

2019 Geneva Forum on Climate Change at the Human Rights Council

10 years after the First Resolution on Climate Change:
Perspectives and Challenges

Summary Report

Contribution of the Human Rights Council to the Recognition of the
Human Rights Implications of Climate Change



Geneva, June 2019

Authors: Yves Lador (EarthJustice), Sébastien Duyck (CIEL), Jolein Holtz (CIEL)

Cover Image: U.S. Mission Geneva/ Eric Bridiers, Back Image: Wikimedia / Eferrante

 *Contribution of the Human Rights Council to the Recognition of the Human Rights Implications of Climate Change* by EarthJustice and The Center for International Environmental Law is licensed under a Creative Commons Share-Alike Attribution 4.0 International License.

This note was prepared with the support of the Climate and Energy Fund of the Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The analysis and information provided in this document are those of the authors.



THE GOVERNMENT
OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG
Ministry of the Environment, Climate
and Sustainable Development

10 years after the 1st Resolution on Climate Change: Perspectives and Challenges

6 June 2019 – 9.30-18.00 / Room XXII, Palais des Nations – Geneva

The UN Human Rights Council adopted its first resolution on **human rights and climate change** on March 28, 2018 at its 41st meeting (Human Rights Council Resolution 7/23, *Human rights and climate change* – adopted without a vote).

The objective of the 2019 Geneva Forum was to: take stock of the last ten years of the Human Rights Council (HRC)'s multiple engagements on climate-related issues in light of the adoption of this first resolution; review the relevant contributions of the HRC and its related bodies to the work on human rights and climate change; and consider lessons learned and opportunities for further Council engagement.

The one-day event provided an overview of the multiple facets of the Council's work on climate change:

- the initiatives of the HRC itself – resolutions, panel discussions, and events,
- the work of its Special Procedures (Special Rapporteurs), and
- the exchange of views and recommendations during the Universal Periodic Review.

The overview of the work of the Council was intended to offer a synthesis of the lessons learned to complement initiatives the Human Rights Council members.

In addition to representatives of Council members and other permanent missions, the forum brought together experts and representatives of Intergovernmental Organizations, Permanent Missions, and civil society organizations, with the goal of:

- reviewing 10 years of action on climate change at the HRC,
- taking stock of the achievements of this first decade,
- framing the HRC's work on climate change within the global institutional landscape, and
- identifying steps to move forward and increase synergies with the HRC's work.

This document is a summary of the different discussions held during the Forum and presents the main points discussed. Responsibility for the formulation of this text can only be attributed to the authors of this Summary Report who aim to reflect the quality, richness, and diversity of the contributions.

The co-organizers of this 2019 Forum would like to express their gratitude to the speakers for the quality of their contributions, to the moderators for having skillfully facilitated the sessions, and to the participants for their frank and open questions and comments.

This Forum would not have been possible without the full engagement of the team of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the dedication of CIEL's interns, and the trust and support of the Climate and Energy Fund of the Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

2019 Geneva Forum Report on Climate Change at the Human Rights Council (HRC)

1. Opening

This day of discussions aimed to take stock of the achievements of the Human Rights Council (HRC) over the last 10 years, since its first resolution on climate change.

- H.E. Ambassador **Marc Bichler**, Ambassador-at-Large for Climate Change & Human Rights, Government of Luxembourg

- H.E. Ambassador **Duong Chi Dung**, Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the UN in Geneva

- Ms. **Peggy Hicks**, Director, Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

- Ms. **Titi Soentoro**, Executive Director, Aksi! Indonesia

Moderation: Mr. **Sébastien Duyck**, Senior Attorney, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)

History of the Resolution

The first resolution on human rights and climate change in 2008 requested that the OHCHR study the relationship between climate change and human rights. Eight resolutions have since been adopted annually, all by consensus, since 2014. They relate to the right to health and food, and the rights of the child, of migrants, of women and girls, and of people in a situation of disability.

These resolutions are grounded in an unprecedented consensus on the global threat of climate change and the science certainty that we are running out of time to address it. The HRC resolutions of the past ten years have kept the topic on the agenda and have highlighted the need for international cooperation, capacity building, and climate finance, mitigation, and adaptation.

