

World Habitat Day 2021  
HIC Declaration

# Climate justice IS a human right

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# Climate justice IS a human right

Back in 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted for the first time a resolution (Resolution 7/231) that explicitly recognised the implications of climate change for the fulfilment of human rights. While this did little to bring about fundamental changes, worldwide social and environmental movements continue to converge on their joint call for climate justice, articulating equality, human rights, collective rights, and historical responsibilities for climate change as an urgent political and ethical issue.

Climate justice acknowledges that climate impacts are unequally produced and distributed across geographies and historical trajectories, across class, gender, race and age. Climate justice calls for long term mitigation and adaptation strategies, along with radical change against the production and reproduction of social and environmental injustices. Cities and organised civil society are already forging ahead, developing concrete and bold, climate action plans locally. The challenge ahead of us is not just to build resilience through local climate action but, more radically, to localise climate justice as an existential and universal human need and aspiration.

Therefore, on World Habitat Day 2021, throughout Urban October and beyond, we at Habitat International Coalition (HIC) call for climate justice to be treated and enacted as a fundamental habitat-related human right.

## Why

**Because simply tweaking around climate pledges and targets won't do.** According to the latest IPCC report, we have already surpassed the 1.2°C rise above the temperature at pre-industrial levels around the globe. The Paris Agreement targets adopted by 196 Parties in 2015 sought to limit global warming to 1.5°C. But still today, the Earth's average temperature is rising at an unprecedented rate. Pledges to mitigate or adapt to these hazards are not ambitious or deep enough, neither enacted quickly enough to tackle the multiple injustices exacerbated by climate change.

**Because climate change is both a social and environmental issue that affects everyone's life,** and disproportionately poor, underserved, and marginalised women and men. From extreme weather to rising sea levels, climate change threatens human and non-human existence and has negative impacts on the protection of most habitat-related human rights across urban and rural areas.

**Because the asymmetry between responsibilities and impacts is shocking.** Between 1990 and 2015, the richest 10% of the world's population were responsible for more than half of the



greenhouse gas emissions (GHEs), while the richest 1% emitted twice as much as the total emissions produced by the poorest 50%. These asymmetries are not just abstract figures; behind them are the threatened lives and livelihoods of ordinary citizens, of their right to life now and into the future.

**Because a just transition is possible** but calls for fundamental changes to the reigning free-market economy, to profit-making based on extractivism and accumulation through dispossession, to export-oriented economies that rely on ever-expanding ecological footprints and lengthy supply chains, appropriating natural resources and services from afar. Climate justice requires immediately stopping ongoing fossil fuel subsidies and investments; it requires massive changes in the production and consumption patterns of the world's middle and upper classes. It requires solidarity and collective action, innovation, accountability, and responsibility.

## What does enacting climate justice as a human right involve?

Aligned with the five key calls in HIC's Habitat Voices Manifesto, we demand:

**1. Profound economic redistribution** and access to international climate finance and citizen's control over climate financing mechanisms are urgently needed. Yet a lion's share of green transition financing is dedicated to projects of the private sector. The needed redistribution requires localising resources in the public interest and ensuring that they are allocated through participatory budgeting and allocation processes. Fair redistribution also means expanding mobility options beyond individual cars, shortening food chains, protecting and restoring indigenous people's food sovereignty. It requires supporting the multiple processes that sustain circular and solidarity local economies, processes that typically rely on the informal sector and are paradoxically criminalised and stigmatised. It requires respect for land as a biological human need and its equitable use and redistribution, stopping the appropriation and expropriation of common lands and protecting its social function.

Climate justice is also closely interlinked with the protection of housing rights and of the social production of habitat, understanding that housing is more than a roof and that social and informal production are vital, while typically embattled and discounted. The intersection between climate justice and adequate housing as common human rights poses two formidable challenges: First, tackling the heavy contribution of urbanization and the construction sector to global emissions, which adds another layer of challenges to how housing deficits and the maintenance of existing social housing are approached. This urges us to explore ways not just of building, but of retrofitting, repairing, rehabilitating, and redeploying existing housing stocks. Second, by confronting the massive wave of forced evictions and displacement that are being perpetrated worldwide in the name of risk, paradoxically justified as a means to protect life, while in reality clearing the land to make room for speculative real estate developments, and worse: dismantling communities on racial or other social-engineering grounds.



