Call for inputs: UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) analytical study and report on the promotion and the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change (HRC resolution 41/21)

**Background**

The United Nations is making history by protecting people with disabilities in the context of climate change, something that most states and non-state actors don’t take into consideration when designing their policies around climate change. When taking actions to address climate change, it is vital that governments consider those with disabilities. Climate change not only disproportionally affects minorities and those in developing counties, but it also severely effects those with disabilities. People with disabilities are disadvantaged socially, economically, and politically. Consequentially, those with disabilities already lack access to financial and natural resources, as well as access to information that allows them to adapt to climate change. In addition, people with disabilities often experience the health effects of climate change more severely than those without disabilities. They are more inclined to get ill from the invasive diseases that come with climate change from pre-existing conditions. People with disabilities are more likely to be neglected, abandoned and die during instances of mass migration and natural disasters. Women, youth and minority groups are now frequently talked about when it comes to shaping climate change policy, however people with disabilities are rarely included when it comes to climate change.

The UN’s resolution is a first and necessary step in including people with disabilities in the climate change discussion and ensuring that their human rights are met by the international community as the effects of climate change become more severe. [[1]](#footnote-1) The world is seeing a dramatic increase in the severity and amount of natural disasters due to climate change. In addition, drought and famine are becoming more globally prevalent. The United Nations and humanitarian groups are setting out to find efficient strategies to include those with disability in the context of climate change. However, many governments do not take minority populations into account when shaping their policy, especially those with disabilities. To make matters worse, many states deny climate change and therefore fail to make any steps to prevent it and shape their policy to adapt to it. This means that when disaster strikes from climate change, there is little policy structure in place to deal with it. Citizens are left to survive on their own without government assistance, and weak and marginalized members of society are the first to be left behind and die. It is not only essential for states to have a comprehensive plan of action in regard to disaster caused by climate change, but they also must include people with disabilities in this plan. This will allow the disabled to be evacuated in case of disaster, so they are not left behind and don’t develop illness.

It is essential that the international community, spearheaded by the United Nations, carries out more research on the impact of climate change on disabled people. Even though disabled people are often some of the poorest members in society and most susceptible to climate change related illness, there is little research on the effect of climate change on disabled people. The United Nations must initiate research on people with disabilities response to climate shocks and stresses, especially in developed countries. People with disabilities make up 15% of the world’s population and face discrimination that prevents them from gaining access to the same resources as the rest of the population.

The UNCRPD was ratified in 2008, with 172 countries signing on to the convention. However, there is no specific article of the convention that mentions people with disabilities in the context of climate change. However, there are articles that can be applied in this context. For example, article 11 focuses on people with disabilities in the context of humanitarian emergencies. It is important to recognize that the states that signed on to this convention are under the obligation to protect people with disabilities in humanitarian disasters. However, in many cases the international community intervenes in the case of natural disaster to support effected countries. This is why the United Nations believes that the entire international community must make an effort to ensure human rights responses are inclusive of those with disabilities[[2]](#footnote-2). Although it is a large step for the international community that this is included in the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with disabilities, it is vital that an article specifically mentions people with disabilities in the context of climate change. This is why the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies is pleased that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is preparing a resolution on human rights and climate change that will include people with disabilities.

1. Please describe the impacts of the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of persons with disabilities. Where possible, please share specific examples and stories.

Persons with disabilities are often the first to be left behind when climate change related disaster occurs. Because persons with disabilities are marginalized and often in lower-socio economic classes, they do not have the resources or ability to adapt to the effects of climate change as well as their counterparts without disabilities. As the effects of climate change become more prevalent, there will be an increased number of severe storms, heat waves, and instances of mass migration. Some people with disabilities are not as mobile, and therefore are left behind when populations are forced to migrate rapidly or long distances. Not only are they more likely to be left behind when climate change strikes, but many people with disabilities are also more susceptible to climate change related illness. Those with disabilities are the most vulnerable when it comes to climate change for the above reasons, however they are the least included in discussion related to climate change on both the national and international level.

From the perspective of the Amman Center of Human Rights Studies, the Middle East will face the worst effects of climate change. Temperatures are expected to increase across the region making living unbearable. Such prolonged heat waves will increase drought and famine and exacerbate armed conflict and civil unrest in an already heated region. That is why the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies, a Middle East based NGO, believes that it is important that the Arab world begins to take in to account people with disabilities when it comes to its climate change policy. We can use examples from past instances of mass-migration related to war in the region to prove that people with disabilities are the first to be left behind.

2.) Please describe any relevant commitments, legislation, policies and other measures that you have taken, in compliance with applicable international human rights law, in particular the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to promote an approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation that ensures the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of persons with disabilities. Please also note and identify any relevant mechanisms for ensuring accountability for these commitments including their means of implementation.

