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Panel

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Climate change, poverty and migration
Human rights challenges to the UN human rights system

Ban Ki Moon; Secretary General, United Nations

Amid the diverse social and political causes, the Darfur conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising at least in part from climate change.

Mary Robinson

Climate change will, in short, have immense human consequences. Mass migration and conflicts will result. Climate change is about suffering. Human rights are relevant because climate change causes human rights violations. We have to think how international Human Rights law can help.

(paraphrasing her foreword to the International Council on Human Rights Policy: 2008)

Introductory Remarks

Although land degradation has been as old as agriculture, and climate has always been unstable, climate-related insurance losses have grown seven-fold in the last decade. Some of the issues dealing today with climate change, have been already addressed – though in a different language (e.g. globalisation) – in the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm 1972. Now, global warming is emerging as a tipping point.

Climate change is meanwhile recognised as a major factor in driving whole populations to leave their homes in order to search of food, work and a way out of poverty. Negative effects of climate change are already obvious:

- productive farmlands turn into desert due to prolonged drought,
- shifting animal migration routes – e.g. in the Arctic,
- increased fires in tropical rainforests and reductions in rainfall in temperate ecosystems,
- rising sea-levels and the accelerated erosion of coastal zones, submerging entire territories
- increasing intensity of natural disasters,

with impacts e.g. on threatening food and water security, or traditional health care as well as displacement of people becoming internally displaced persons or even stateless in cases where the territory of the State will cease to exist.

The effects as such of climate change are not only restricted to the developing countries. Desertification is growing in the USA and Australia too, not just in the Sahel zone. A one-meter sea-level rise would affect Britain, Denmark or the Netherlands, not just the deltas of Mekong, Ganges or Brahmaputra, the Pacific Islands or Bangladesh. But it is also true that

some environments and peoples are more exposed to climate change and are significantly more vulnerable to its impacts and long-term consequences. The poorest regions are most likely to suffer because they are least able to adjust to new conditions.

How do people and local communities perceive the changes?

Early impacts

COP 13 / Climate Summit / Bali / Indonesia, 2007

Rusdi, a peasant from Sumatra stated: *„In former times we could estimate, when rain was going to fall. In former times we knew, where are the sources for good water. Today, everything has changed. No more forest, no more water.“*

In a similar way, Jane Naini Meriwas, from Kenya, stated during a conference in Copenhagen organised by the NGO IWGIA in February 2008, that the environmental situation is quite alarming for the pastoralist community in that region. Traditionally, the pastoralists move with the livestock. If it will be a long drought, they use a traditional set-up where they select places where animals can graze, and other places that they will protect. In the year 2000, for a whole year there was no rain. The drought forced the community to migrate. Since 2001 the rain pattern has changed completely, and in addition, the lands that are actually left for the mentioned land management have become very limited.

The same story was reported from the nomadic Turkana people of North-West Kenya who were forced by severe droughts into towns and relief camps. According to their testimonies, droughts are becoming more intense and more frequent, which lead to crop failure, scarcity of pasture, livestock deaths and conflicts over scarce resources, which destroy traditional livelihoods, cause economic losses and make local people dependent on emergency relief food and supply of water. Other areas are affected by increased and unpredictable precipitation leading to flooding, which also undermines food security, increases vulnerability and poverty.

Merlin Koonooka, from Gambell / Alaska, stated during a meeting on Climate Change within the Convention on Biological Diversity meeting, held in Helsinki 26 March 2008, that his community used to hunt walrus and bowhead whale along leads in the ice in spring time. But the ice now became different. Its temperature now is higher what makes hunting difficult and dangerous to get across and to the open water. Even the game does not like to stay on this ice.

On 18 April 2008, the Office of the Governor of Pohnpei, one of the four federated states of Micronesia, declared municipalities in its outer islands to be in a state of emergency due to saltwater incursion of taro fields. The declaration says that the sources of food and livelihood of the people from these outer municipalities are threatened by the global warming that has resulted in unprecedented incursion of seawater into the agricultural lands; whereas the seawater incursion has resulted in the decline of agricultural production which in turn poses serious risks to the sustenance and health conditions of the people.

In the Himalayan region and in the high Andean zones, glaciers are melting due to an increase in temperatures, which affects agriculture and the natural resources of the local people. Small islands in the Pacific or Caribbean Sea are in danger of being submerged by rising sea levels

as a result of global warming, melting the planet's ice caps. Among the potentially threatened are Tuvalu, Nauru, Kiribati, Salomon Islands, Maldives or the Bahamas.

Already during the Climate Summit in Montreal 2005 (COP 11), Sheila Watt-Cloutier, President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), presented a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights seeking relief from violations of Inuit human rights by global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference urges the Commission to recommend that the United States of America adopt mandatory limits to its emissions of greenhouse gases and cooperate with the global community of nations to "prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system," [the objective of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change]. The petition also requests the Commission to declare that the United States take into account the impact of its emission on the Arctic before approving major government actions.

Are these singular cases or what is the prognosis?

The report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of 2007 states, that farmers in warmer and drier conditions in the Sahel region have already curtailed their cropping seasons. Yields from rain-fed agriculture are expected to fall as much as 50 percent in some African countries. Fisheries production will likely also decline, according to the report. In the region's drier areas, climate change is expected to lead to increases in the saline content of the soil, which reduces crop productivity. In this context, Latin America could also see greater desertification. Higher temperatures and humidity means that water related- and vector borne diseases like malaria may develop in new areas.

