
Climate change: A gross violation of human rights

What is elegantly termed as “climate change” is in reality one of the most gross violations of human rights ever committed in history. It is a crime to Humanity as a whole.

People are already dying, or becoming homeless, or suffering from hunger and malnutrition as a result of changes in weather patterns. Entire countries –particularly small island states- are witnessing the impacts of rising sea levels that may make them disappear underwater in few years' time. People living in lowland areas close to the oceans are facing the same threat. Communities living in mountain areas are witnessing the melting of the ice and snow that ensures their water supply and productive activities throughout the year.

Climate change is not just “happening”; it is the result of a socially unjust and environmentally destructive economic model imposed by a corporate-led minority on the entire planet. Climate change is a crime being committed by an extremely powerful group of corporations in alliance with also very powerful governments that provide them with impunity.

What makes the issue more dramatic is that even if those responsible would agree to immediately adopt the necessary measures to avoid further climate change, the basic human rights of millions of people will continue being violated as a result of the already changed weather patterns. To name but a few:

- The right to food and water: the increased occurrence of catastrophic droughts, floods and extreme temperatures will destroy people's agricultural production and limit access to sufficient and clean drinking water.
- The right to health: malnourishment, heat waves, extreme cold, new illnesses related to environmental change, will impact on people's health, in many cases leading to death.
- The right to live in your own homeland: millions of people will be pushed away from their homelands by climate-related impacts, and will become environmental refugees.
- The right to life: the increasing occurrence of catastrophic climate events such as cyclones, hurricanes, tornados and floods will result in millions of deaths.
- The right to peace: desperate situations resulting from climate change will result in civil strife, repression and even war.

Within the many millions of people whose rights will be violated as a result of climate change, most of the suffering will be borne by those who lack the resources to protect themselves against climate-related events. Although the majority of these live in the South, the impacts will disproportionately affect vulnerable groups in every single country of the world.

Instead of changing course to avoid further increasing climate change and its related human

suffering, the climate criminals are promoting “solutions” that will violate the rights of many more people while at the same time enabling them to continue business –and climate destruction- as usual. The following examples can illustrate this:

- Promotion of agrofuels as a substitute to fossil fuels. This “solution” implies the appropriation of vast areas of forest and agricultural lands to dedicate them to sugar cane, soya, oil palm, jatropha, eucalyptus and other crops for producing agrodiesel and ethanol to be used as fuels. As a result, a number of human rights are violated, such as the right to food, water, health, medicines, biodiversity, territory, culture.
- Promotion of hydropower as a substitute to fossil fuels. This approach results in the building of large hydroelectric dams that flood extensive areas of forests and agricultural lands and that impact heavily on fish populations. Local people not only lose their means of livelihoods but are also forced to migrate as their lands become submerged under the dams’ reservoirs. Thus those rights -to livelihoods and to live in their territories- are violated, together with a larger number of basic human rights.
- Promotion of carbon reservoirs and carbon sinks for trapping carbon dioxide emitted from fossil fuels. This means either the takeover of peoples’ forests –defined as carbon reservoirs that need to be preserved- or the appropriation of their lands for planting trees to act as so-called carbon sinks. Needless to say that the result is the violation of a large number of human rights.

Everything expressed above gives only a very partial picture of climate-related violation of human rights. The full picture is far worse and can become even more dramatic if climate criminals are allowed to continue to destroy the Earth’s climate. This is not a matter that can be left in the hands of “experts”, many of which have been and continue being accomplices of those responsible for the crime.

In this context, women have an important role to play. Although it is true that women are the most affected by climate change, it is equally true that they are also key catalysts for positive change. Their knowledge and experience is fundamental for a successful mitigation of climate change, as well as for climate change adaptation.

What is at stake is nothing less than the right of this and future generations to a livable planet. This very basic human right –on which many other rights depend on- needs to be imposed by organized peoples –women and men- worldwide.

Climate needs to be taken back into peoples’ hands before it is too late.