

## **Seminar to Address the Adverse Impacts of Climate Change on the Full Enjoyment of Human Rights.**

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Good morning my brothers and sisters, my name is Kumi Naidoo and I would like to talk to you about how climate change is affecting human lives, and is and will cause human rights violations across the world in many forms. Because of climate change, we will see more starvation, more climate forced migration, and more extinction across the world. Climate change impacts have no boundaries. They do not need visas or travel documents. One country's pollution devastates and can destroy a nation thousands of miles away.

Governments in Durban failed the delegates who had to go back to their communities with an outcome which, according to the science, will have devastating impacts on their way of life; a devastating impact on the people who are least responsible for the climate chaos, but they will be the first to pay the highest price.

Many citizens in the world, especially young people, I know my own daughter feels this way, are completely disgusted by how governments lack the political will to establish a solid, time-bound process to address the biggest threat our planet faces. The equation is very simple, governments must agree to peak global emissions by 2015 and reduce emissions by at least 80% below 1990 levels by 2050, this is not a Greenpeace statement, this is according to the recommendations of the IPCC. Any delay of the peak year will increase the environmental and economic costs and diminish the probability of keeping temperature rise below 2°C, which governments adopted as a target at COP 16 in Cancun, let alone the 1.5 °C which is supported by more than 100 countries. Failing to do so is basically admitting that our political leaders are sleep walking us into a crisis of epic proportion, putting the future and lives of our children and grandchildren in jeopardy and great danger.

Today, I will offer a few examples of how climate change impacts violate human rights and why. Ultimately, states have human rights obligations to protect their citizens and to cooperate to solve the climate change crisis. That's why it is important for the Human Rights Council, the global guardian of human rights, to continue its essential work on climate change.

Recently, I was quoted in a Canadian online magazine as saying "Canada's Oil Sands Kill Africans." This statement raised eyebrows not only in Canada but also across the world. Well, it's a strong statement that I stand by. Please allow me to tell you why in a human rights context.

The tar sands generate 40 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year, more than all the cars in Canada combined. The tar sands are the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions in the country. Canada's greenhouse gas emissions have grown more since 1990 than those of any other G8 nation. More importantly, the tar sands are the main reason Canada has abandoned its Kyoto commitments and continues to block meaningful global climate regulations.

Climate science is clear. For the first time, climate scientists teamed up with experts in disaster risk management on a report on climate change. This Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report concluded that climate change is fuelling extreme weather and there will be an escalation of impacts on people and economies.

Those facts, my brothers and sisters, are the sad reality of our time. The tragedy about this whole issue for somebody like me coming from Africa is that the people who are least responsible for climate chaos are the ones that are paying the first and the most brutal price.

Climate change in Africa is contributing to the creation of more deserts, starvation and water scarcity. The very problems that helped drive the genocide in Darfur, Sudan. The *Climate Vulnerability Monitor 2010: State of the Climate Crisis* report estimated that climate related deaths to be at 350,000 deaths per year, and this number could rise to 1 million deaths per year by 2030 if measures are not taken...Look at what is happening in the Horn of Africa, over the past year, the eastern Horn of Africa has experienced two consecutive failed rainy seasons, whereas droughts were recorded every six to eight years in the past, they now occur every one to two years.

Canada's contribution to the climate crisis is significant. Therefore I stand by what I said. The Canadian government's drive to develop the tar sands and refusal to keep its Kyoto promises and efforts to block further global action is contributing to the killing of Africans.

Countries that contribute the most to climate change have a moral obligation to help the poor nations to adapt and mitigate. We have reached a point in our history where we need to look at the science and acknowledge the reality we live in.

We simply cannot afford to delay anymore. At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, George H. W. Bush, then President of the United States of America, infamously stated that "the American way of life is not negotiable."

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg. President George W. Bush decided not to attend. Prior to the Summit, White House press secretary Ari Fleischer was asked whether the President believed Americans needed to correct their lifestyles in order to address the energy problem. His answer was an unequivocal no. He said that "the American way of life is a blessed one." My brother and sisters, we will need 5 planets, FIVE, if everyone in the world consumed in the level of the average American.

The current position of the lead U.S. negotiator within the UNFCCC process continues to reflect this philosophy. He does recognize that the U.S. has a historical responsibility for the largest share of emissions, yet he continues to defend an extremely unambitious effort from the U.S. and rejects taking on real legally binding commitments to act. The U.S. does not seem prepared to pay back its major climate debt.

