender equality in climate actions. We fully agree: **actions taken to address climate change must not come at the expense of peoples and communities or their rights.**

As the world prepares for COP21, we urge you to translate your commitment to protecting the rights of those most vulnerable into concrete action. We call upon the United States to seek a just and equitable outcome in Paris that:

1. Explicitly recognizes that human rights obligations apply when taking actions to address the impacts of climate change as well as actions to mitigate those impacts, thus ensuring the protection and promotion of human rights, including the rights of indigenous peoples, gender equality, intergenerational equity, just transition, food security, and ecosystem integrity;

2. Catalyzes urgent and ambitious mitigation action that effectively limits the average global temperature increase to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius as a means to minimize future loss and damage; and
3. Ensures that the United States and other countries contribute their fair share of finance for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage in a manner that prioritizes the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

We share your goal for Paris: to achieve an ambitious, durable and inclusive climate agreement. But it must also be an agreement that will deliver human rights protections for peoples and communities in the United States and around the world. We look forward to working with you to ensure that outcome is achieved.

Sincerely,

ActionAid USA

Alaska Institute for Justice

Alaska Wilderness League

Amnesty International USA

Bianca Jagger Human Rights Foundation

Bronx Climate Justice North

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, New York University School of Law

Center for International Environmental Law

Center for Rural Empowerment and the Environment

Centers of Investigation for Poverty and Inequality and for Sustainability, Moravian College

CIDSE

Clean Air Council

Clean Energy Action

Climate Law & Policy Project

Climate Wise Women

Coalition of Immokalee Workers

Connecticut Fund for the Environment

Consortium of Universities for Global Health

Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas, North Region

Deep South Center for Environmental Justice

Earthjustice

Friends of the Earth US
Global Health Justice Partnership, Yale Law School/Yale School of Public Health*
Global Network for the Study of Human Rights and the Environment
Grail Climate Action Circle
Gray Panthers
Green America
GreenFaith
Greenpeace USA
Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights
Heinrich Böll Stiftung North America
Human Rights Advocates
Indigenous Environmental Network
Indigenous World Association
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Institute for Policy Studies, Climate Policy Program
Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense
International Accountability Project
International Indian Treaty Council
International Movement for Fraternal Union among Races and Peoples
Kingdom Living Temple
Loretto Community
National Congress of American Indians
Native American Rights Fund
New Jersey Sand Hill Band of Indians
Passionists International
Rachel Carson Council
Refugees International
Show Up! America
Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary
Southern Oregon Climate Action Now

* This represents the position of the Global Health Justice Partnership solely and cannot be attributed to the University or any other component part.

Southwest Native Cultures

SustainUS

UNANIMA International

United Confederation of Taino People

Vanishing Earth

Women's Environment & Development Organization

Young Feminists & Allies, National Organization for Women

cc: Todd D. Stern, Special Envoy for Climate Change, Department of State
Trigg Talley, Deputy Special Envoy for Climate Change, Department of State