

Talk Clean and Sustainable Technology AP Forum

The Development of Clean and Sustainable Technology in the Context of Human Rights by Ian Fry

I want to thank the organisers of this meeting for inviting me to participate. I regret that I am unable to attend in person.

We are faced with a global crisis in the name of climate change. Throughout the world, human rights are being negatively impacted and violated as a consequence of climate change. For many millions, climate change constitutes a serious threat to the ability of present and future generations to enjoy the right to life.

The process of addressing climate change must ensure that all technology used in this fight is clean and sustainable. This includes both mitigation and adaptation technologies.

Any technology should be human rights-based, gender-responsive, age-sensitive, disability-inclusive and risk-informed.

In my work as Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change, I have heard many testimonies from civil society organisations and individuals expressing concern about the deployment of technologies, in the name of addressing climate change, that are not sustainable and have serious human rights implications.

Let me name just a few examples:

Electric vehicles are becoming more popular and the sourcing of minerals for used in batteries and electronics is having significant human right implications. The mining of lithium, gold and copper mining is having a significant environmental and social impact in many places.

In my region of the world, Pacific, people are concerned about deep seabed mining to extract minerals for these new e-technologies.

I have heard concerns about hydro-electric dams. They displace people from their land and cause downstream problems for people who survive on the right of access to freshwater. The Mekong River is a prime example of too many

dams, limiting access to freshwater. This affects downstream production of food and also affects the river ecology which is important for maintaining a sustainable environment. It is very evident that dams are affecting the right to food in many downstream locations along the Mekong.

Nuclear power is neither environmentally sound nor sustainable and yet it is promoted by some as a climate change mitigation technology. The Fukushima power plant meltdown is testimony to the problems with nuclear power. The people around the plant have lost their right to housing, clean water, and food. Now the Japanese government wants to dump contaminated water into the ocean. This is likely to affect the rights of many coastal and Pacific island people to their right to food.

I have heard testimonies from many Indigenous Peoples that reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) is another form of colonialism, with the right to use their land taken away from them. Furthermore, recent studies suggest that REDD+ accounting has shown that carbon offsetting is not an appropriate alternative to reducing emissions at source.

Many companies have claimed that they will reach Net Zero by 2050, but a recent study commissioned by the UN Secretary General found many of these claims are false. The issue is around the term Net. This implies offsetting and not emissions reductions.

We need to ensure that business is truly accountable for its actions.

All businesses and government enterprises should abide by the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Critically, we must give a voice to those most affected by inappropriate technology.

Stakeholder engagement in decision making is vitally important. We need to ensure that people have a choice in deciding on what mitigation and adaptation technologies are appropriate for their circumstances.

On the other side of the ledger, we must not forget those who need to transition justly from outdated fossil fuel technologies. We need to find pathways so that these workers, their families and their communities can find

meaningful work in new, clean and sustainable technologies. Nobody should be left behind.

We need to ensure that communities are able to choose the technologies that are appropriate for their survival, not technologies that will create greater hardships and human rights abuses.

This means we need new accountability mechanisms. We need to establish regional disclosure mechanisms whereby governments and corporations are compelled to disclose where they are investing their finances and what technologies they are investing. We need to find a reward system for those investing in clean and sustainable technologies. Tax breaks is clearly one of these.

Finally, we must protect those who stand up against the perpetrators of human rights abuses in the environment. Environmental rights defenders must be protected. In my report to the UN General Assembly I called for a special tribunal to prosecute those that act against environmental rights defenders, whether it be governments, industry or individuals.

I hope you will join me in pushing for this tribunal.

I wish you all the best with your forum.

Thank you