



## **UNHCHR analytical study of the relationship between climate change and human rights**

### **Contribution by the International Labour Organization**

#### **1. Climate change and decent work**

This communication is in reply to the High Commissioner's letter dated 16 June 2008 by which the ILO was invited to provide information relevant to an analytical study of the relationship between climate change and human rights that UNHCHR is preparing in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 7/23.

The ILO is addressing climate change from the perspective of its impact on the Decent Work Agenda. Indeed, climate change impacts in many ways on the enjoyment of the right to decent work, with men and women in developing countries being particularly affected. Environmental changes resulting from climate change have direct consequences on agricultural employment in rural areas. With about 1.3 billion workers, agriculture continues to be the largest single employer in the world and the sector which already has the biggest concentration of poor people. Due to climate change certain types of agricultural activities may no longer be possible. In turn, this will have an impact on enjoyment of the right to food.

Policies to mitigate climate change may negatively affect human rights. A case in point is biofuel production, which has been reported to place pressure on the lands of indigenous peoples and lead to violations of their human rights. There are also reported cases of child labour and of debt-bondage in the production of feedstock for biofuels. Mitigation strategies include the restructuring of the economy and changes in production methods that may imply loss of employment, which must be addressed.

At the same time the workplace is a crucial entry point for measures to slow down climate change, with workers' and employers' organizations having a key role to play. Adaptation to climate change and mitigation offer numerous opportunities to create decent work and to advance the realization of rights. This includes investments in renewable energy which can provide access to modern energy for populations currently excluded. Biofuels can diversify rural economies and provide decent jobs for youth. Other examples include investments in infrastructure for adaptation or the upgrading of substandard housing through efforts to improve energy efficiency and put countries on a clean development path. The outcomes are often a function of coherent policies which integrate all three dimensions of sustainable development rather than focusing exclusively on environmental or economic objectives.

These issues continue to be high on the agenda of the ILO and its constituents, and the ILO is also engaged in active collaboration with its partners in the UN System. A joint ILO/UNEP report on "Green Jobs" is scheduled to be launched by ILO Director-General Juan Somavia and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner on 24 September 2008. The report discusses the implications for decent work and the respect of fundamental labour rights in some detail.

Climate change and its implications for the Decent Work Agenda have been analysed in a number of ILO publications and discussed in various ILO forums. The ILO is developing an active programme of work in cooperation with partners in the UN system and beyond along the lines set out in GB.300/WP/SDG/1 which you find attached. We hope that the selection of documentation listed below will provide useful information and guidance for the purpose of your study.

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## **2. Climate change and its human rights implications for indigenous and tribal peoples**

Climate change has already started affecting some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities across the world, including indigenous peoples' communities. Paradoxically, indigenous peoples, whose livelihood activities are most respectful of nature and the environment, suffer immediately and directly from climate change and its consequences. The negative effects of climate change on indigenous peoples' traditional livelihood strategies, which are closely linked to access to land and natural resources, are becoming evident. Increased pressure on arable land, decrease in and disappearance of certain species, seasonal climate change in the form of extreme weather events such as tropical storms and long periods of drought means that a number of traditional livelihood activities are increasingly coming under pressure and are at the risk of being unable to sustain livelihoods.

Climate change thus becomes an additional factor impeding the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples to pursue their traditional livelihood strategies. Traditional livelihood strategies must therefore be diversified and combined with other strategies in non-traditional sectors and through e.g. skills improvements and entrepreneurship development. This will allow indigenous peoples' communities to pursue alternative socio-economic strategies and build healthy and enterprising communities. In addition, climate change is likely to accelerate out-migration leading indigenous peoples to enter into new areas of work and employment in the formal and informal economies, often outside their communities, where they are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, forced labour and child labour.

The ILO's objective to promote decent work opportunities for all is highly relevant for developing new livelihood strategies where traditional ones are no longer sufficient or possible, as a result of climate change. While new livelihood strategies will be necessary, measures should also be taken to ensure that indigenous peoples can continue to engage in their traditional occupations. It is increasingly recognized that traditional livelihood strategies, are making a positive contribution the protection of the environment, which is of an ever increasing importance in the context of climate change. The full and effective application of ILO standards, particularly Conventions Nos. 169 and 111 is key in this regard.

Where natural resources are threatened, the right of indigenous peoples to participate in the use, management and conservation of these resources is crucial. Another fundamental right is to ensure their consultation and participation, in line with international standards, in processes that design and implement overall coping and mitigation strategies at the different levels. The trend towards carbon-free energy, which leads to increased pressures on indigenous peoples' lands and livelihoods, is a case in point.

The participation of indigenous peoples in the development and implementation of strategies to address climate change is also crucial because indigenous peoples have an important contribution to make through their traditional knowledge and innovations.

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## Appendix