

Remarks by Ambassador Negash Kebret, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations Office at Geneva and International Organisations in Switzerland and Vienna at the High Level Opening of OHCHR Expert Meeting on Climate Change and Human Rights. 6 – 7 October 2016. Geneva.

Mr. Chairman (Mr. Bat-Erdene Ayush, Chief, Right to Development Section, OHCHR)

Excellency Ms. Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Excellency Ms. Mary Robinson, President, Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice,

Excellency Ambassador Ms. Elayne Whyte Gomez, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to the organizers for inviting me to take part in this important meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

As the first intergovernmental statement on human rights has clearly underlined “climate change has clear and immediate implications for the full enjoyment of human rights”. We can look at this interlinkage between human rights and climate change from three perspectives.

First, climate change adversely impairs conditions for the realization of a broad range of human rights. As a result of rising average temperature and changes in

rainfall patterns and the increasing incidence and intensity of extreme weather events including floods and drought, our ability to realize rights to life, health, food, education, adequate standard of living and a range of others could be seriously impaired. And there is ample evidence in this regard.

Second, responses to climate change could potentially affect a range of human rights. Traditional responses to climate change take two primary forms; adaptation and mitigation. Mitigation includes policy responses to reduce causes of climate change and this is generally the increasing levels of emissions of greenhouse gases. However no matter how ambitious our mitigation responses are, there is already a certain level of climate change that our past emissions have committed. And hence, there is a need to take adaptation measures. Adaptation includes policy responses to minimize the adverse consequences of climate change by reducing exposure and vulnerability too these various changes. It must be pointed out that human rights could be adversely affected not only by the direct effects of climate change but also indirectly by our responses to climate change.

Third, approaching a human rights approach to climate change helps increase the effectiveness, scope and fairness of climate policy responses. In this regard, we could take into account such internationally recognized human rights such as rights to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice. Take for instance access to information and education. Climate change is of such a nature that its causes and effects can be widely distributed. In Ethiopia, estimates indicate that 87 percent of our emissions come from the land use sector. This sector includes crop and livestock production and management of forest resources. Our land use sector is characterized by millions of smallholder farmers. From this it follows that to effectively reduce our

emissions we need to mobilize millions of our people, crafting policies such as regulatory instruments and public expenditure of limited use. These policy instruments work best when sources of emissions are highly concentrated. The more concentrated it is the easier it becomes to deploy regulatory or public expenditure instruments. This brings the issue of access to information and education. Provision of information and quality education are cost-effective means of mobilizing relevant behavioural change for as many people as possible to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Mr. Chairman,

If climate change and human rights are interlinked in this manner, one may ask what will be the implication in terms of guiding the responses of governments and private actors.

First adopting a human rights approach to climate change policymaking and programming helps to prioritize the issue of climate change in national policymaking arena. The issue of climate change cannot be more externalized to the rich or the industrialized countries. This is indeed a spirit which is consistent with the ideals of the Paris Agreement of universal contribution and cooperation to solve climate change problem. Governments can no more justify failure and point hands without doing anything to anticipate, alleviate and prepare for climate change and related disasters. It is with this mind-set that the Government of Ethiopia has set an ambitious climate targets. We aim to reduce our emissions by 64 percent from the business-as-usual scenario by 2030 taking 2010 as a baseline. In Ethiopia, the major climate hazards include drought and floods. That is why we extensively engage in natural resources conservation and development.

Second, adopting a human rights approach to climate change policymaking and programming helps to refine the quality of policy instruments and projects as it brings to light the adverse human rights consequences of certain types of responses. In addition, human rights by serving as safeguards further enhance the implementation of quality climate responses.

Third, adopting a human rights approach enhances the need for international cooperation and assistance, mainly with respect to low income countries such as Ethiopia. The issue of international finance becomes also an issue of human rights.

Fourth, as stated earlier, by working on improved access to quality and relevant information and education, we can also increase our ability to address human rights.

In concluding, Mr. Chairman, we have to, however, be concerned by the zeal and paternalistic tendency of some entities which claim to be motivated by their concern for human rights when they blindly and generally oppose any sort of biofuel and hydropower projects. We accept human rights are important considerations to strengthen the quality of climate actions and help focus national actions on climate change. We should not however accept wanton interference in the policy choice of countries by unaccountable non-governmental organizations. This is something that we need to be aware of if we have to succeed in our noble cause of addressing the effects of climate change to make the world a better place for us and our children.

I thank you.