**2. Recognition of differences and invisibilities is needed** that the impacts of climate change are global, yet highly unequal, they exacerbate existing inequalities and produce new ones. But recognition needs to translate into the real empowerment and human rights fulfilment of those most affected to participate meaningfully in climate adaptation and mitigation across gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, geographical location, and physical and other ability. When climate change-induced disasters hit, they often strike at poor communities first and hardest, with women already making up 70% of those living below the poverty line. Therefore, women and girls are, and will continue to be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Because of their dual roles as providers and caretakers, they experience many adverse consequences when the climate changes, sometimes all at once: from fuel, food, and clean water shortages, to crop failures, income losses and health impacts, as well as multiple negative impacts as a result of displacements caused by environmental disasters. After floods, droughts, and storms, women often encounter domestic and sexual violence and are deprived of essential services. Women and girls have invaluable knowledge about adapting to erratic environmental changes due to their multiple roles, yet they are typically excluded from decisions on climate change adaptation and mitigation. When included equally not only their survival and wellbeing rates increase, but also those of others.

Social and environmental movements, and particularly the youth across the world are connecting the dots between civil rights and climate change and denouncing the links with racial justice. Toxic facilities like coal-fired power plants and incinerators emit mercury, arsenic, lead, and other contaminants into the water, food, and lungs of local communities. They also emit carbon dioxide and methane, the main drivers of climate change. Often race is the main indicator that explains the placement of toxic facilities.

**3. Parity in political participation:** Over the last 30 years, negotiations have been in the hands of national governments, with some of states accounting for the highest levels of emissions paralyzing progress and favouring non-action, protecting corporate interests over human and other natural life. During the same period, humanity has doubled the amount of carbon dioxide released in the atmosphere. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognises the differential responsibilities of countries based on their historical emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs). Nevertheless, climate justice demands going one step further to address the historical climate debt accumulated by a few countries, not just over the last three decades, but over much longer trajectories of exploitative capitalist accumulation, imperialism, destruction and dispossession.

Waiting for national and supranational-level actors to reach a broadly based and substantively effective agreement on climate change is like waiting for Godot—unlikely to happen, at least soon enough. Glasgow CoP26 will be a key point in history to affirm a global





deal toward a net carbon-zero pledge as early as possible in this century. For that, civil society needs to build collective pressure and social force to go beyond pledges and deals, to demand real and deep progress toward human rights and other treaty obligations of the state to ensure climate justice.

**4. Human rights habitat, not war:** Climate justice requires both conflict-sensitive climate change policies and climate-proof peacebuilding. Eight of the ten countries hosting the bulk of multilateral peace-making operations in the world are in areas highly exposed to climate change. Peacebuilding efforts need to take full account of the climate-related impacts in the contexts where they are operating, thus tackling conflict and climate change simultaneously to build sustainable peace. Compounded with this, is the urgent need to protect people's sovereignty over the privatisation of common resources, and an immediate end to exploitation of people and natural resources under illegal occupations. Data from the Global Resources Outlook reveal that over two-thirds of the extraction of all resources consumed in the world is concentrated in just ten countries, which bear the social and environmental consequences of global corporate extraction. Climate justice also demands protection for the women and men, girls and boys displaced due to the combined effects of droughts and floods, and of conflicts and the belligerent occupation of peoples' sovereign territories – often motivated by ideologies of violence to control the extraction of resources.

**5. Mutual care, solidarity and social responsibility:** Climate justice requires nurturing care and solidarity across and within countries, cities, villages, and communities, recognizing –as in the Habitat Agenda (1996–2016)–that these 'form points on a human settlement continuum within a common ecosystem.' This cannot be approached as a charitable or paternalistic cause, neither as greenwashing to maintain the status quo, or as an excuse for doing only the minimum for the poor, or demanding their 'resilience' by stretching their own coping capacities. Enacting climate justice as a human right requires social and environmental responsibility, and unambiguous political commitment and policies.

Urgent, fair and deep measures to tackle climate change cannot be taken at the expense of these principles and considerations. On the contrary, the possibility of enacting a just green transition relies on operationalizing them. Our future must be rooted in deep democratic practices that drive regenerative processes, solidarity, equity and cooperation, acknowledging the interdependence of both human and other natural life, and respect for the universal rights of all. Non-action is no longer an option, because climate justice is a human right that encompasses all living things – human and non-human – to live sustainably on this planet.

**Adriana Allen, HIC President, October 2021**

