



# The Containment of Human Rights related to climate change

Human Rights Council





**Forum:** Human Rights Council

**Issue:** The Containment of Human Rights related to climate change

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## Introduction

To gain a deeper understanding on the issue of Containment of Human Rights related to Climate change, we first need to clearly describe what we are working with. By solving this issue, we aim to not let climate change negatively impact human rights of any groups or individuals. Climate change impacts all of our lives. It leads to a little warmer weather here, and to massive floods there. But the only thing we all share is that climate change touches us all and is a collective issue.

This issue is especially rough for individuals in difficult conditions because of their living situation. Third world countries, for example, are hit hard by the changing climate. In many instances one might say that human rights are no longer being met, because of the effects of climate change.

In this report the issue will be outlined, after which some previous and possible solutions will be given.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Food security

the state of having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. This is a human right, but sadly climate change has its effect on it.

### Climate change

A change in global or regional climate patterns, in particular a change apparent from the mid to late 20th century onwards and attributed largely to the increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases produced by the use of fossil fuels.

### Livelihood

A means of supporting one's existence.



## General Overview

### What is the problem

The problem addressed in this issue is the fact that climate change can inflict upon people's freedom in many different ways. Some fundamental human rights that are attacked by climate change are of course the right not to suffer from hunger or unhealthy diets, the right to have secure accommodation and the right to live in safety.

### Hunger

It is no secret that climate change is a big contributor to world hunger. A big reason for that is that biodiversity seems to fade away with rising temperatures. Because of this, ecosystems are disrupted and food security becomes fragile. Other reasons for food shortages may include water scarcity. Because of uneven evaporation and shifted rain patterns, some places find themselves lacking water from their previously so full reserves. An infamous example of this is Cape Town in South Africa, where the water reserves are nearly always on the verge of running out. If the reserves do eventually run out, big parts of the city will not have access to clean water, which would be horrific.<sup>1</sup> Another problem a city such as Cape Town faces, is that nearly one in five people that live there, live in the outskirts of the city in inhumane conditions. These are precisely the groups that need the most protection from climate change. And these are precisely the groups that are feeling its impact most.

Another problem, resembling water shortages and droughts is desertification leading to a smaller amount of crops to grow. Due to desertification on large scales, crops can hardly be grown in places the flora and fauna used to flourish. There are many efforts made by various companies and individuals to mitigate the effects of desertification, or stop it completely, but none are able to quite succeed in their mission to this day.

There are many types of vulnerability due to financial problems, but more on that later.

### Housing security

Another big problem created by climate change is that your living space might be safe one day and be submerged in water the next day. Of course this sounds a little extreme, but it is the hard reality for some nations in this world. Take Fiji, for example, a small island nation that will most likely be underwater within the next 60 years.<sup>2</sup> Not only is the right to a secure and safe home inflicted upon, but also the simple right to life. Fiji is not the only country heavily hit by rising sea levels. Countries like the Netherlands or other small island nations

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/cape-town-water-crisis-timeline>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dnaindia.com/viral/photo-gallery-five-beautiful-islands-including-maldives-and-fiji-to-disappear-in-water-before-end-of-this-century-here-s-why-2894120#:~:text=HomePhotos-.Five%20beautiful%20islands%2C%20including%20Maldives%20and%20Fiji%2C%20may%20disappear%20in,only%20due%20to%20global%20warming.>



need to be extremely cautious, as here too rising sea levels can cause floods and other disasters.

## **livelihood**

As mentioned previously, the livelihood of people decreases immensely, or at least, it becomes more difficult to keep the livelihood levels the same. They are no longer able to live securely in their home, and they do not have sufficient amounts of food. But the other aspect of their livelihood that climate change impacts is simply people's safety. Climate change implies the fact that earth will be terrorised by more and more natural disasters. More hurricanes will destroy coastal cities, more droughts will make water supplies go empty. With all of this known, it seems like a violation of our human rights to not work hard on resolving the issue of climate change once and for all.

## **Other forms of impact**

It is easy for us to read a few UN reports on this issue, that state climate change is being mitigated with all of our power, but the fact still remains that in 2023, for the first time in history, the global average temperature rose with more than 2 degrees in comparison to pre-industrial times.<sup>3</sup>

This ever rising trend in global temperature leads to various natural disasters that endanger our human rights. Drinking water, which should be available to all, is now becoming a privilege instead of a simple right, as the water quality decreases drastically due to the salinization and rising temperatures.<sup>4</sup>

Climate change also has economic effects. A paper by the European Central bank has shown that climate change leads to more inflation, income divergence and a higher public debt. This is all because of the innovations needed simply to restore the climate to its natural state as closely as possible.<sup>5</sup>

But businesses might also seize existing. Say, for example, a farmer in sub-saharan Africa is not able to functionally grow his crops any longer because of rapid desertification. He cannot make any more money to lead his life and has to find another job. This uncertainty and turbulence negatively impact the economy.

