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**28th session of the Human Rights Council**

**Full-Day discussion on Human Rights and Climate Change**

**Address by Ms. Flavia Pansieri**

**United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**



**Geneva, Friday 6 March 2015,**

**Room XX, Palais des Nations**

Excellencies, Colleagues and friends,

I am pleased to welcome you to this vital full-day discussion. Human-induced climate change is not only an assault on the ecosystem that we share. It also **undercuts the rights** to health, to food, to water and sanitation, to adequate housing, and -- for the people of small island states and coastal communities -- even the right to self-determination. Environmental disasters displace more people than wars.

There can be no doubt about the damage being done to our planet. Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change –the world’s most authoritative voice on climate science – made abundantly clear the **immediate and long-term harm** that climate change brings to our environment. The Human Rights Council’s seven resolutions on climate change clearly detail the impact of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights. For our part, OHCHR reported on this subject in 2009 and 2012, and Special Procedures mandate holders have also addressed it repeatedly.

The IPCC and this Council have both highlighted the **disproportionate impact of climate change** on poor, vulnerable and marginalised communities, and on people who are already at risk, due to factors such as, gender, poverty, age, minority status and disability.

**Those who have contributed the least to greenhouse emissions, will often bear the greatest burden**. The poorest people in the poorest countries. Their children. And ours.Populations of small islands, and low-lying coastal lands. For some communities, climate change threatens their very survival.

We believe that a human-rights-based approach can drive more effective climate policy and action. Why? **Because such an approach seeks to identify and satisfy the most pressing needs of vulnerable persons living in our highly inequitable global society**, with greatly differing levels of social, environmental and economic of development. It promotes careful stewardship of the world’s resources with higher levels of accountability and for the benefit of all.

This is not new. The importance of a human-rights-based approach was acknowledged in 2010 with the ‘**Cancun Agreement’**. We hope that a new legally binding climate agreement will strengthen commitments already made to ensure that “parties should, in all climate change-related actions, fully respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights.”

In 2015, the international community will undertake an ambitious agenda that includes finalizing **the new Sustainable Development Goals**, setting out a universal, legally-binding agreement on climate change, and new agreements on financing for development.

The decisions made in coming months will have far-ranging consequences. It is vital that they fully reflect the human rights obligations of States and the related responsibilities of actors in the private sector.

We hope that the crucial **climate talks in Paris** this year will build on the language in the Cancun agreement and include clear reference to the human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, accountability, participation, empowerment, solidarity, and transparency, among others. And we trust this will be followed with action. We need real steps to reduce the harmful effects of climate change, in ways that are fully consistent with States’ human rights obligations.

Sustainable development is development that is inclusive, participatory, and that addresses the rights of all. Similarly, equitable climate action – which is designed to limit climate change, and to prevent and mitigate its negative impacts – must have, at its core, people’s rights. In particular, **care must be taken to prevent and remedy any negative impacts on the human rights of vulnerable, marginalised, discriminated or at risk groups**, including indigenous peoples; minorities; persons living in poverty; migrants and displaced persons; older persons; persons with disabilities; and children – as well as to empower and protect the rights of women.

This can be done. I was heartened to hear that during the most recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action on climate change in Geneva, several States expressed support for the inclusion of strong language on human rights in forthcoming agreements and 18 signed the **'Geneva Pledge on Human Rights and Climate Action'**. I urge all States to make this commitment.

Today’s panels offer a further opportunity to highlight the critical linkages between human rights and climate change, and to promote **action-oriented outcomes**. They will, I hope, facilitate our global, local, individual and collective efforts to save humanity from irreversible global warming and its devastating impact on human rights.

I look forward to today’s discussions.

Thank you.