

Human Rights Council, 54th session
Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes
19 September 2023

The Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) and Amnesty International thank the Special Rapporteur for his report on the toxic impacts of some proposed climate change solutions.

Among the approaches and technologies to address climate change, the report importantly addresses climate-altering engineering technologies, defined as “large-scale, deliberate intervention in the Earth system to counteract climate change”. The report rightfully points out their risks, uncertainties, and human rights implications.

Technologies to capture carbon dioxide from emitting sources (carbon capture and storage) or directly from the atmosphere (carbon dioxide removal), are unproven at scale, face multiple feasibility constraints, are energy intensive, pose significant documented risks to human rights and the environment - including by releasing toxic chemicals. There is a lack of scientific certainty about the efficiency of climate-altering engineering technologies, such as solar radiation modification, and they can have a wide range of potential impacts on the effective enjoyment of human rights. These technologies divert attention and resources from the only possible pathway to avoiding catastrophic climate change while respecting human rights: rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions through the immediate phase-out of fossil fuels.

The report also exposes various decarbonization proposals that do not at the same time detoxify industrial agriculture. The heavy use of fertilizers and pesticides transgresses several planetary boundaries and carbon capture and storage in the production process of agrochemicals would not address any of them. By the same token, it is clear that large-scale biofuel use would increase demand for energy crops and therefore agrochemical use to grow them in monocultures.

States’ obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights not only entails that States shall not put in place unproven technologies that have the potential to undermine fundamental rights, but also to effectively phase out fossil fuels, scale-up renewable energy, increase energy efficiency, and reduce energy demand. This report importantly highlights the imperative for this transition to be respectful of human rights and ecosystems, integrate the Free and Prior Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples and be accompanied by effective protection of environmental human rights defenders.

Thank you.