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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Joint written statement* submitted by New Humanity, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status, Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, American Association of Jurists, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development - VIDES, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco, Teresian Association, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 June 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Climate Change: it is happening here, it is happening now. Fighting climate change through international solidarity

Climate change is undoubtedly one of the greatest global challenges threatening, with its devastating impact, the environment and the future perpetuation of humankind. For this reason, States and international community as a whole are required to give an urgent and immediate response, reflecting the spirit of a new international solidarity.

The Independent Expert on Human Rights and International Solidarity, Mr Obiora C. Okafor, in his vision-setting report decided to include climate change among the thematic priorities to focus on, during his mandate.¹ Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23) and the co-signing NGOs agree with the choice of the Independent Expert, affirming that international solidarity and climate change are strictly interrelated.

First of all, it is necessary to consider how the crosscutting effects of this phenomenon interfere, both directly and indirectly, with the human and social dimension. Indeed, as it is widely recognized, climate change is reshaping the map of liveable areas worldwide: rising sea levels, higher surface temperature, and disruptions in water cycles are making crop-killing droughts and flooding rains more common, and human survival more difficult. Not all regions of the world are equally affected by extreme weather conditions. Coastal areas and some of the world's poorest regions, including large parts of Central and Southwest Asia, the Horn of Africa, Central America or North Africa, are especially vulnerable. Notwithstanding, exposure to adverse climatic events is expected to increase worldwide in the future.

As a result, the adverse impact of climate change includes implications for the effective enjoyment of a wide range of fundamental freedoms and human rights, such as, *inter alia*, the right to life, the right to adequate food, the right to safe drinking water, the right to adequate housing and the right to health. It poses serious threats to the enjoyment of both the right to self-determination and the right to development, exacerbating the existing inequalities among countries and the vulnerabilities of communities and groups, especially children, women, persons with disabilities and indigenous people. Another matter of concern regards the irreversible impact of environmental degradation on the cultural heritage and the intangible traditional knowledge of some populations. Moreover, given its economic, social, political and financial consequences, some studies suggest that climate change could lead to a high risk of violent conflicts in the future.

One of the most dramatic effects of this phenomenon concerns human mobility. Although the movements within and across national borders have a complex and multicausal nature, there is a clear link between climate change-related effects, environmental disasters and the increasing phenomena of displacement and migration. At this concern, international migration is also considered a viable adaptation strategy to national displacement. These aspects pose questions about the difficulties in defining the climate change-induced migrants and the need of formally recognizing their legal status, in order to guarantee the full respect and protection of their human rights.

In order to find and implement effective measures countering the effects of climate change, a multilateral approach is needed. Acknowledging their interdependence, States should adopt a global perspective instead of persevering in unilateral actions. Indeed, given the undeniable interrelatedness between human rights and environment, national governments should inform their decision to human rights standards and principles, developing coherent and long-term policies aiming to address the crosscutting challenges. Regional and national institutions should multiply their efforts to implement strategies to minimize the vulnerability to environmental risks, boost resilience and coping capacity. As Mr Okafor stated, "collective problems [...] require collective solutions".² A new model of global

¹ Report of the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity- Okafor (2018) A/HRC/38/40.

² *Ibid.*

partnerships and the widest international cooperation by all countries are essential to address properly this critical issue. Nevertheless, it is not enough. Echoing the words of the Independent Expert on Human Rights and International Solidarity, we believe that a more comprehensive and “human right-based international solidarity” is imperative to overcome the challenges presented by climate change.

Rather than reducing their action to the mere intervention in case of emergencies, States should develop collective strategies and initiatives in the spirit of a preventive solidarity.³ In accordance with this holistic perspective, their action should also be inspired by the notions of “intergenerational equity and justice”,⁴ necessary to guarantee the future of our planet and the perpetuation of humankind.⁵ As Pope Francis affirmed in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, climate is a “common good” which extends to future generations. For this reason, “we can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity”.⁶

