

Creating a future for all: climate Justice and Peacebuilding

Geneva Peace Week

6 November

Summary of event

As the disastrous consequences of climate change become increasingly apparent worldwide, it is important to address the way vulnerable groups are particularly impacted. During Geneva Peace Week, the Environmental Committee of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, with support from the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), gave voice to experts on climate justice, vulnerable populations and decision makers working to include climate justice concerns in national and international policies through the event "*Creating a Future for All: Climate Justice and Peacebuilding*".

Paloma Noriega, a student at the Graduate Institute of Geneva and moderator of the event, highlighted how climate change is a threat-multiplier in many situations around the world. Noriega continued to weave together the presentations shared by the other panelists, and stressed particular moments of impact.

Lindsey Fielder Cook, QUNO Representative for Climate Change, explained the layers of injustice that occur when we do not act sufficiently to transform the root causes of climate change. She highlighted the disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities, for example those in countries recovering from the scars of colonialism and slavery, indigenous peoples, and women. The plights of future generations and the rights of nature itself must be understood as those impacted by climate change. Although hopeful about possible change, Lindsey pointed out that with our current rate of greenhouse gas emissions, we are on track for a 4.8 degree Celsius warming by 2100. Rapid climate action is essential and well grounded in rights-based approaches, will lead to more legitimate, coherent and sustainable climate policy supported by citizens. Rights-based climate action act as a peacebuilding approach, helping to reduce tensions increased over natural resource stress due to rising temperatures. Lindsey shared different rights-based approaches, which include just economic transitions, intergenerational equity, food security, the displacement and peacebuilding link, rights of Indigenous Peoples and other human rights, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, and the need to include the gendered realities of climate change. Lindsey in particular highlighted public participation as an essential form of rights-based approaches for climate change as it ensures community involvement and can contribute significantly to peace-building.

Nahla Haidar emphasized the particular impacts women and girls face that leave them more vulnerable to climate change impacts. Haidar highlighted that climate change is exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities, which often intersect with other lived experiences that are at a greater risk of climate change impacts, such as indigeneity, race, and class. Environmental and human rights defenders are also increasingly persecuted, with recent spikes in criminalization and murder. Important to stress, Haidar shared, is that these intersecting vulnerabilities are constructed rather than innate due to historical and contemporary distributions of power and resources.

To illustrate these conceptual and policy conversations surrounding peacebuilding, climate change, and gender, Silja Halle provided a summary of her work with a pilot project in Al-Rahad in southern

Sudan. This community is vulnerable due to droughts, land use policies, and conflict, and is exactly the type of place where climate change acts as a threat-multiplier. These situations create social shifts, and in the case of Al-Rahad, this resulted in the feminization of the community as the seasonal migration of men became longer and more often permanent, and pastoral groups split, with women and children becoming sedentary. The project was successful in empowering women in local governance and bolstering economic self-sufficiency. Halle explains this was the case as different organizations worked together and the project ensured meaningful participation of local communities, adding legitimacy and effectiveness to the project. Breaking down silos and empowering local marginalized communities were the key-takeaways.

Didier Georges spoke last and started by raising his hand and pleading not guilty. He explained that all the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) combined were responsible for 0.03%, and that climate justice must consider where this lack of culpability falls, especially as SIDS are some of the hardest-hit countries already. This is compounded by the confusion of what States like Haiti are supposed to do, as their climate actions are not the ones that would impact the current global crisis most. Georges also explained that within the international interconnected world, climate impacts ripple in unexpected ways. Georges provided two examples. Firstly, in 2008 there was major global crop failure, an event more likely to occur in the future under all current emission scenarios. SIDS import most of their food, and thus food prices rose. This led to civil unrest and riots, and thus political instability. The second example was that after Hurricane Matthew wiped out 100% of Haiti's GDP in 2016, over a 100,000 Haitians fled to Chile. In response, the previous Chilean open-border policies were changed to more hostile ones, denying Haitians the right to seek refuge from disasters and creating further international isolation and xenophobia. These examples illustrate climate change and peace building as interlinked and global.

The panelists were;

-Ms. Nahla Haidar, Member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

-Ms. Lindsey Fielder Cook, Representative on Climate Change, Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO)

-Ms. Silja Halle, Programme Manager, Joint UN Environment, UNDP, UN Women and Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) Programme on Promoting Gender-Responsive Approaches to Natural Resource Management for Peacebuilding

-Mr. Didier Georges, Diplomat at the Permanent Mission of Haiti in Geneva

**Lindsey Fielder Cook (Programme Representative Human Impacts of Climate Change, QUNO)
Full Remarks**

As Paloma asked me to go first, I want to use this time to help frame an understanding of climate justice, of peacebuilding, and how we experience their relationship.

