

Climate Change and Human Rights

Joint Stakeholder Summary Report



Submitted for the 36th Session of the
Universal Periodic Review



UNA ★ USA

Southern New York State Division



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Chapter

UN Universal Periodic Review: Third Cycle Joint Stakeholder Report Summary: United States of America “Climate Change and Human Rights”

The United Nations Association — Southern New York State Division (UNA-SNY) is dedicated to building a strong network of global citizens in support of the United Nations. The United Nations Association of the University of Hawai'i Manoa Chapter (UNA-University of Hawai'i Manoa Chapter) with support from UNA-Hawaii has the motto of “Uniting the World Through Aloha.” UNA-Southern New York State Division and the UNA-University of Hawai'i Manoa Chapter held consultations to address the impact of climate change on human rights. Topics covered included: an overview of climate change's impact on human rights; fossil fuels; the need for science-based policies; community empowerment; and Agriculture.

The consultations took as guiding principles the findings of the 5th Assessment Report (2014) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). We also integrated discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on Goal 13, which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

In 2012, the UN Human Rights Council voted to establish a Special Rapporteur to study human rights and the environment. The U.S. joined the consensus on these resolutions as a member of the UN Human Rights Council. The U.S. ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992). During its second UPR the U.S. accepted two recommendations calling for the country to uphold the rights of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities; to protect traditionally owned lands and resources against environmental degradation; and to consult indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities on matters of issues to their communities. The 2015 U.S. National UPR Report states “The United States is firmly committed to addressing the causes and impacts of climate change.”

Overview: U.S. Policies and the Impact of Climate Change on Human Rights

On the first day of the Trump Administration, the White House website announced that President Donald Trump's predecessor's Climate Action Plan would be eliminated, stating it was “harmful and unnecessary.” According to an August 2019 update from the New York Times, 84 environmental rules have been “rolled-back” by the Trump Administration. These include roll-backs completed, or in process, regarding air pollution and emissions; drilling and extraction; infrastructure and planning; animals; toxic substances and safety; water pollution; and others.

However, in August 2019, a coalition of Attorneys General from 22 states, six cities, and the District of Columbia – led by the Attorney General of New York – filed suit that the new regulation is inadequate. Supporters and detractors in Congress and civil society are currently debating the potential creation and adoption of a “Green New Deal.”

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For full report please visit: http://bit.ly/UNA_UPR-Climate

Timothy C. Weiskel, a noted professor, author and environmentalist who delivered the keynote address at the UNA-Southern New York State Division consultation, declared, “The crisis of climate change represents the most daunting problem the human community has ever faced in the course of its history as a species on Earth.” Participants in consultations recognized the need to acknowledge and promote state and local level leadership on combating climate change. New York City is part of a network of cities pursuing climate action through the “Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy” that aims to uphold the Paris Agreement. Global equity considerations for indigenous peoples, women and the poor are included.

There is also urgency in rolling back infrastructure development that is reliant on fossil fuels. This includes extraction, pipelines, refineries, and mines implicated in harming human health, agriculture and water systems that contribute to the rise of sea levels. Moreover. The bar for legislation regarding issues related to climate change should rest on accuracy and impartiality. Policymakers also need to acknowledge that GHG emissions produced in the U.S. have impacts on human rights elsewhere in the world. Finally, current federal jurisdiction over interstate pipeline permits, the construction of power plants and other energy infrastructure can effectively overrule the concerns of frontline communities. In many cases, these populations are already contending with the health impacts of these actions.

There is urgency to shift agricultural subsidies to sustainable agriculture practices, including no-till farming, which allows carbon storage in soils, improves the ability of soil to absorb and retain water, promotes microbial soil life to support healthier root systems, and improves crop productivity. Worldwide, dietary habits have shifted toward heavy consumption of meat and other animal products to such a degree that it’s severely impacting the environment. People’s diets increasingly rely on more processed foods, refined sugars, and “land intensive agricultural” products like beef.

“Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of the present and future generations of humankind.”

- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Recommendations to the U.S.:

- Re-enter the Paris Climate Agreement immediately;
- Consider climate change a national emergency by mobilizing all levels of government to build substantive partnerships with civil society, the private sector, and other actors;
- Create a definition of a “climate refugee” and establish legal frameworks for supporting those displaced by climate change internationally and domestically;
- Invest in clean public transportation within cities and suburbs, as well as high-speed rail to connect cities and regions;
- Support efforts that enable the freedom of expression and assembly of local communities to respond to construction of energy infrastructure projects that endanger public health, jeopardize public safety, and contribute to climate change; and
- Promote awareness of the health and environmental benefits of reducing meat consumption and adopting a plant-based diet.