



Report

## Human Rights and Climate Change

### NGO information meeting on the coming Climate Change negotiations in Geneva and their relevance to human rights

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Earthjustice and the Geneva Office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) jointly held an NGO meeting to discuss human rights aspects in view of the negotiation process of the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP 21). The occasion was to exchange perspectives and inform about the upcoming meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP) from 8 – 13 February in Geneva. Common purpose of the participants is to accomplish an immediate link between human rights and climate change policies with respect to three dimensions: a) strengthening the link between human rights and climate change, b) accelerating urgent and ambitious mitigation and c) enhancing response measures to address climate change implications in a socially compatible way in line with human rights obligations.

Opening the meeting, Felix Kirchmeier (FES) and Yves Lador (Earthjustice) recalled the relevant dates of the ADP group prior to the COP 21 in Paris: the imminent event in Geneva from 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> February and the meetings on the negotiation of the final text to the Paris Climate Change Conference, held in Bonn as of November 2015. The speakers recalled the main points of the Human Rights Council (HRC) resolutions to climate change negotiations which depict the impact of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights, the need for effective international cooperation regarding the integration of human rights issues into climate change actions for instance as safeguards or criteria for policy evaluation, and the necessary protection of individuals against foreseeable human rights violations by climate-change

measures. Budi Tjahjono, as a representative of the Franciscans International, introduced the faith-based approach in the climate change debate which – from its ethic perspective – sees human rights and vulnerable groups as central concerns.

Further, the invited experts Sébastien Duyck (University of Lapland) and Alyssa Johl (Center for International Environmental Law, CIEL), explained the three central goals within this linkage between human rights and climate change measures, which the Paris agreement should comprise as integral components: The first is the strengthening of the existing link, established during COP 16 in Cancun. As second goal, urgent and ambitious mitigation action is aspired. Here, the further advancement and

sharing of renewable energy technologies is desired. The third goal deals with response actions to address the effects of climate change: Participation possibilities and safeguards for the creation and modification of sustainable and socially acceptable adaptation measures need to be established, as well as compensation possibilities for harm caused. These claims are approached by the integration of the central statement “Parties shall, in all climate related actions, respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights for all” into the Paris agreement.

The information meeting invited a subsequent discussion round which generated – among others things – several propositions for the future procedure. These comprised a more extensive contribution of specific research to the subject by NGO’s in order to have stronger leverage in the negotiations. As well, an involvement of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the portrayal of the climate change impacts was desired. This could account for a better understanding of the climate change impacts as a global problem which asks for a global solution. The UNHCR could help to illustrate the interrelation between the effects of climate change and the push factors for refugees. Furthermore, another strong resolution of the HRC were mentioned as contributing to the concern.

As well, possible expectations on the Conference of the Parties in Paris were discussed. Here it became apparent that an explicit commitment by the host nation, France, would be of particular importance for the promotion of the issue and could play a key role in the coordination process. A French recognition of the correlation between climate change and human rights would fit in their traditional history of the human rights proclamation. In the connection to probable partners to fostering the issues, the significant overlap with other stakeholders, such as indigenous peoples or trade unions and their interests in climate change policy have been emphasized. In addition to that, the NGOs count – in the first instance – on the support of the group of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs),

the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), many other Developing Countries and states of traditionally strong commitment to include human rights into the climate change debate. As a positive sign, an increasing interest of typical human rights actors and environmental actors in the debate has been registered. This can be seen as meaningful since the debate depicts a cross-cutting phenomenon of the two classic approaches of human rights and environment.

### On the author

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