In relation to Asia, a report from Oxfam and 35 further NGOs of 2007, forecasts that climate change is going to severely affect the economical development in the Asian region if the average level of temperature increases only by one degree Celsius:

- the paddy harvest would decline with 10 %, wheat would decline with approx. 30 % till the year 2050;
- India would suffer large submergence as well as droughts reducing the entire production of food by 30 %;
- the People's Republic of China would lose about 40 % of its current production of wheat, rice and sweet corn due to increasing droughts;
- the extension of biofuel production would accelerate the deforestation rate and, thus, contribute to a further global warming.

Preliminary Conclusions

Climate Change and Poverty

In terms of poverty, climate change is an all encompassing, global threat to livelihood, access to resources (water, food, energy generating), food security, and health. Climate change acts as a multiplier, intensifying already existing threats and induces further impoverishment up to extreme poverty. More vulnerable segments of the population – e.g. minorities and indigenous peoples – will be hit hardest, as in large parts, they inhabit economically and politically marginal areas in fragile ecosystems in countries likely to be worst affected by climate change. They are more vulnerable to environmental degradation and

climate change and run a higher risk of entering into a vicious circle of devastating environment, economic marginalisation and social exclusion, followed by an erosion of social and cultural life, human rights violations and discrimination. Climate change contributes substantially to social unrest, violent conflicts on resources and territories, lastly endangering peace and security.

Climate Change and Migration

Migration is one of many survival strategies when livelihood options are exhausted. Such options are food reserves, seeking local non-farm employment, selling livestock, borrowing food, or selling household and farm equipment. Nomads move with the seasons and keeping a certain balance with the natural resources. Now, the access to these natural resources is altered in terms of devastation and limitation. Climate change will potentially threaten social cohesion, leading to conflicts, social unrest, ethnic or religious tensions and radicalisation; particularly where vulnerability and weak governance overlap. Often, people under such conditions migrate on a large-scale to a new area, ending up e.g. to settle in urban slums around Mega-Cities.

Various reports show a direct link between climate change - impoverishment of the local population - followed by migration; having as side effects e.g. human trafficking. The decline of productive agricultural land forces rural residents to migrate in search of work. In Burkina Faso, residents of dry, rural areas are likely to migrate to rural regions with greater rainfall. In the Pacific, local people are being displaced from their lands due to coastal and land erosion caused by large storm-driven waves. Dislocation is a reality in Samoa and Vanuatu, where flooding from extreme weather and rising sea levels have become the norm and, thus, have serious implications for the people residing in this region. So, climate change threatens the very existence and makes climate change an issue of undermining a broad range of human rights (to name only the most obvious ones):

- the right to life;
- right to health;
- right to food, water, shelter and property;
- rights associated with livelihood and culture;
- the right to education;
- the right to work,
- rights on migration and resettlement;
- rights to personal security in the event of conflict;
- the right to have access to justice and redress to courts;
- the right to freedom from arbitrary detention;
- the right of association and assembly.

What to do?

Obviously, to deal with climate change, several dimensions in politics, economy, social and cultural issues as well as in law need to be addressed. At the political level, climate proofing of all development policies is an urgent and increasing need. Development efforts and programs to reduce poverty will lessen livelihood vulnerability, ultimately reducing the need for families to migrate because of climate change. There are also ethical dimensions.

Residents of less industrialized countries have historically contributed little to climate change

but are going to suffer disproportionately from the effects. In addition, a new paradigm for development is required as transforming developing countries into developed countries under the same concept of development would need three times the capacity of the world's resources to satisfy the demand for consumption. So, solidarity is required, e.g. to transfer knowledge and technology on generating energy based on renewable resources.

Nevertheless, my intention at that stage has not been, to elaborate a comprehensive strategy on halting further climate change, but to identify major problems within this context in terms of human rights. Even more specific: The question is, how far the HRC Social Forum can provide discussion and proposals in order to address and to protect the victims of this increasing problem.

Recommendations

From the viewpoint of a grass roots approach, a major problem seems the lack of involvement of local people in decision making processes as well as on the design and implementation of initiatives to address climate change at the national, regional and international level.

- The Social Forum should promote participation of the local people / victims on the deliberations on human rights issues relating to climate change, poverty, migration. The Social Forum might establish a series of meetings to further elaborate together with local people from the regions on issue as:
 - to ensure that climate change policies and programmes are in full conformity with and promote the implementation of international human rights standards,
 - address legal and institutional barriers that prevent local people from coping with climate change impacts;
 - develop mechanisms to ensure that information on planned and current mitigation and adaptation schemes is made available to local people;
 - engage in constructive dialogue with civil society partners.

The Organisation of American States has just approved Resolution 2429 on Human Rights and Climate Change in the Americas. The resolution calls on the various development and human rights agencies of the hemisphere in order to help States understand the adverse effects of climate change on the most vulnerable populations of the region.

- The Social Forum might continue with studies as of Françoise Hampson *The human rights situation of indigenous peoples in States and other territories threatened with extinction for environmental reasons*. (UN-Document E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/CRP.1 and E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/28) and also considering the outcome of OHCHR's study on climate change mandated by the HRC in March 2008 and to be presented in March 2009.
- The Social Forum might continue with deliberations on the issue of environmental refugees as the former Special Rapporteur on Food, Jean Ziegler, has started with.
- The Social Forum might debate mutually reinforcing obligations, with ICESCR and the International Convention on Migrant Workers as reference points.

Finally, States have a special responsibility to monitor and, where necessary, regulate the behaviour of private entities within their purview, including those operating abroad. This is especially important in the case of climate change, where the causes are generally found in private acts. Referring to yesterday's discussion on Transnational Companies,

- the Social Forum should discuss and develop an international monitoring mechanism in order to address the human rights based conduct of private enterprises.

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