Ten years ago, the first HRC resolution described climate change as an immediate and far-reaching threat. We know more today than ever; the adverse impacts of climate change violate human rights at a massive scale and on a continuing basis. Twenty million people are internally displaced each year by natural disasters. This is likely to increase as climate change worsens. Seven million people die each year from air pollution, and an increasing number of people will be at risk for hunger and insufficient access to water. One million species are threatened with extinction. Climate change is also impacting biodiversity, the loss of which poses a danger to human survival.

For example, in Indonesia, climate change threatens 250 million people on 2,600 islands, 200 of which will be lost by 2030 if sea levels rise by one meter. Sea level rise, the impacts of cyclones and extreme weather, and the additional threat posed by measures taken to respond to climate change further exacerbate the vulnerability of communities. In this context, women are disproportionately affected and too often neither informed nor consulted on climate change projects.

The HRC has a pivotal role to play in upholding Member States' human rights obligations by further elaborating the relationship between climate change and human rights, analyzing its impacts on the enjoyment of human rights, and by underlining States' obligations and duties to protect vulnerable communities.

2019 Geneva Forum Report on Climate Change at the Human Rights Council (HRC)

Acts by States

The Philippines, Bangladesh, and Viet Nam are the core group driving the HRC resolution on human rights and climate change. Such an engagement encourages other countries to undertake efforts — both domestically and through international cooperation — to adapt to and mitigate climate change. The HRC Universal Periodic Review (UPR) sessions provide another tool to reference climate change impacts and document countries' climate change commitments. For example, Luxemburg, through its national efforts, is now listing over 50% of all green bonds worldwide in its stock exchange. Indicated Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) developed by each country under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) can also be updated and enhanced to foster respect for human rights, which would contribute to putting us on track to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C. Currently, INDCs put us on track to 3°C of global temperature rise.

Perspectives

It will take more than just goodwill to act prevent and address the adverse impacts of climate change on human rights, including the rights to food, water, and education. Moreover, impacts can exacerbate existing inequalities and create new ones, particularly affecting populations already in vulnerable situations.

The issue will be high on the HRC and OHCHR agenda in the coming years. The High Commissioner, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, stated in her first remarks to the HRC that protection of human rights against climate change impacts is among her priorities. Five of the Special Rapporteurs, including the mandate holders on housing, water, food, indigenous peoples, and the environment, have also joined OHCHR's calls for higher ambition in climate action as an obligation of States.

International cooperation is a human rights obligation and should be reflected in the climate negotiations. Climate change impacts on human rights are only effectively addressed when the needs of developing and less developed countries are addressed.

The HRC has a central role to play, in coordination with other sectors and fora of the UN, such as the UNFCCC. While this coordination should not replace global commitments, it does present opportunities to double impacts through policy coherence.

2. Overview: 10 years of action on climate change at the HRC

This session provided a historical overview of the developments at the Human Rights Council since the adoption of the first resolution on human rights and climate change ten years ago.

- H.E. Ambassador **Shameem Ahsan**, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN in Geneva

- H.E. Ambassador **Elayne Whyte**, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN in Geneva

- Mr. **Marc Limon**, Executive Director, Universal Rights Group

- Dr. **Margareta Wewerinke-Singh**, Assistant Professor, Leiden University

Moderation: **Yves Lador**, Earthjustice Representative to the UN in Geneva

Background to the First Resolution and Subsequent Steps

In 2006 and as a result of discussions among small island developing states (SIDS), the Maldives sought to introduce the issue of climate change in human rights institutions. There was a clear need to strengthen global awareness of the urgency of the issue. The first document discussing this relationship was prepared at the Malé Conference (2007). It explored the potential added value of the HRC in this context and how to leverage the possible involvement of the HRC to strengthen climate policy.

Over the past ten years, the HRC has taken essential steps highlighting this relationship, with collaboration among States, civil society, and other UN bodies. Debates, reports, and dialogues contributed to the development of a holistic understanding of the connections between human rights and climate change. The discussion also explored issues of burden sharing, equity, development, participation, displacement, rights of specific groups, and response measures, etc.

The work of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment has also been important in achieving a holistic understanding of human rights and climate change. Findings of this work included mapping the human rights threatened by climate change and the human rights obligations of States related to climate change. Additional findings include:

- Climate change induces land degradation, pollution, depletion of resources, and loss of biodiversity. This heavily impacts human rights, as well as future generations;
- The rights to information, participation, access of remedy, and freedom of association are essential;
- Women Human Rights Defenders and Environmental Human Rights Defenders need strong protection.