For many of you in this room, these terms may be clear, but I have come to learn not to make assumptions. And the framing I offer is only a grounding. Our speakers today will share specific examples of how these relate to their experiences, and then we open this discussion to engage your experiences.

The term 'climate justice' speaks to our human family in different ways. For me, at core, climate justice is grounded in our current generations having the information of what is happening, and why, but not acting sufficiently to transform those activities in time to avoid great suffering. This creates layers of injustice to those most effected and least responsible for the consequences of climate change. These communities can include:

- The poorest countries, whose fragile ability to feed their populations are the most vulnerable to disruptive climates;
- The poorest people in all countries, who have the least physical and economic shelter to cope with loss;
- The marginalized in our societies - children, women, disabled, poorer minorities and Indigenous communities.
- The island States whose face losing some if not all of their land, and already cope with hurricanes intensified by rising temperatures;
- Developing countries as a whole, which did not get a chance to strengthen their economies as developed countries have, still holding the scars of colonization or slavery;
- The youth, and future generations;
- And nature, unable to adapt so quickly to rates of warming, of ocean acidification and deoxygenation, of land use change, chemical pollution, freshwater loss, and species extinction all at rates unprecedented in our human history.

On a remarkable side, we are seeing an extraordinary awakening to climate change, to our human impact on this planet. It is not fast enough, but the journey has begun. We are all living in a profound moment in history. What we do now will determine how humanity will and can live in the future.

We are on track for a global mean temperature rise by 2100 of +4.8 C above preindustrial levels. And this DOES NOT HAVE TO HAPPEN.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, concluded that with rapid action and transformation of energy, infrastructure building, land use and diet, temperature rise could be stabilized at 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. This difference, as one climate scientist said dryly, between the 'manageable and the unmanageable'.

It would avoid the collapse of human civilization as we know it. This is a great call for climate justice, a moral call to conscience for all us, in our lives as personal witness, in our engagement with our communities and our decision makers.

Yet how does Climate Justice connect with Peacebuilding? It connects remarkably, and is also part of a fair and just transformation from the root causes driving climate change.

Let us start, though, with conflict.

Conflict is not in itself negative. Conflict becomes destructive when root causes are not addressed.

And it is important to avoid the assumption that 'climate change=war'.

The more realistic equation would view climate change a 'threat multiplier' of existing tensions, adding great stress to natural resources on which communities depend.

Preventing destructive conflict over natural resource stress, can be understood as a process of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding that helps create the personal and institutional capacities needed to handle conflict constructively, to address the root causes that lead to destructive conflict such as inequality and marginalization.

We are seeing three elements that we consider critical to peacebuilding, to avoiding violent conflict.

1. **Rapid reduction of GHG emissions:**
2. **Strong institutions:**
3. **Rights-based approaches:**

(NEW SLIDE) So what are rights-based approaches to climate action, and what do they have to do with climate justice and peacebuilding?

Rights-based approaches could be renamed as 'climate action as if people mattered'. They help people be effectively and fairly part of the journey to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to do so in a just way – a climate justice way.

The different colors represent different ways of 'rights-based approaches' They INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO (READ OUT)

Rights-based climate action, to quote the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and the Environment, promotes policy coherence, legitimacy and sustainable outcomes. Meaning, if it involves people fairly, respects and protects their human rights, and helps them adapt to climate change, then the people will support the climate action, in turn that action is more effective in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Take public participation as an example, in the light blue.

Public education and public participation are key to Principle 10 of the 1992 Rio Declaration. They are central to Article 6 of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the core of Article 12 of the Paris Agreement. It is central to the Aarhus Convention and the Escazu Agreement in Latin America,

Bring this to present day situation. The French government announces a petrol tax to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Ordinary citizens are told to carry the burden of climate action. They revolt, and we have months of street protests.

Now RESET the channel. The French government announces a carbon tax at extraction. It will tax oil companies which drill and profit from oil. The government will use tax revenue to support the poorest facing petrol price rises. Will the people revolt on the streets, or will they consider this a fair approach, where those most accountable accept their responsibility?

The IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5C included the following statement: *Civil society is to a great extent the only reliable motor for driving institutions to change at the pace required.*¹

Climate justice and peacebuilding are essential for a chance to stabilize rising temperatures and avoid great suffering.

Thank you

¹ IPCC – SR1.5C, chapter 4, 4.4.1p. 352, https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/SR15_Chapter4_Low_Res.pdf