The Amman Center for Human Rights Studies has not taken specific actions to promote rights of people with disabilities in the context of climate change. However, ACHRS strives to work on this in the coming years, as the Middle East will be dramatically affected by climate change. As civil unrest and armed conflict escalate due to climate change, those with disabilities will be the most dramatically affected. The ACHRS hopes to work with the United Nations and relevant local NGOs to improve the situation for people with disabilities in the context of climate change. The Center is skilled at strengthening civil society in Jordan and across the Arab world. We put on a wide range of if seminars and lectures to inform Jordanians about their human rights. The Center’s most important lecture series is the Jordanian Institute for Women Leaders, which is a 12-month training course for women of promise in Jordan. The application process is competitive, and the women who are selected have the opportunity to learn skills that benefit them for the rest of their lives. The ACHRS also gives a variety of other lectures on human rights issues in the region. The most recent lecture the Center was one on abolishing the death penalty in Jordan. The Center’s lectures are well attended and play a large role in strengthening civil society in Jordan. The ACHRS would be able to hold similar events to make Jordanians aware of the crisis people with disabilities have when it comes to climate change related issues. Making people aware of the problem is the first step in order to ensure their rights. Too many people are unaware of the situation of people with disabilities in the context of climate change, and this is the first problem that stops them from achieving their rights. Strengthening civil society is the best way that to make changes in the Middle East.

1. Please share a summary of any relevant data that captures how the adverse effects of climate change have affected persons with disabilities, taking into account multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (i.e. discrimination based on a combination of multiple grounds, including disability, gender, race, colour, sex, language, religion, nationality and migration status).

It is recognized that certain factors contribute to inequality when it comes to climate change response, such as disability, gender, race, color, sex, language, religion, nationality and migration status. However, disability is too often lumped into the same category without taking into account the above factors that coincide with disability. There is little data published that takes in account the wide range of experiences that are associated with disability. In this section of the report, ACHRS will take into account gender and race.

Women are more vulnerable when it comes to effects of climate change, yet do not have the equal say in the decision-making process when it comes to policy making. Women are more likely to experience the negative effects of climate change compared to their male counterparts because they are often less educated, poorer and are not involved in the political decision-making process. Women possess fewer monetary assets, and therefore they depend more on natural resources to sustain them. This means when drought causes famine, women are the first to be negatively impacted. All of these factors are made worse for women with disabilities who are often even poorer and less likely to be educated. It is vital to invest in disabled women as part of the climate change response process and ensure that policy is made in a way that it adapts to women with disabilities. Another key to enhancing the rights of women with disabilities in the context of climate change is to mitigate poverty and empower such groups of women to achieve financial independence. It is also vital that disabled women are taking into account in budgets to finance climate change[[3]](#footnote-3).

Few studies outside of the United States have been done that take into account the perception of climate change based on race. Moreover, in this case, the United States will be used. Race not only shapes the perception of climate change, but also shapes who is included in climate change related disaster response. Those who are racial minorities have less access to financial resources, education and information. Therefore, they are less likely to be able to respond to climate change. Non-white minorities express higher concern in regard to climate change than their white counterparts. Minorities in the United States, especially Black and Latinos, are more likely to support national and international climate change policies. This can be attributed to the fact minority communities in the US or more negatively affected by climate change[[4]](#footnote-4). For example, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, minorities were hit the hardest, and were not included in the disaster response. This case is true for the global minority community-they are often the ones who are most effected by climate change, but the least likely to be accounted for when it comes to disaster response. Minorities with disabilities are at an even greater risk of not being included in disaster response, and therefore more likely to be left behind by their communities when disaster hits. If minority communities are left to fend for themselves, like in the case of Hurricane Katrina, they are less likely to remember to take into account those with disabilities during times of crisis.

1. Please describe mechanisms and tools that can be used to measure and monitor the impacts of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of persons with disabilities.

Few organizations collect statistical data on the state of human rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change. NGOs and States must take initiative to measure how people with disabilities are affected by natural disaster, drought, and famine. For example, it would be in good practice to collect data on how many disabled people are left behind when instances of mass migration related to natural disaster occur. Organizations can also measure how those with disabilities are negatively impacted by drought and famine more readily than their able-bodied counterparts due to lack of access to education, financial resources and access to information. For example, a local NGO could collect statistical data on the correlation between lack of access to information of disabled people and if and how this makes them unable to prepare for drought and famine. The United Nations must promote and fund this data collection at a local level. Having such data will allow the international community to better understand and respond to disabled people when disaster strikes by understanding the number of people they are helping and what circumstances those people are facing.

1. Please identify and share examples of good practices and challenges in the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of persons with disabilities in the context of the adverse effects of climate change. Please include examples that highlight multilateral cooperation and approaches that are implemented in close consultation with and with the active involvement of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.

