

Human Rights Must Be Front and Centre in Climate Action

BANGKOK / SUVA (4 September 2019) – Global efforts to confront the wide-ranging effects of climate change must take a human rights-based approach if they are to be effective in dealing with the crisis, the UN Human Rights Offices for the Pacific and for South-East Asia said at the occasion of Asia-Pacific Climate Week 2019.

Climate change undermines people’s access to clean air, drinking-water, food and shelter, and protecting the environment is a fundamental pre-requisite for the enjoyment of all human rights.

The 2015 Paris Agreement, adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, calls on all States to respect, promote and consider their respective human rights obligations when taking climate action. The universal, legally binding agreement aims to keep the global temperature rise this century below 2°C and ideally less than 1.5 degrees. Under the agreement, each State should formulate a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) with this collective objective in mind.

“All States, jointly and individually, have human rights obligations with respect to climate change mitigation and adaptation,” said Cynthia Veliko, Representative of OHCHR’s South-East Asia Regional Office. “Mitigation efforts must be enhanced, including through NDCs, if we are to avoid a human rights catastrophe.”

The Asia-Pacific Climate Week, which is being held from 2 to 6 September 2019 in Bangkok, is an important prelude to the September UN Climate Action Summit in New York and the December UN Climate Change Conference COP25 in Santiago, Chile.

It brings together Government officials from Asia and the Pacific, civil society organizations, academia, faith-based organizations, the private sector, international organizations, human rights and environmental defenders and others to support the implementation of Asia-Pacific Member States NDCs and efforts to realize the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

On 4 September UN Human Rights, together with UN Environment, will hold a side event “Needs and Gaps for Integrating Human Rights in Climate Action – Challenges and Good Practices” to raise awareness of the linkages between climate change and the effective enjoyment of human rights.

The event will consider State obligations to prevent foreseeable human rights violations caused by climate change and explore how rights-based approaches to climate action can lead to better outcomes for both people and planet. Such an effort

is critical to protect the rights of all persons from the adverse effects of climate change.

“In the Pacific, we have seen the impacts of climate change kill people, devastate communities, wreck local economies, and threaten traditions and cultures,” said Chitrlekha Massey, Representative for the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific in Suva, Fiji. “Ultimately, climate change poses an existential threat to all life on the planet as we know it, and the Pacific is on the frontlines demanding climate justice now.”

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