Joint advocacy between the HRC and the Special Procedures has had a number of achievements, including influencing not only the Preamble of the Paris Agreement, but also the formulation of the global temperature goal of keeping temperature increase “well below” 2°C and the reference to the 1.5°C limit in article 2 of the Agreement.

There were important interactions between climate processes (such as the Cancun Agreements, the Paris Agreement, the integration of human rights in INDCs) and the HRC resolutions on climate change (which have all been adopted by consensus).

2019 Geneva Forum Report on Climate Change at the Human Rights Council (HRC)

Additionally, a regional breakthrough was achieved in the Latin America and the Caribbean region with the adoption of the Escazú Agreement, which recognizes the right to a healthy environment and has been welcomed by 25 special procedure mandate holders as an achievement in combatting climate change.

Nevertheless, urgent action remains needed today. The IPCC special report on 1.5°C (SR1.5) stated that it is still possible to limit global warming to below 1.5°C and that this would significantly reduce the risk of massive climate change-induced human rights violations. To achieve this, a massive and rapid transition is needed.

Progress linking human rights and climate action continues to face resistance. The implementation guidelines of the Paris Agreement adopted at the UNFCCC COP24 make no explicit reference to human rights. However, this absence does not affect the relevant provisions of the Preamble and should not prevent the integration of rights into the NDCs and the review thereof in the Global Stocktake.

Some lessons learned

- Small countries have added value in these processes;
- The objective was never to swamp the HRC, but to understand the impacts on human rights and how its principles and obligations can inform better international and domestic climate policies, mitigation, and adaptation. The HRC can also highlight moral dimensions;
- Climate change demands that we think differently about the international human rights system, for example on extraterritoriality. Responsibilities still remain, even in cases in which actions unknowingly undermine the rights of people in other countries;
- The HRC has accomplished some solid work, but addressing these linkages remains an urgent issue, and it is getting more urgent. Climate action needs to be approached from a rights-based angle in all dimensions, including the responsibility for emissions.

Possible questions and ways forward

- Where are we heading? How can the HRC take into account the urgency?
- What are the subjects the Council should address now?
 - o Should the HRC have a Special Rapporteur on climate change?
- The HRC can
 - o help build the bridge between national and international levels of implementation of human rights laws and transfer its knowledge;
 - o seek to clarify the existing human rights obligations of States in light of climate change;
 - o seek to provide redress for victims of climate-induced human rights violations and guidance for legislative measures to operationalize the right to an effective remedy at all levels;
 - o assess the normative recognition of the right to a healthy and sustainable environment as a contribution to climate action.
- The HRC should also
 - o seek ways to raise more awareness among the general public;
 - o help to understand how to implement a human rights-based approach in daily climate change activities;
 - o pay particular attention to the situation of those States most impacted by climate change;
 - o support international cooperation, which provides for technical and financial support and capacity building.

3. Taking stock of the achievements in the last ten years

This session aimed to review key developments achieved through the four streams of the work of the Council: the HRC annual resolutions, the Universal Periodic Review, the Council's Special Procedures, and the Advisory Committee.

- Mr. **Benjamin Schachter**, Focal Point, Climate Change and the Environment, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

- Ms. **Victoria Tauli-Corpuz**, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

- Mr. **Budi Tjahjono**, Asia Programme Coordinator, Franciscans International

- Ms. **Meena Ramkaun**, Human Rights Officer, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Moderation: H.E. Ambassador **Nazhat Shameem Khan**, Permanent Representative of Fiji to the UN in Geneva

The HRC and the OHCHR

The resolutions of the Human Rights Council have commissioned several reports from the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, first exploring the links between human rights and climate change more broadly, and later exploring more specific links. In the last several years the resolutions have been thematic, focusing respectively on health, children, human mobility, gender, and this year, on persons with disabilities. The work mandated in these areas resulted in the engagement of the Office at COP21, where the Paris Agreement was adopted with its explicit reference to human rights in the Preamble. The language in HRC resolution 35/20 gave the OHCHR a clear mandate to communicate outcomes of its work on human mobility to other processes such as the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss & Damage and its Task Force on Displacement and the negotiations of the Global Compact on Migration. Creating explicit linkages between the work of the Office and related processes can lead to more policy coherence, and ultimately to the creation of more effective climate policies. As a whole, the resolutions have encouraged the Office to broaden the scope of its expertise, knowledge, and action with respect to climate change.

