56th Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Agenda Item 3: Annual Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change.
Written Statement
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WELCOMING THE APPOINTMENT OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROPOSALS OF THEMATIC PRIORITIES

On behalf of the Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights (GIF)[1], we welcome the appointment of Ms. Elisa Morgera, as the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change.

The establishment of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change by the Human Rights Council in 2021 was the culmination of a joint effort by Council members and hundreds of civil society stakeholders. These stakeholders, including faith-based, children's, women's and indigenous peoples' organizations, had been advocating for more than a decade for concrete action by the Council to address the human rights impacts of climate change.

As civil society and faith-based organizations, we offer our support in fulfilling this mandate. We encourage and expect the Special Rapporteur to engage in meaningful consultations with diverse civil society stakeholders as efforts to build and advance this critical area of work

Taking into account the scope of the mandate, we would highlight the importance of the following priorities:

- **Just transition**: A just transition is essential to ensure a sustainable future and decent livelihoods for workers and their communities during the transition to a low-carbon economy that aims to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This

[1]The Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights (GIF) is composed of the following faith-based NGOs: ACT Alliance, Anglican Communion, Brahma Kumaris, Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Franciscans International, Lutheran World Federation, Soka Gakkai International and World Council of Churches.

transition should include not only mitigation efforts, but also adaptation measures to support those affected by climate change and promote resilient communities and societies in an intersectional manner. Recognizing the social dimension of this transition is critical to achieving the goals set out in the Paris Agreement.

The Special Rapporteur might contribute to provide guidance to states with regard to the protection of human rights through just transition for workers in industries that contribute the most to climate change. This guidance should prioritize provisions for intra- and intergenerational equity, gender equity, racial justice, and the rights of indigenous peoples, affected communities, and migrants.

- **The promotion and protection of human rights in the context of loss and damage:** The intersection of human rights and loss and damage highlights the profound challenges faced by vulnerable communities around the world. Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations and jeopardizing human rights.

  Loss and damage from climate-related events, including extreme weather events, sea-level rise and slow-onset changes, pose serious threats to human well-being, livelihoods and cultural heritage. Loss and damage intersect with human rights in a number of ways. Displacement due to climate impacts can violate the right to adequate housing and increase risks of discrimination and marginalization.

  Loss of livelihoods, particularly in agriculture-dependent communities, undermines economic and social rights, including the right to work and the right to an adequate standard of living. As such, it is often a driver of labour migration taking place under exploitative conditions violating a wide array of human rights. Regular pathways for migration are essential tools for providing vital coping strategies that can protect lives and better prepare communities for future loss and damage. At the same time, people should also have a right to stay. This requires stronger efforts to protect people affected by the adverse effects of climate change, to assist with adaptation measures, and to address loss and damage in order to ensure a life in dignity.

Climate-related disasters also threaten the rights to life, health and access to clean water and sanitation. Ongoing discussions on issues related to the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) should include direct access to people on the frontlines of climate change impacts.

We strongly encourage the Special Rapporteur to advocate for this approach from a human rights perspective, emphasizing the importance of visiting affected regions and countries to gather first-hand evidence. This should include prioritizing vulnerable countries in the Caribbean and Pacific, where extreme weather events are increasing in intensity and frequency due to the climate emergency. Direct engagement with affected communities will enable the Special Rapporteur to amplify their voices, prevent and document human rights violations and underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the complex interplay between climate change impacts and human rights. These visits will provide critical insights into the specific challenges faced by these regions and inform policy recommendations that prioritize justice, equity and human dignity in responses to climate change.

- **Adequate protection for environmental defenders**: we urge the Special Rapporteur to prioritize adequate protection for environmental defenders and ensure access to remedies at the national level. Frontline activists are essential in the fight against environmental degradation. Disturbingly, there is evidence that attacks on individuals working to protect land and the environment are on the rise worldwide, with incidents ranging from assault and murder to intimidation, harassment, stigmatization and criminalization of their efforts. It is critical to uphold guiding principles and norms on business and human rights, to prevent profit-driven practices from overriding human rights obligations, and for States to establish adequate oversight and remedial mechanisms for business practices that may lead to human rights abuses. The voices of those whose human rights are already affected by climate change, many of whom belong to our faith communities, are critical stakeholders in fulfilling the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. It is imperative that environmental defenders are protected and supported.

- **Human mobility in the context of climate change**: Climate change is leading to more frequent and severe weather events, forcing millions of people to leave their homes either temporarily or permanently. While migration may be a way to adapt to climate change if it is voluntary, safe and orderly and human rights are respected, ensuring agency of people on the move is

key, as it results in better developmental effects for individuals, their communities and the host countries. However, this freedom remains severely restricted, exposing migrants and displaced persons to protection gaps. This situation affects both those crossing international borders and those on the move or displaced internally, whose numbers are much higher. The impact of climate change on human security is profound, as those displaced are often vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and human rights violations. Unfortunately, the international protection framework for such scenarios is still inadequate and insufficient.

As civil society and faith-based organizations, we are troubled by policies that treat climate mobility as a security threat, rather than a humanitarian and human rights challenge closely linked to issues of global inequality, vulnerability, development and justice. Some governments have increasingly instrumentalized the fight against the so-called root causes of migration to legitimize anti-migration policies. Instead, we urge governments to uphold and protect the right of individuals to move, including those who are forced to leave their homes due to climate-related disasters, often without adequate support or solutions, and those who are attempting to ensure the survival of their families in dire circumstances, being compelled to make a living abroad in the absence of decent work and human rights standards. At the same time, governments should also increase their efforts to put in place conditions that allow affected communities to stay, if this is their choice.

Policies and frameworks to address human mobility in the context of climate change must prioritize the meaningful participation of affected communities and civil society organizations. They should adopt a human rights-based approach and consider the differentiated impacts of climate change based on age, gender and diversity. We urge the Special Rapporteur to engage affected communities and adopt human rights principles to develop more effective and equitable responses to the challenges posed by climate-induced human mobility .

- **Indigenous Peoples:** We ask the Special Rapporteur to pay special attention to Indigenous communities who, due to their deep ties to land and oceans, are among the first to experience the impacts of climate change. Indigenous peoples are dependent on their land for food, water, medicine, culture and identity. Climate change is disturbing this close relationship, pushing Indigenous communities including those residing in coastal areas from

their land, and threatening their livelihoods, their access to basic needs, their culture, and their lives.

In some cases, the transition to renewable energy, such as the establishment of wind parks and the extraction of rare metals for green technologies, have displaced Indigenous communities and disrupted their ways of making a living. Indigenous rights must be included in a "green transition," upholding the Principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

As 36% of the Earth's remaining forests and 80% of the Earth's biodiversity are safeguarded by Indigenous Peoples in their lands, the protection of Indigenous Peoples rights, not least the right to land, is an important pillar of climate action.

- **Linkage with other Special Rapporteurs:** Building on the work of previous Special Rapporteurs who have reported on the impact of climate change within their specific thematic areas, it is crucial to emphasize the systemic impact of climate change and climate action on human rights. In addition, it is essential to address the issue of mental health and well-being in the context of human rights and climate change. It would be beneficial for the Special Rapporteur to analyze the climate change situation in relation to other key instruments, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working and Living in Rural Areas. This approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection between climate change and human rights.