# Outputs of the OHCHR Expert Meeting on Climate Change and Human Rights (October 2016)

## *Statement by Benjamin Schachter on behalf of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 15 November 2016 at the COP22 side event on Human Rights and Gender Equality in the Implementation of the Paris Agreement*

## Excellencies, Friends, Colleagues, Distinguished Guests,

It is my pleasure to be here on behalf of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. I would like to thank the organizers and the esteemed speakers who preceded me for their efforts to ensure that human rights are part of the implementation of the Paris Agreement and indeed part of climate action at all levels.

We are here for a simple reason. Climate change and its impacts hurt people. In some cases, they kill people. We know this and we know that human action is both the cause and the solution.

As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said upon entry into force of the Paris Agreement “climate change is a threat to us all and to future generations, to the enjoyment of human rights now and in the years ahead. A continually warming world will be a graveyard for entire ecosystems, entire peoples – and potentially even entire nations.”

The High Commissioner stressed that “there is a clear disconnect between the Paris Agreement’s stated ambition to limit warming to less than two degrees and the commitments countries have made.”

He called for urgent action at COP22 to close this gap, to make sure that the measures detailed in the Paris Agreement are carried out, and to ensure there is accountability for harmful actions and omissions.

Ladies and gentleman,

Taking rights-based action to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change is an obligation founded in both the human rights and climate commitments of States. And, pursuant to these commitments, States and other duty-bearers must act to protect rights-holders from harms caused by climate change.

In October of this year, OHCHR along with the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice and the Geneva Pledge for Human Rights in Climate Action hosted a two-day expert meeting on human rights and climate change. The meeting included representatives of numerous States, civil society organizations and international organizations.

Participants were asked to identify concrete actions for advancing the human rights and climate change agenda. A complete draft summary of recommendations from the meeting and other relevant materials are available on the OHCHR website. I encourage you to review these documents for further information.

For now, I want to share with you a taste of the discussion and a few recommendations derived from it.

Participants expressed an overwhelming sense of urgency. The implications of inaction, inadequate action, or harmful action were rendered clear, human, and visceral, the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women, children, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and the poor, among others, were highlighted.

The need for climate justice and climate action that benefitted people, particularly the most vulnerable, was a primary focus. 1.5 degrees was about the survival of peoples, of nations, of ecosystems. Something less than the best outcome of which we were all collectively capable was not acceptable. Rights-based action was a legal and moral imperative that offered hope for the future.

My friends,

We should not doubt that human ingenuity and innovation harnessed for the benefit of all persons can solve the climate problem that it has created.

But there remain many obstacles in our way. In the meeting, participants spoke frequently of **the need to break down silos, improve communications and cooperation, and ensure meaningful participation of affected persons in climate action.**

Colleagues,

Let’s remember that silos are for keeping rats out of food, not for keeping people apart, not for harboring ignorance, not for justifying inaction. So, let us speak no more of silos in this context.

Instead, let us speak of strengthening connections and creating new ones, of the values, principles, norms and standards that will make us stronger together: generosity, solidarity, compassion, cooperation, justice, **human rights**.

The Geneva Pledge for Human Rights in Climate Action represents a step in this direction. It calls for signatories to strengthen the links between their climate and human rights experts and to integrate human rights in climate actions. But like the Paris Agreement itself, the Pledge is no stronger than the action that it inspires.

We remain at a tipping point where urgent action to preserve the planet and to fulfill human rights commitments is needed.

What should this action look like? Meeting participants recommended that it:

1. Respect, promote and consider human rights in UNFCCC processes
2. Effectively mobilize human rights mechanisms to address climate change
3. Breakdown silos, improve awareness, build capacity and ensure meaningful participation
4. Guarantee access to effective remedies
5. Promote accountability for businesses and ensure they do no harm
6. Close the protection gap for those displaced by climate change

Given today’s subject, my final remarks will elaborate upon the first recommendation: respect, promote and consider human rights in UNFCCC processes. This commitment made at COP21 in Paris imperfectly reflects the universal, legally binding obligation of all States to respect, promote, protect and fulfill all human rights for all persons.

It is language that demands action be taken to integrate human rights considerations in UNFCCC processes. Meeting participants called for States to, *inter alia*:

1. Uphold international human rights obligations in climate actions
2. Raise the ambition of nationally determined contributions.
3. Include human rights in nationally determined contributions, adaptation communications and national communications.
4. Integrate human rights considerations throughout measurement, review and verification processes including the transparency framework.
5. Establish and support social and environmental safeguards for climate financing mechanisms.
6. Strengthen and extend the Lima Work Programme on gender.
7. Ensure that the traditional knowledge platform established by the Paris decision respects indigenous peoples’ rights.
8. Guarantee the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders in UNFCCC processes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Taking these actions would be a good start toward meaningful, rights-based climate action for people and planet. We cannot wait. We must act now.

In this regard, I congratulate the parties for their work to extend and strengthen the Lima Work Programme on gender and include human rights in capacity building at COP22. However, as we heard today, much remains to be done to ensure truly sustainable development that benefits all persons. I look forward to continuing this work with you.

Thank you.