These statements demonstrate the clear link between historic emissions and the climate change effects that are being felt now and will increase in the future. Countries like Canada and the U.S. have a responsibility to act to reduce their emissions and pay compensation for the now unavoidable damage they have caused. However, the blame should never fall on the Canadian people or even the American people. It is a political failure on the part of those that have the responsibility to lead. A political failure of those governments that continue to listen to the polluters instead of their people.

When we say that rich countries have to put money into a green climate fund to help poor countries adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, we are not asking for charity, we are asking for the developed countries to actually compensate poor countries for the impacts they inflict. At the same time, it's crucial that those funds are spent in a way that safeguards human rights.

So, what happens when "big" governments with large carbon footprints choose to listen to the polluters and not their own people? And when they choose to ignore how their own policies affect the lives of

millions of people in poor nations? Some nations and people take the matter into their own hands and fight for their survival and existence. For example, there have been significant efforts by affected governments and local NGOs to highlight the issue of climate forced migration. I was privileged to be part of panel discussions during the past three COPs on this issue. Some sources forecast that by 2050 there will be around 200 million climate forced migrants around the world. In Bangladesh alone, sources say that 20 million people could be displaced because of sea-level rise and resulting salinity, and the increase in storm surges and cyclones. Serious discussions are underway on how to ensure those forced to leave their homes, and possibly even their countries, are given political and legal rights, including citizenship in other countries.

These examples demonstrate that a human rights based approach is integral to solving the climate crisis.

Another great example that demonstrates how serious the issue of climate change is to some nations, is when in December 2010 a small island nation – the Federated States of Micronesia, requested a transboundary environmental impact assessment regarding the life extension of a coal fired power plant in the Czech Republic. Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessments are requested frequently - nothing new here. What made this one groundbreaking was that the petitioner was a Pacific island nation.

In requesting a transboundary assessment, the country established itself as a stakeholder based on human rights and environmental concerns in a European energy decision. In this process the Federated States of Micronesia was awarded standing. The Czech government recognized that transboundary pollution includes CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that drive climate change. And the plant operator was forced to offset future emissions. This was a small but important victory for the protection of human rights.

As you know, the most vulnerable countries, such as the Pacific island nations, are the canaries in the coal mine of climate change impacts. While numerous factors are at play here, their coasts are eroded by storms that come more frequently and are more intense, floods threaten their homes and rising sea-levels lead to the salination of crops. Life is getting more difficult and more expensive and in the long run evacuation may be inevitable. The future of their inhabitants, statehood, and ancient cultures is uncertain.

Our energy choices are infringing on the full enjoyment of human rights in the Pacific, in Bangladesh, the Philippines, the Horn of Africa, and elsewhere. Those choices can be good or bad. We can choose between renewable energy or continue our unsustainable addiction to fossil fuels such as coal. We can choose either to destroy or to protect. Today, let's make the right choice.

Climate change has both direct and indirect implications for human rights. It has far-ranging impacts on the enjoyment of human rights – such as the right to life, adequate food, water, health, adequate housing, and even the right to self-determination.

In 2012, let's see the recognition of the right to a healthy environment in the Rio+20 outcome document. The efforts of the HRC should help shape and influence this positive development. The human rights implications of climate change and the impacts of climate change adaptation and mitigation activities must be further explored by the Human Rights Council through mechanisms, such as a special procedure.

To end on a positive note: We can turn the crisis of climate change into an opportunity. Climate change should bring humanity to its senses. We can use this challenge to break down the divisions between rich and poor nations, developed and developing, North and South. Since, we either come together as a global family and seriously work for an energy revolution away from dirty brown fossil fuels based

system to a clean, green, renewable energy system and secure all our children and grand children's futures. If we get it wrong, none of us will ultimately be secure. Most importantly, by moving in a direction of a clean energy future, we can generate millions of new decent jobs, reduce poverty and ultimately avert catastrophic climate change. Our children expect no less.

Greenpeace will continue to work with our NGO partners such as the Center for International Environmental Law, Earthjustice, FES, among others to encourage urgent action be taken by the Human Rights Council.

Climate Change is an urgent and cross-cutting issue that has severe implications for our human rights and requires cooperation and action right now by the people in this room.

- Thank you for your time.