UN Special Procedures

The issue of the rights of indigenous peoples provides a relevant example of key human rights achievements made in the Paris Agreement. This achievement is due to two key factors:

- The role played by indigenous peoples representatives, both in the UNFCCC and at national level; and
- The role of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, working with indigenous peoples and civil society.

This example shows how joint efforts of different human rights bodies can contribute to the advancement of human rights under the UNFCCC. Here, both the role of the OHCHR and of the Special Rapporteur were impactful at COP21.

The rights of indigenous peoples also provide a useful example of how an issue can act as a bridge between different international processes. Recent progress achieved at the UNFCCC includes the establishment and operationalization of the Local Communities and Indigenous

2019 Geneva Forum Report on Climate Change at the Human Rights Council (HRC)

Peoples Platform. One of the members of the facilitative working group of this platform is also a member of the HRC Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Another positive UNFCCC development is the adoption of indigenous peoples safeguards at the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which will be integrated into the social and environmental safeguards of the GCF. Unfortunately, only two other decisions at COP24 contained human rights language.

Climate risks continue to increase, and COP24 failed to deliver not only on ambition, but also on rights as efforts to reference the preamble in relevant sections failed. This demonstrates that there is still a lot of work to be done to integrate human rights into the UNFCCC.

The Universal Periodic Review

The Universal Periodic Review started operations in 2008. While it took a while for the HRC climate resolutions to start to be integrated into this process, some States, starting with SIDS, have included the impact of climate change on the rights of their people in their national report. In particular, their reports described the limits of SIDS to act on the drivers of climate change and how those drivers threaten the territorial existence of these States. Recommendations on combatting the human rights impacts of climate change have also been formulated, but mainly by those States that are the most impacted by climate change. Other sources have also consistently provided information regarding how climate change impacts human rights in countries under review, reflecting the situation lived by local communities who highlight the human rights impacts of climate change in their respective realities.

The Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee consists of eighteen experts from all regions of the world. It conducts thematic studies at the request of the HRC. The Committee has worked on around 30 thematic topics, among them food, corruption, local governments, and albinism. No study on climate change has been requested to date by the HRC. Such a study could complement those studies already conducted by the OHCHR and the Special Procedures. Scoping research was done in 2016 at the request of two NGOs. One of the experts formulated a research proposal that would support soft guidelines to help States with climate-induced displacements. This proposal has not been addressed to date by the HRC. The Advisory Committee could bring specific issues to the Council's attention and review implementation gaps in areas where the Council could consider contributing. As a number of countries are still asking questions on what is meant by "integrating human rights to climate action," this could also be an issue the Council can help clarify.

Contributions of Human Rights Bodies

Human rights processes, such as the UPR and the Council's resolutions need to be used more systematically and relevant their recommendations distributed more widely. People need to be made aware of the interlinkages between human rights and climate change, including through the work of these mechanisms.

To make sure that no one is left behind, climate change requires an intersectional approach, as well as robust participation. The focus of the UNFCCC process will shift to the national level with the implementation of the Paris Agreement. In this context, it will become even more crucial to work with domestic institutions and seize opportunities for country-specific recommendations that UN human rights mechanisms, such as the Human Rights Treaty Bodies, can provide.

At the international level, there is a need to increase capacity to address the climate emergency, promote policy coherence, foster political will, and mobilize resources. The OHCHR will use the coming UN Secretary General Summit (UNSG) in New York in September to create a podium for rights-based climate action.

4. Human Rights and Climate Change in the Global Institutional Landscape

This session reviewed key developments related to the promotion of human rights and climate change in the context of relevant global institutional developments, including the upcoming UNSG Climate Action Summit and the UNFCCC negotiations.