It is vital that NGOs work to strengthen civil society so that people understand the rights of people with disabilities in the context of climate change and those with disabilities are able to understand their own rights. This is the first step in the process of initiating change in policy at a governmental level. It is crucial to make governments realize that people with disabilities are productive and important members of society. Those with disabilities must have the same access to education, job opportunities and information as their able-bodied counterparts in order to be able to respond to climate change appropriately. There are several steps governments can implement in their policies to ensure that people with disabilities receive fair treatment when it comes to climate change. It is important that people with disabilities have access to relief services and procedures. People with disabilities must be included in all stages of preparing for climate change related disasters and engaged and represented in major legislative and decision-making bodies. Awareness raising must be sponsored the governments and NGO’S so that people with disabilities can learn how to deal with natural disasters and stigmas surrounding people.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Please provide any additional information you believe would be useful to support climate action that promotes the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities.

It’s time for climate change to be recognized as a disability rights issue. Climate change is too often an afterthought when it comes to fighting for people with disabilities. Instead, the international community usually takes steps to ensure people with disabilities have access to healthcare, work, and are not discriminated against. Although these are factors that contribute to people with disabilities not being able to prepare for climate change adequately, it is important that the international community focuses directly on ensuring the rights of people with disabilities in the context of climate change. The United Nations must sponsor local NGOs in areas effected by climate change to provide training courses to people with disabilities and the general population so that civil society learns how to better protect people with disabilities when disaster strikes.

*Is it too late to help people with disabilities considering they are only being included in the climate change discussion now?*

Over 155,000 disabled people were affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which was one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the U.S. However, it took the United Nations Human Right Council almost 20 years after this natural disaster to even consider including people with disabilities in natural disaster discourse. Ironically, despite this hurricane affecting so many disabled people in the United States, President Trump decided to withdraw the United States from the UN Human Rights Council right before it agreed to add a resolution to include people with disabilities in the climate change discussion. The United States not being part of this movement sets a bad precedent for other countries, as the United States should take a proactive stance in spearheading these initiatives. This means that there is little hope for people with disabilities in the United States to be taken into account when it comes to climate change. However, the United States’ disregard for people with disabilities will encourage other countries to do the same[[6]](#footnote-6).

Because the ACHRS operated in the Middle East, it understands how dramatically climate change will impact this region in the future. The United States has a heavy hand in shaping the future of this region, especially the country where the Centre operates, Jordan. If the United States does not include people with disabilities in the climate change discussion, it is unlikely it will take into account people with disabilities in its Middle East foreign policy. This means that countries that rely on the United States for funding, like Jordan, will not receive any form of funding for people with disabilities. Jordan does not have the economic resources to take care of those with disabilities affected by climate change on its own. It is inevitable that as the effects of climate change become more stark, civil unrest and conflict will escalate in the Middle East and North Africa. Countries like Jordan will rely on the USAID for food assistance when the Middle East heat becomes intolerable and it is impossible to grow crops. However, in the instance of famine and mass migration in Jordan, the United States is unlikely to allocate funds to people with disabilities in Jordan as they are left behind. To make matters worse, the United States is not only denying the rights of people with disabilities, but also the climate change itself. After pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord, there is little hope that the United States will lead the world in reversing climate change. U.S. companies will continue to pollute the earth and make matter worse.



*Based on the current greenhouse emissions trends, the Middle East will be uninhabitable for humans by the year 2071[[7]](#footnote-7)*

1. Schulte, Cara, and Isaac Gazendam. “UN Climate Resolution Emphasizes Protection of Disability Rights.” *Human Rights Watch*, 15 July 2019, www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/15/un-climate-resolution-emphasizes-protection-disability-rights. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Smith , Fred, et al. *1 Disability and Climate Resilience A Literature Review*. UKAID, Apr. 2017**1**  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Overview of Linkages between Gender and Climate Change.” *Global Gender and Climate Alliance*, UNDP , 2012, UNDP.ORG. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Pearson, Adam R., et al. “Race, Class, Gender and Climate Change Communication.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*, 16 May 2018, oxfordre.com/climatescience/climatescience/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228620-e-412.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Smith , Fred, et al. *1 Disability and Climate Resilience A Literature Review*. UKAID, Apr. 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kim, Sarah. “Is It Too Late That The Impact Of Climate Change On People With Disabilities Is Getting Discussed Only Now?” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 13 Nov. 2019, www.forbes.com/sites/sarahkim/2019/11/13/climate-change-and-people-with-disabilities/#690036c81d83. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Thomson, Peter. “Climate Change May Soon Make Much of the Persian Gulf Region Too Hot for Humans.” *Public Radio International*, 27 Oct. 2015, www.pri.org/stories/2015-10-27/climate-change-may-soon-make-much-persian-gulf-region-too-hot-humans. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)