Side event: Geoengineering and Human Rights

Human Rights Council, 54th session

Monday 18 September, 12-13 PM CEST | Palais des Nations, Room XXV, Geneva, Switzerland

"Geoengineering" refers to a set of large-scale technological interventions in the Earth's natural systems to counteract some of the effects of climate change. Proposed approaches usually fall under the category of solar radiation management (SRM) or carbon dioxide removal (CDR), targeting land-based, marine and atmospheric ecosystems. Many CDR approaches rely on carbon capture and storage (CCS) as an enabling technology. Such technologies are largely hypothetical for now, but some CDR approaches are being implemented at small scale and SRM proponents are rapidly moving into real world experiments.

All geoengineering technologies have the potential to undermine human rights and threaten procedural rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. While some geoengineering projects and experiments are planned or currently underway in Indigenous territories, they fail to integrate community consultation and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), which are essential to guarantee that the rights of the communities involved are protected. Also potentially affected peasants communities may not have been meaningfully informed and consulted.

A growing number of human rights experts have highlighted that geoengineering technologies have the potential to undermine fundamental human rights. The **Human Rights Council Advisory Committee** recently released its report on New Technologies intended for Climate Protection, which will be considered by the Human Rights Council on 28 September. The report clearly states that most geoengineering technologies remain unproven, unavailable and unfeasible at scale, pose threats to human rights, and cannot be considered viable mitigation or adaptation measures. The **UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights** also warned about such technologies in his latest report on The toxic impacts of some proposed climate change solutions, which will be presented to the Council on 19 September. The **Committee on the Rights of the Child**, in their latest General Comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change also stated that "*[m]itigation measures cannot rely on removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere in the future through unproven technologies*". The **UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment** had already warned that geoengineering technologies could have massive impacts on human rights and ecosystems.

Reliance on hypothetical and uncertain geoengineering is delaying the implementation of proven, near-term mitigation measures that are more likely to avoid catastrophic levels of warming. The IPCC has also consistently warned of geoengineering's risks to people and ecosystems, which remain poorly understood. These risks would not only put present generations in danger, but threaten the human rights enjoyment of future generations. The risks around researching SRM for potential deployment are so high that over 250 scientists are calling for a "solar geoengineering non-use agreement".

This side event will look at the human rights implications and risks of geoengineering interventions. Speakers will discuss how human rights institutions are addressing this issue, and more in general the role of human rights mechanisms in furthering the geoengineering discussion.

Speakers:

- **Patrycja Sasnal, Human Rights Council Advisory Committee**
- **Marcos Orellana, Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights**
- **Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh, Blue Ocean Law and University of Amsterdam**
- **Kevin Surprise, Mount Holyoke College**
- **Ghazali Ohorella, Alifuru Council**
- **Francesca Mingrone, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)**

Moderator: Ana María Suarez Franco, FIAN International