- H.E. Ambassador **Luis Alfonso de Alba**, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the 2019 Climate Summit (video message)
- Mr. **Walter Schuldt**, Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the UN in Geneva
- Ms. **Tanvi Mani**, Climate Finance/Legal Affairs, UNFCCC Secretariat
- Ms. **Marina Maiero**, Focal point for the Climate Change talks, World Health Organization
- Ms. **Ileana Sinziana Puscas**, Migration, Environment and Climate Change, International Organization for Migration

Moderation: Mr. **Isaiah Toroitich**, Head of Advocacy and Development Policy, ActAlliance

UN Secretary-General's 2019 Climate Action Summit

The Secretary General's Climate Action Summit in September 2019 will emphasize that there is only a decade left to avert the most dangerous levels of temperature increase and the threat that this poses to the effective enjoyment of human rights. The Climate Action Summit aims at generating stronger State climate action commitments.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The Paris Agreement is the first multilateral environmental agreement to explicitly reference human rights. Collaboration between the Secretariat, OHCHR, and the Mary Robinson Foundation, among others, has contributed to increasing awareness of the interlinkages and integration of human rights in climate action.

This year, the negotiations related to mechanisms under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement are expected to conclude at COP25 in Santiago, Chile. Under Article 6, a new framework for cooperative approaches and joint action will chart a path for the resurgence of carbon markets. However, the modalities, rules, and guidance are yet to be fully elaborated by the Parties to the Paris Agreement. These negotiations offer an important opportunity to ensure that human rights safeguards and independent redress mechanisms are included.

Continuing discussions related to loss and damage, action for climate empowerment, and access to technology offer further opportunities for the integration of human rights in the UNFCCC process.

The decision of the Paris Committee on Capacity Building to address cross-cutting issues like human rights and gender equality is also an important step. This work included a side event at COP24 in Katowice and a workshop at the 50th meeting of the subsidiary bodies (SB50) in Bonn in June 2019 to contribute to the development of an online training tool. There are also opportunities to enhance participation of local communities and indigenous peoples through the recently operationalized Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, to work with least developed countries and vulnerable groups, to integrate human rights within response

2019 Geneva Forum Report on Climate Change at the Human Rights Council (HRC)

measures, to work on food security, and to work with the Warsaw Mechanism on Loss and Damage's Taskforce on Displacement.

However, more needs to be done to explicitly integrate a human rights perspective in climate action. The Paris Agreement Preamble did not do enough, and this provision has not been fully operationalized in subsequent COP decisions. It is important as States revise their NDCs that they take the opportunity to integrate human rights in domestic climate action.

World Health Organization

Climate change governance focuses mainly on the level of emissions and international climate finance, but human rights gives a different perspective, particularly as related to health and livelihoods. Impacts of air pollution, which causes 7 million deaths each year, correlate with greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, accountability for these emissions is important. The World Health Organization is promoting a concrete commitment on health at the Climate Action Summit under the social and political drivers track led by Peru and Spain. The commitment seeks to harmonize climate change and air pollution policies and to mobilize resources for more investments in health.

UN Migration Network

The International Organization on Migration is the leader of the UN Migration Network and works on the migration dimension of climate change. Climate change is a driver of migration. A large number of actors are working on the topic and are increasing the awareness of the links between climate change, human rights, and migration through reports, global compacts, and more. Relevant norms include the guiding principles on internal displacement and the Global Compact on Migration, which is a comprehensive migration agreement that acknowledges environmental damage as a driver of migration and proposes a regular pathway for migration. There is a clear need for States and international organizations to use a human rights-based approach to jointly address and protect the rights of those migrating as a result of environmental degradation.

5. Moving Forward and Increasing Synergies with Work of the HRC

This session considered how to further strengthen the role of the Council in the broader institutional landscape and how to improve synergies between Geneva and other key actors.

- Dr. **Abdalah Mokssit**, Secretary of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

- Ms. **Urška UČAKAR**, Third Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Slovenia to the UN in Geneva

- Ms. **Chiara Liguori**, Policy Adviser, Amnesty International

- Mr. **Yves Lador**, Representative of EarthJustice to the UN in Geneva

Moderation: Mr. **Felix Kirchmeier**, Manager of Policy Studies, Geneva Academy

As seen throughout the day, real progress has been made since the adoption of the first resolution on human rights and climate change by the HRC. However, we can also see that these efforts still do not align with the magnitude of the challenge. The HRC must continue to strengthen its contribution in the fight against climate change and develop cooperation and outreach policies that can maximize the impacts and efficiency of its contribution.