Furthermore, given the unequal burden of climate change and the disproportionate impact on the poorest regions of the world, States should protect environment and climate system according to their common but differentiated responsibilities, complying in good faith to their extraterritorial obligations and refraining from violating human rights through trans boundary environmental harm. For this reason, environmental policies should take into account the respective capabilities and socio-economic conditions of States, as well as their historical responsibilities. The specific needs of developing countries should be given consideration, especially in relation to the creation of a climate finance framework. From our point of view, the adoption of a human rights-based approach, in accordance with the proposed “Draft Declaration on the Right to International Solidarity”,⁷ is essential to reshape the political, financial and commercial relations among States. Indeed, on the one hand it would encourage the correction of the existing imbalances. On the other hand, it would guarantee the full respect and implementation of international agreements, making the so-called “big polluters” be accountable for their violations and for their contribution to the environmental crisis.

In this perspective, the collective struggle should be inspired by the will of anticipating, preventing and minimizing the causes of climate change. In line with the dispositions of the Agenda 2030, this effort encompasses the promotion of a sustainable development, based on the respect of equity, social justice and human dignity. A multilevel governance and effective cooperation among different stakeholders are needed, involving, local authorities, municipalities, traditional and indigenous communities, as well as civil societies and the private sector. Moreover, information and effective participation of citizens in the decision-making mechanism would be fundamental.

Given the environmental, social and cultural impact of climate change, APG 23 and the other co-signing NGOs believe that only the recognition of an international solidarity, extending across national frontiers and generational boundaries, can stimulate an ethical and equitable approach to the climate crisis.

Therefore, in occasion of the 41st Regular Session of the Human Rights Council, we have decided to convene a parallel event on this theme. It is an occasion to further discuss the necessary steps to promote global governance in this area, to build a sustainable and resilient development and share good practices in implementing the current policies. Our aim is to once more remind the urgency of climate action, in order to stay as close as possible to 1.5°C degrees above pre-industrial levels. In this regard, it is necessary to create a synergy with all the stakeholders in an integrated and coherent way to enable countries to

³ Art. 2 of the *Draft declaration on the right to international solidarity*, presented in the Report of the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity - Dandan (2017) A/HRC/35/35.

⁴ Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the relationship between climate change and human rights – (2009) A/HRC/10/61.

⁵ In this regard see Human Rights Council Resolution, “Human rights and international solidarity” (2017) A/HRC/RES/35/3.

⁶ Encyclical letter *Laudato si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our common home (2015).

⁷ *Draft declaration on the right to international solidarity*, presented in the Report of the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity - Dandan (2017) A/HRC/35/35.

achieve their objectives efficiently and quickly under the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Accordingly, the speakers will deal with interrelated aspects, first of all with the precious insights of the Independent Expert on International Solidarity. The event aims to share our spiritual approach on the topic, giving prominence to the concept of integral ecology, and focusing then on climate change-induced migration. Finally, examples of existing best practices, sustainable measures and policies adopted in particular by civil society groups will be presented and discussed. We invite all Member States, civil society organizations, academia, intergovernmental bodies and other stakeholders to attend our event that will be held June 26 from 16.30 to 18.00 hours.

In our view, an international solidarity based on the human rights principles is the only powerful tool we can use in order to address the challenges presented by climate change. It is time to take our commitments seriously and to stand all together in order to foster a true change of mind-set. The environmental protection and the fight against global warming must become a political priority in all the countries. As Catholic-inspired NGOs, we urge societies to change their irresponsible production and consumption systems, in order to combat the human causes, which aggravate environmental crisis. Consequently, we strongly support the adoption of an “integral ecology”,⁸ aiming to strengthen the boundaries between social and environmental justice, and to enhance a development centred on the full respect of the human being. Only through this integral approach we can hope to successfully implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular attention to Goal 13.

We would like to conclude, echoing the words of the Swedish teenage climate activist, Greta Thunberg: “Until you start focusing on what needs to be done rather than what is politically possible, there is no hope. We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis. [...] And if solutions within the system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself”.⁹

⁸ Encyclical letter *Laudato si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our common home (2015).

⁹ Greta Thunberg speech at UN Climate Change COP24 Conference, Katowice, Poland. The full speech is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFkQSGyeCWg&feature=youtu.be>.