

Report on Guidelines for Climate Justice

Working paper of the GHF expert group on Climate Justice

Introduction

There is a clear scientific consensus today that climate change is unequivocal and is mainly caused by human activity. Increasingly severe and unpredictable weather is already having a significant impact on people and communities worldwide. This constitutes a serious humanitarian concern but also endangers human rights and socio-economic development. In particular, the world's poorest communities contribute least to global emissions of greenhouse gases that cause climate change. But it is the poor who suffer most from the impacts of climate change, since they have the least buffer of protection and means to cope. If emissions of greenhouse gases worldwide continue to intensify, today's dangerous situation will become catastrophic for the planet and human societies within the life-span of the majority of humankind. Significant, immediate and sustained emission reductions are a necessity for the survival of much of humanity and the preservation of the planet. Those who already suffer or will suffer from the unavoidable impacts of climate change require common support in order to persevere.

As outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every human being is born free and equal. Yet within the shared biosphere of our planet, the limited resources available to human society have been unequally consumed. The result of mass consumption of fossil fuels by some has led to a changing climate for the entire planet. Respect for all human rights includes protecting the habitat in which human beings coexist worldwide.

As a global community, we human beings can care and act together with different motivations. Ultimately, however, concern and commitment for the planet we inhabit and our fellow people is a strong unifying force. This will be essential for resolving the global challenge of climate change.

Climate Justice

Everybody - states, institutions and individuals - has a responsibility to protect this planet. All must recognize that pollution has a cost and that the polluter must pay. Climate justice is realized when polluters take responsibility for their actions. They need to end or minimize pollution and compensate for any harm. The poor require more support than other groups to adapt to climate change and reduce emissions associated with continued development. On a global level, therefore, an international mechanism must be established to transfer funds, knowledge and technologies.

The following "Guidelines for Climate Justice" can serve as basic ethical benchmarks for action.

1 Take responsibility for the pollution you cause

"The polluter should, in principle, bear the costs of pollution [...]." The polluter must pay: those who pollute have a duty to reduce the negative effects of their actions and support those who suffer the impacts of climate change. Pollution must have a price that reflects the full cost of its impact on human society.

2 Act according to capability and capacity

Every actor can and should contribute to resolving climate change according to physical, economical, technical, political, intellectual and spiritual capabilities and capacities.

The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" figuring in article 3 of the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an expression of climate justice. Coupled with the polluter pays principle, responsibilities are linked to capabilities and capacities. There is no right to pollute. However,

* Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Principle 16, June 1992



responsibility can only be attributed in accordance with an ability to reasonably assume that responsibility. The poor, in particular, cannot be expected to share the same burden as other groups, since a greater proportion of capacity is necessary for survival and a dignified existence.

3 Share benefits and burdens

As the equality of all human beings is a universally accepted principle, the benefits and burdens associated with climate change and its resolution must be fairly allocated.

Those who have benefited and still benefit from emissions in the form of economic development and wealth, mainly industrialised countries, have the ethical obligation to share benefits with those who suffer from the effects of these emissions, mainly vulnerable people in developing countries.

4 Respect and strengthen human rights

The global human rights framework provides a legal and ethical foundation for the vulnerable to seek support and redress. It also provides governments with a strong moral standpoint in climate negotiations. Human rights supply legal imperatives but also a set of internationally agreed values around which common action can be negotiated and motivated. They provide minimum thresholds, legally defined, about which there is already widespread consensus. International cooperation for resolving climate change is vital for the respect and implementation of human rights.

5 Reduce risks to a minimum

Human activities always include risks. Risks cannot be avoided, but should be reduced to a minimum. The heightened vulnerability associated with poverty means that impoverished communities are most at risk to the negative impacts of climate change. Women are also particularly exposed to climate change-related risks due to pre-existing gender discrimination, inequality and inhibiting gender roles.

Where scientific information clearly indicates that vulnerable individuals or communities bear risks beyond a certain threshold, inaction to reduce such risks is unjustifiable. Risk analysis has to include immediate environmental disasters and societal risks such as social conflicts, destabilized political systems and stress on food, water, security, health, and other human rights.

6 Integrate solutions

Adaptation refers to actions that help human beings and natural ecosystems adjust to climate change. Mitigation means actions that reduce net carbon emissions and limit long-term climate change while continuing development. Emissions must be reduced in order to stem the root cause of climate change. Adaptation is imperative for dealing with the unavoidable impacts of climate change. Transfer of technologies, knowledge and experience is necessary to achieve both worldwide. And all these actions can and must be mutually-reinforcing, sustainable and in respect of human rights.

7 Act in an accountable, transparent and reliable manner

To effectively address climate change, we need participation of all people everywhere with fair, accountable, transparent, and corruption-free procedures.

With respect to political representation, only promises that are kept are promises that matter. Global solutions require a climate of confidence based on reliability. Procedural justice is necessary to effectively represent the interests of those affected by climate change.

8 Act now!

Delayed action increases the level of danger, leading to more damage and harm to people and communities, as well as to broader socio-economic development. The science of climate change and the mitigation and adaptation strategies are known and available for implementation. Action must take place now.



Annex – Members of GHF expert group on Climate Justice (sorted by last name)

- › Barbara Bleisch – Centre for Ethics, ETH Zürich
- › Andrew Clapham – Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law Human Rights
- › Nathalie Emch – Globethics.net
- › Jenny Heap – Oxfam International
- › Stephen Humphreys – International Council on Human Rights Policy
- › Scott Jerbi – Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative
- › Clarisse Kehler Siebert – Stockholm Environment Institute
- › Guillermo Kerber – World Council of Churches
- › Yves Lador – Earth Justice
- › Jean Laville – Ethos Foundation
- › Marc Limon – Mission of Maldives
- › Edward Lloyd – Colombia University, School of Law Environmental Law Clinic
- › Thomas Schultz Jagow – Oxfam GB
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