



Seminar to Address the Adverse Impacts of Climate Change on the Full Enjoyment  
of Human Rights

Session 3: Forging Stronger Cooperation between Human Rights and Climate  
Change Communities

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Mr. President, Excellency Ambassador Garcia

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Distinguished participants

Colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, I would like to thank the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the invitation to participate in this important seminar and congratulate the HRC for.

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss what we believe is a critical, but often forgotten, relationship – the links between human rights, population dynamics, reproductive health and climate change.

Back in 1992, the very first principle of the Rio Declaration made it clear humans are at the center of concerns for sustainable development. People are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.

That Declaration was echoed just two years later in Cairo at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, or ICPD, when 189 governments agreed that human rights and gender equality should guide all population and development programs, including environmental ones.

In the past few years that there has been a growing recognition that people – their lives and livelihoods, health, well-being and security – should be central to our analysis of the impact of climate change.

And that people must be at the center of climate change policies as empowered rights-holders and agents of change.

Despite this recognition, the quest to ensuring human wellbeing and a life of dignity for all is seriously compromised by the compounding effects of current financial, economic and food crises.

In this context, climate change is no longer just a probability but a new threat that will put the survival of entire populations at risk and will reverse the development gains that took more than a generation to achieve. Unfortunately this situation will only deteriorate as climate patterns change.

Moreover, population growth will put more pressure on the current production and consumption model that has contributed to climate change.

Unfortunately - issues related to population growth, the structure and composition of populations, their spatial distribution and their movements - what we call “population dynamics” - has been largely absent from the discussion of climate change and environmental sustainability in the last 15 years.

But population issues are critical to understanding climate change and its consequences, and UNFPA is working with partners to establish a nuanced, evidence-based perspective, grounded in human rights, on the links between population, reproductive health and climate change, and how those links can inform national and local programmes, particularly for the health, well-being and empowerment of women and youth.

Less than four months ago, the world's population hit the 7 billion mark – that's 1.4 billion more people on the planet than we had at Rio. And we will continue to grow.

According to the best estimates, we will be more than 9 billion rights-holders – and climate change agents- by the middle of this century.

But numbers alone do not tell the story, and an understanding of **population dynamics**, of is essential to our response to climate change.

For example urbanization is expanding at a rapid rate in many countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, and this will alter people's exposure to a changing climate and the resources they have to address it.

Many countries in the developing world are also experiencing significant population growth, which will put an increasing strain on the natural environment and directly impact the factors that contribute to global climate change.

Understanding population dynamics and planning for these changes is critical to addressing the long-term challenges we will face as our climate continues to change in the years and decades ahead.

To address challenges associated with population dynamics and promote more sustainable pathways of development, countries have powerful instruments which can strengthen human rights and freedoms and support human development.

We must ensure that those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change are able to adapt.

Maximising the opportunities and choices available to individuals and families will contribute to both greater adaptive capacity and to better outcomes with respect to population growth and change.

For example, better access to health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, and expanded access to education beyond the primary level can contribute to decreasing fertility levels and provide the foundation for greater resilience to the negative impacts of climate change.

It is the opportunities and choices of individuals that add up to demographic changes, so we must address demographic change by enlarging, not restricting, these choices and opportunities.

These interventions, in turn, will help slow population growth, which will give developing countries more time to adapt to a changing

climate.

If we are to make intelligent choices in the years ahead, we will also need to make a greater effort to involve young people in the debate.

We need to ensure that the leaders of future generations understand the ways that climate change will likely affect their health, education, nutrition, safety, and access to adequate housing and sanitation.

Giving young people a greater voice in climate change negotiations will encourage them to make even more positive contributions to their future, and that of our planet.

Finally, we should work to mitigate the worst effects of climate change by addressing population dynamics proactively, rather than reacting after they have happened.

Urbanization is a case in point. Cities where the poor are marginalized and vulnerable to the effects of climate change generally represent failures of urban planning.

Strategic use of population data and population projections to plan carefully for land use, housing requirements and employment needs of an urbanising population clearly represents a more thoughtful and proactive approach.

Protecting vulnerable populations from the worst effects of climate change, engaging young people in this critical issue, and addressing the potential impact of climate change proactively would represent a people-centered approach to meeting the twin challenges of climate change and population dynamics.

## Conclusion

As we heard yesterday, the damage done to the environment by modern society is perhaps one of the most inequitable risks of our time.

The carbon footprint of the poorest billion people on Earth is a mere 3 per cent of the world's total carbon footprint. And it is the poor who are and will bear the disproportionate brunt of our changing climate.

The paramount challenge of this century is to ensure the well being of 7 billion human beings who currently inhabit the world – and the 2 billion more that are expected by mid century – while protecting the intricate balance of nature on which all life depends

This is why it is time to put people-centred solutions alongside technology in the debates and solutions to climate change.

As we face the brink of disaster, our future as humanity depends on unleashing the full potential of all human beings.

Bringing population dynamics back into the discussion can help chart a path to true sustainable development.

Thank you.