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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Beijing Changier Education Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Integrating Human Rights into Climate Action - A Comprehensive Response to Climate Change and the Plastic Crisis

Introduction:

Climate change is one of the gravest challenges facing humanity, not only as an environmental crisis but as a profound human rights issue that threatens the very fabric of our societies. Since the late 1800s, the Earth's surface temperature has risen by approximately 1.2°C, triggering unprecedented environmental changes with far-reaching consequences. These changes are already affecting the livelihoods, health, and futures of billions of people worldwide, particularly those in vulnerable and marginalized communities. The escalating impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels, prolonged droughts, and biodiversity loss, directly threaten fundamental human rights, including the rights to life, health, water, food, and an adequate standard of living.

Plastic pollution and climate change are deeply intertwined issues, both stemming from the unchecked exploitation of natural resources and the prioritization of short-term economic gains over long-term environmental and human well-being. Addressing these crises requires urgent and comprehensive solutions grounded in the principles of justice, equity, and human dignity. The time for incremental change has passed; we must now adopt a holistic approach that integrates environmental sustainability with the protection of human rights to ensure that no community or ecosystem is left behind.

Climate Change, Plastic Pollution, and Human Rights:

The dual crises of climate change and plastic pollution are already having devastating impacts on communities around the world, particularly in regions that are least equipped to adapt. The effects of climate change—ranging from more frequent and severe hurricanes and floods to prolonged droughts and food shortages—are being felt globally. At the same time, plastic pollution is contaminating waterways, harming wildlife, and entering the food chain, with serious implications for human health and livelihoods.

These environmental crises disproportionately affect marginalized and vulnerable populations, including indigenous peoples, women, children, and those in developing countries. For these communities, the consequences of climate change and plastic pollution are not just environmental issues; they are existential threats that undermine their ability to exercise their fundamental human rights. The lack of access to resources, technology, and infrastructure necessary to adapt to these challenges only exacerbates their vulnerability, making it imperative that the international community takes decisive action.

High-income countries and major corporations, particularly those in the fossil fuel and plastics industries, bear significant responsibility for the current state of our planet. The unregulated emission of greenhouse gases, driven by these entities, is at the heart of the climate crisis, while the proliferation of plastic waste can be traced back to decades of unchecked production and consumption. Despite their significant contributions to these global problems, many of these actors have failed to take adequate measures to mitigate their impact or support those most affected by the resulting environmental degradation. This neglect not only exacerbates environmental harm but also deepens existing social and economic inequalities, creating a cycle of vulnerability and injustice that must be broken.

Human Rights-based Solutions:

Addressing the intertwined crises of climate change and plastic pollution from a human rights perspective requires a holistic and integrated approach. This approach must prioritize the protection of the most vulnerable populations, ensure corporate accountability, and empower affected communities to seek justice. The following strategies are essential to achieving these goals:

1. Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks:

To effectively address the human rights implications of climate change and plastic pollution, countries must enact and enforce robust legal frameworks that prioritize environmental sustainability and human rights protection. This includes implementing laws that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, limit plastic production and waste, and safeguard vital ecosystems from further degradation. Such laws should explicitly protect the rights of vulnerable populations, ensuring that they are not disproportionately harmed by environmental impacts and have access to the resources they need to adapt.

Legal frameworks must also be adaptable to evolving environmental conditions, allowing for responsive and effective action as new challenges arise. For example, governments should regulate the production and disposal of plastics more stringently, including banning single-use plastics, promoting biodegradable alternatives, and investing in waste management infrastructure. Additionally, international agreements must be strengthened to address transboundary pollution and ensure that all nations contribute to global efforts to mitigate climate change and reduce plastic waste.

Incorporating human rights standards into national and international climate and environmental policies is essential to making these efforts effective and equitable. These policies should not only focus on reducing emissions and curbing plastic pollution but also on safeguarding the rights and well-being of individuals and communities affected by these crises. By aligning environmental policies with human rights obligations, we can create a more just and sustainable world where all people have the opportunity to thrive.

2. Prioritizing Vulnerable Populations in Adaptation Strategies:

Adaptation strategies must be designed with the most vulnerable groups in mind, including indigenous communities, women, children, and those living in poverty. These strategies should ensure that these populations have equitable access to the resources, information, and support they need to adapt to changing environmental conditions and mitigate the impacts of climate change and plastic pollution.

For indigenous communities, whose traditional knowledge and ways of life are closely tied to the environment, it is critical to protect their lands and resources from exploitation and degradation. These communities must be empowered to participate in climate and environmental decision-making processes, ensuring that their rights are respected and their voices heard. Furthermore, adaptation strategies should prioritize the protection of natural resources that are essential to these communities' survival, such as clean water, arable land, and forests.

Governments should also invest in education and capacity-building programs that equip vulnerable communities with the skills and knowledge they need to respond to environmental challenges. This includes providing training on sustainable agricultural practices, water conservation, and waste management, as well as supporting the development of community-based adaptation plans that reflect local needs and priorities.

3. Ensuring Corporate Accountability:

Corporations, particularly those in the fossil fuel and plastics industries, have a significant responsibility to respect human rights by reducing their environmental impact. Governments must hold these companies accountable for their contributions to climate change and plastic pollution and ensure they take meaningful actions to reduce emissions, limit plastic production, and transition to sustainable practices.

OHCHR advocates for stronger mechanisms to ensure corporate accountability, including transparent reporting of emissions, adherence to environmental regulations, and active participation in global efforts to combat climate change and reduce plastic waste. Corporations should also be required to invest in innovative technologies and practices that minimize environmental harm and contribute to sustainable development.

This includes transitioning to renewable energy sources, reducing waste, and implementing sustainable supply chain practices.

In addition to regulatory measures, there must be a concerted effort to shift corporate cultures towards sustainability and responsibility. This can be achieved through public awareness campaigns, shareholder activism, and the promotion of corporate social responsibility initiatives that prioritize environmental stewardship and human rights protection.

4. Empowering Affected Communities:

Empowering communities affected by climate change and plastic pollution to seek justice and compensation for the harm they have endured is a fundamental aspect of a human rights-based approach. This can be achieved by improving access to legal remedies, such as courts and tribunals, for environmental cases. Additionally, providing communities with the information, tools, and resources they need to challenge harmful practices is essential for holding perpetrators accountable and preventing further violations.

International cooperation is also crucial for addressing transboundary environmental issues and ensuring that affected communities receive the support they need. This includes fostering partnerships between governments, civil society, and international organizations to build a global movement for climate justice and environmental protection. Such partnerships can provide a platform for sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices, enabling communities to take collective action and amplify their voices on the global stage.

In the context of plastic pollution, efforts must be made to reduce the environmental and health impacts on communities living near plastic production facilities, waste disposal sites, and polluted waterways. These communities are often the first to experience the harmful effects of plastic pollution, and they must be empowered to advocate for cleaner environments and healthier living conditions.

Conclusion:

The future of our planet and its people depends on our collective action. As the UN ActNow campaign emphasizes, we must act urgently to create better lives on a healthier planet. By integrating human rights into our climate and environmental strategies, we can build a more just and sustainable world for all. Together, we can turn the tide on climate change and plastic pollution, securing a future where every individual's rights are respected and protected, and where the natural environment is preserved for generations to come.