## **Health security and access**

Our collective health is negatively impacted by climate change. This is because of more exposure to UV-rays, heat stress and air pollution.<sup>6</sup> And of course natural disasters can be a serious threat to our health. WHO shows that 3.6 billion people live in areas that are highly

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<sup>3</sup> <https://climate.copernicus.eu/global-temperature-exceeds-2degc-above-pre-industrial-average-17-november#:~:text=According%20to%20data%20from%20ERA5,C%20above%20pre%2Dindustrial%20levels>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/water#:~:text=Water%20quality%20is%20also%20affected,pathogens%20and%20pesticides%20\(IPCC\)](https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/water#:~:text=Water%20quality%20is%20also%20affected,pathogens%20and%20pesticides%20(IPCC)).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/pdf/scpwps/ecb.wp2793~7969efec4f.en.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rivm.nl/en/climate-change-and-health#:~:text=Climate%20change%20affects%20our%20health,the%20prevalence%20of%20infectious%20diseases>.



susceptible to climate change.<sup>7</sup> This means that these people have a higher chance of having their health damaged by climate change. But the problems do not end here. Let us say an area has been badly damaged by a hurricane. Roads are blocked, houses are destroyed and people need to get to the nearest hospital. It is hardly possible for these people to actually get there, as infrastructure is badly damaged and there are no possible means of transportation to get the people to the hospital. This will undeniably lead to more deaths and injuries among the inhabitants of the damaged area.

### Who feel the most impact

A similarity between the farmer, who can no longer grow his crops, and the people that cannot get to their hospital, is that these are poor people living in extremely bad conditions already. These are the groups that feel the most impact from climate change, as for example European countries will hardly be affected as badly by a natural disaster as densely populated regions in third world countries might be. This might lead people in more economically developed countries to underestimate the dangers of climate change, since they feel relatively minor impact compared to people in less developed countries. This idea needs to be removed from people's minds as it is absolutely absurd.

First world countries have plenty of resources and money to protect themselves from natural disasters. Examples of this protection are Dutch delta works. This is a big network of dams and dikes to protect the Netherlands from water disasters, such as floods. Third world countries do not have access to protection that is this effective. Therefore, they suffer more from natural disasters, which creates a vicious circle.

### Conclusion

As has been shown in the general overview, climate change is a destructive fact that plays a role in our lives, and especially in the lives of people in need. Climate change can completely minimise people's (sense of) security. It is an ever looming threat over the heads of humans who already have so little. The crops of a poor farmer might burn and never grow back. This leads to him having a hard time financially and others having a hard time, because they suffer from hunger and health issues. Others lose their homes because of ever bigger storms or hurricanes. All of these people have in common that climate change takes away their basic human rights and needs. They no longer have a sense of security, a home to live in or food on their plate. They can hardly visit the doctor, nor can they run their little business.

This is not a world one can expect us to raise our children, and this is not a world we can stop worrying about. This is a world that needs fast and acute help, in order to prevent further violations of human rights.

## Major Parties Involved

### WHO

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>



The World Health Organisation, or WHO is actively involved in the issue. It is one of the biggest providers of trustworthy research on the issue of climate change, with other organisations (like governmental organisations) taking a less prominent role in the research.

Moreover, The WHO develops various policies and agreements on how we should deal with the issue. Just like the UN Human Rights Council.

And lastly, this organisation also collaborates with many organisations worldwide to solve the issue of climate change, which connects different companies and organs.

## NGOs

Besides WHO, which is a UN body, there are also various different non governmental organisations that are involved in this issue. Greenpeace for example is famous for its protests, which have changed a lot in policies of countries such as the Netherlands.

Other organisations and charities like Oxfam Novib keep themselves busy with combating the effects of climate change in other ways. They, for example, help groups of people in difficult financial situations or bad living circumstances.

## Timeline of Events

It is difficult to have a concrete timeline of events, as climate change is a very broad issue, which cannot easily be summarised in a small timeline, but here are some significant moments in our effort to combat this issue.

April 7th 1948	The WHO was established
February 12th 1979	First Climate conference in Geneva
December 12th 2015	The climate agreement in Paris
December 20th 2019	Judge rules in favour of Urgenda vs The Netherlands

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

And here again, as this is such a broad and in some way vague issue, it is hard to pinpoint concrete previous solutions to this issue. However we again identify a few important conventions and treaties.

The Paris agreement, for example, urged many different countries to contribute to the global effort of combating climate change. This is such an important attempt to solve the issue, because it is the first one in which so many different nations work together towards the same goal using the same strategy.

Another important attempt was the lawsuit between the Urgenda Foundation and the Netherlands. This infamous lawsuit is the first example of a company winning a legally binding battle against a government. This case has shown that not combating climate change



enough is an infliction on human rights. This is the reason the Dutch government was found guilty of neglecting the climate change issue.

## Possible solutions

An obvious solution is the increase of international collaboration. But just collaboration will not be enough. There need to be binding treaties, and checks of, or between nations to ensure that every single nation is still obeying to the agreements they made. Because as mentioned earlier, it is not economically beneficial to invest a lot in green energy right now for many nations. But it is still very important to do so. This is why international collaboration is key to success.

Another solution is to put more funding towards science and research on this issue. Because only with enough knowledge and understanding, can we efficiently solve this issue.

## Useful documents

The Paris Agreement: [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf)

About the impact of climate change on third world countries:

[https://www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/the\\_impact\\_of\\_cc\\_on\\_ldcs\\_and\\_sids\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/ohrlls/sites/www.un.org.ohrlls/files/the_impact_of_cc_on_ldcs_and_sids_for_web.pdf)

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