Synergies with Science

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is one of the best interfaces between science and policy. Several reports are coming up, with the first on land and the cryosphere. Its 6th assessment will be published in 2022, before the Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement. The IPCC aims to inform policy makers. Its latest Special Report on 1.5°C of warming shows that the impacts of climate change are apparent, that limiting warming is possible, that there exist clear benefits to keeping the increase of temperatures to a maximum of 1.5°C compared to 2°C and that doing so would contribute to the achievement of other global goals (such as SDGs). Unprecedented change in all sectors of society is required to achieve this. To achieve this objective, we need:

- Deep emission reductions;
- A more detailed assessment of sectoral and regional aspects (also incorporated in the new report on land);
- The conclusions of climate science adopted into a voice more easily transferred to policymakers, stakeholders, and individuals;
- Paying more attention to young people, addressing gender dimensions, and adopting approaches that are truly inclusive to all minorities.

For experts, events such as the Geneva Forum that take place outside of the HRC sessions are important, since representatives of permanent missions have more opportunities at these events to sit down and truly engage.

Synergies with the Public

Public awareness has increased and the engagement of individuals in climate responses is increasingly valued. There is an unprecedented mobilization of people calling for action on climate change. This mobilization has contributed to a strong sense of urgency, and climate ambition/climate action have increasingly become key words for a broader audience. The HRC needs to respond to these expectations and mobilizations. The voices of the youth should be more included here in Geneva, in a more substantial manner.

2019 Geneva Forum Report on Climate Change at the Human Rights Council (HRC)

Synergies within the UN

If more UN fora step in and contribute to the struggle against climate change, we must avoid Forum shopping. As stated clearly in the previous discussions, the UNFCCC will remain the main forum for global climate governance. However, more specific mobilizations and interactions with specialized agencies can only benefit the global response.

For example, human rights bodies should make their own assessment of what should be included in the outcomes of:

- the upcoming and future High-Level Political Forum on SDGs in July 2019 in New York;
- the UN Summit on Climate Action in September 2019 in New York;
- the UNFCCC COP25 in December 2019 in Santiago, ensuring that the outcomes of the conference truly reflect the full human rights provisions contained in the Paris Agreement;
- the UNGA second committee, which adopts resolutions that are relevant to this discussion, but which lack references to human rights as some States argue that human rights are addressed by other fora.

States and UN institutions must break silos and develop more comprehensive and coherent approaches.

Synergies with the Upcoming UNSG Summit

The UNSG Summit should be an opportunity for human rights to be taken into account in raising ambition in climate mitigation, adaptation, and in relation to implementation. The HRC should consider engaging with the upcoming UNSG Summit and aligning its messaging with that of the Summit.

A civil society meeting before the Summit will take place to send a strong message about the importance of human rights for effective climate action and call on institutions to strengthen their commitments to human rights in the context of climate, and to raise the bar in response to the urgency of the ongoing crisis.

Synergies within the Human Rights Bodies

Human rights are important for policy coherence at the national and international level. To link up with other human rights bodies, the Council should focus more on prevention/mitigation. In light of this, it would be beneficial to support the work of Human Rights Treaty Bodies. Moreover, there is no devoted mandate holder on climate change as of yet. The question is whether it is enough to have a large number of Special Procedure mandate holders working on the issue occasionally within their own mandates.

The UPR is an important mechanism within the Council. More attention could be paid to this mechanism. Civil society can play an important role in relation to the UPR by putting forward climate-related recommendations or questions that are specific to the circumstances of the States under review.

Other roles that the Council can play include:

- Paying long-term attention to the situation of environmental human rights defenders;
- Promoting human rights at the heart of all action in the field of climate;
- Addressing the role of businesses, for example in light of corruption, including setting rules to promote accountability;
- Contributing to regime articulation/integration since the Council can bring together relevant developments under different international fora and discuss the issue. In this context, the Council could set precedents regarding how specialized UN bodies can address climate change under their respective mandates;
- Stressing the need for adequate emissions reduction more systematically;

2019 Geneva Forum Report on Climate Change at the Human Rights Council (HRC)

- Echoing the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' finding that failure to mobilize adequate resources to combat climate change could entail a human rights violation (this includes e.g. financial support to developing countries, phasing-out fossil fuels);
- Communicating clearly that a rights-based approach will lead to more effective climate policies as identified in the most recent reports by the IPCC;
- Referring explicitly to the concept of "urgency" throughout its work;
 - o The first resolution that the Council will adopt on human rights and climate change after IPCC's Special Report on 1.5°C of warming should align its tone and demands to that of this report in the sense of urgency; and
- Putting a human face on climate change and hearing more voices of people affected by climate change.

