**31st Session of the Human Rights Council**

**PANEL DISCUSSION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE RIGHT TO HEALTH**

*Cristina Tirado-von der Pahlen*

*UCLA, Institute for Environment and Sustainability*

*Chair of IUNS task force on climate and nutrition*

Members of the Human Rights Council, excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure to be with you today and I want to congratulate you for the organization of this panel discussion on climate change and the right to health.

Climate change undermines the enjoyment of human rights and especially the right to life, to health, food and to environmental protection. The right to health of our and future generations is compromised by climate change challenging intergenerational equity.

The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change concluded with high confidence, that the main impact of Climate on health is children undernutrition in developing countries*.* Calorie availability in 2050 is likely to decline throughout the developing world due to climate change, resulting in an additional 24 million undernourished children.

The same elevated CO2 levels that are causing climate change, are directly decreasing the protein, mineral and vitamin content of many important staple food crops. This compromises the right to food of our and future generations, particularly in developing countries who depend mostly from staples.

Climate change disproportionately impacts the health of poor women and children and other vulnerable people who have contributed the least to the problem. It is estimated that 88% of the burden of disease attributed to climate change affects children under 5 years old.

Health losses due to climate change-induced under-nutrition will occur mainly in areas that are already food-insecure. It is predicted that climate change will increase severe children stunting by 23% in central sub- Saharan Africa and by to 62% in South Asia in 2050. Stunted girls frequently become mothers of stunted children perpetuating the vicious circle of poverty.

At the same time, increasing global demand for animal foods and appetite for meat in rich countries and in the urban developing world presents huge implications for crossing the planetary boundaries, for climate change and for human health. A meat based diet has a very high impact on emissions and is associated with increased risks for non communicable diseases when compared with more sustainable and healthier diets. Efforts to modify production and consumption of meat to mitigate climate change is ethically imperative.

Ladies and Gentlemen

To address these complex challenges we need a theory of change that places people's right to life and to health in center of sustainable development. The Paris Treaty recognizes human rights and the co-benefits to health of mitigation actions. Our theory of change should emerge from the co-benefits to health of sustainable and climate-resilient development.

The IPCC has identified the co-benefits from actions that reduce emissions and at the same time improve health. These include:

-Reducing local emissions of air pollutants from energy systems through improved energy efficiency and cleaner energy sources.

-Designing transport systems that promote active transport leading to lower emissions and better health through improved air quality and physical activity.

-Shifting consumption away from animal products in high-meat consumption societies towards more sustainable and healthier diets

-Providing access to reproductive health services (including modern family planning) to improve child and maternal health through birth spacing, contributing to adaptation and at the same time to the reduction of population growth.

The signatories of the Paris Treaty should recognize these co-benefits and additional key strategies that can contribute to realizing human rights and empowering the most vulnerable communities.

The right to health and the right to food should be considered in the national (climate) adaptation plans (NAPs), within the Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action Plans (NAMAs) and in Disaster Risk Reduction and Risk Management Plans. The UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) can offer opportunities to address more broadly the health co-benefits of adaptation and mitigation.

Climate finance should support measures that bring health co-benefits and respect gender equality and equity principles at all levels. A climate justice approach requires funding to be innovative, long term and additional, without diverting funds from budgets designated for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Gender equality and equity are fundamental to achieving climate resilience, sustainable development and right to health and food. To ensure gender equity, it is crucial to improve women’s access to education, land, technologies, credit, social protection, and resilient health systems.

Loss and Damage should be considered as a human rights and climate justice issue. The Pacific Islands make a plea to the World before Paris and we recall the leadership of the Minister of Health of Fiji advocating for global warming to be limited to less than 1.5 °C. Fiji has been just struck by one of the strongest storms ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere and yet climate models project that a greater number of future hurricanes will tend to strengthen to category 4 and 5.

To avoid the worst impacts of climate change governments should urgently cut drastically their emissions to limit warming below 1.5°C and commit to help the most vulnerable to adapt to an increasingly unpredictable world.

The temperature of a planet is not negotiable as the right to life and to health are non negotiable.

Thank you for your attention