6. Take Aways & Closing Remarks

The final panel offered an opportunity to reflect on key lessons and opportunities discussed during the day.

- H.E. Ambassador **Evan P. Garcia**, Permanent Representative of the Philippines to UN in Geneva

- H.E. Ambassador **Hala Hameed**, Permanent Representative of the Maldives to the UN in Geneva

Moderation: **Mr. Benjamin Schachter**, Focal Point, Climate Change and the Environment, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Outcome of Fruitful Collaborations

This day-long Forum demonstrated what has been accomplished so far, relying on long-term and fruitful collaborations between various actors and countries. The Forum provided an opportunity to step back and take stock of what has been done and identify achievements, as well as challenges. It enabled enriching reflections and passionate discussions thereby encouraging further consideration of this issue by the HRC.

Accomplishments

Substantive progress has been made at several levels. Issues related to the impacts of climate change on human rights have been documented through the work of the HRC and its mechanisms. In particular, both previous and current Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights and the Environment have integrated issues related to climate change throughout their work.

This collective work on human rights and climate change has contributed to strengthening synergies among the actions of States and intergovernmental agencies, including at the regional level on issues including the equal rights of women, the rights of migrants, the rights of the child, and disaster resilience. It has also contributed to the emergence of a consensus that recognizes that for stronger benefits on the ground, institutionalized engagements with civil society and the private sector are needed.

There is a breadth of complementary initiatives outside the HRC, and this offers an excellent possibility to broaden the interactions between the Council and other initiatives. The review of SDG 13 on climate change in New York, as well as the Climate Action Summit, provide some complementary opportunities. It should also be noted that several other SDGs relate to climate action as well, including SDG 12 and 17 (respectively related to sustainable consumption and production and to global partnerships).

Recognition of an Existential Challenge

Climate change is now considered an existential threat for a number of countries. The UN Secretary General underlined this fact after his visit to the Pacific region and stated that such a challenge should be addressed creatively. The urgency of the matter requires adequate action, broad participation of the public, and clear commitments from all relevant actors.

The Maldives scenario is an example that must attract our attention. Last May, the Maldives suffered its biggest rainfall in 30 years. It caused severe flooding affecting 16 islands. As a result, the number of internally displaced persons is increasing, as their livelihoods are destroyed by the flooding. The management of floods is becoming very difficult as it combines heavy rain and large tides.

2019 Geneva Forum Report on Climate Change at the Human Rights Council (HRC)

We do not have the luxury to wait. The global average temperature increase must be stabilized well below 2°C, to avoid the dangerous threshold of 1.5°C, as requested by the Climate Vulnerable Forum and enshrined in the Paris Agreement. Even with such measures, sea level will continue to rise and threaten SIDS, posing an existential threat. How can human rights be protected in such a context?

More needs to be done

Climate change requires swift action at all levels. Actions must be targeted and practical. The HRC and its Special Procedures represent a great potential to highlight collaborative interfaces and to encourage synergies. Special Procedures' country visits in particular can offer unique opportunities to document the existing realities and advocate for active collaborations and partnerships for the most affected countries.

Moving forward, we will need to broaden engagement. The HRC work program on human rights education will focus on youth in the next four years. This program, adopted in September 2018, includes elements on climate change that should empower youth on climate action.

At the HRC, the Geneva Pledge was launched in 2015 with the purpose of creating a platform between human rights and climate change experts and overcoming silos on cross-cutting issues. The pledge must play a bigger role and be used more effectively.

In the future work of the HRC more attention should be paid to the right to a healthy and sustainable environment, already recognized in the widely ratified Convention of the Rights of the Child. The Council could facilitate discussions on the measures needed to efficiently protect human rights from climate-induced impacts.