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Item 72 (b) of the provisional agenda[[1]](#footnote-2)\*

**Promotion and protection of human rights: human**

**rights questions including alternative approaches for**

**improving the effective enjoyment of human rights**

**and fundamental freedoms**

International legal frameworks related to climate change, culture and cultural rights, and examples from submissions received

Note by the Secretary-General

Supplementary information on the report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

The following information is supplementary to the report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights on climate change, culture and cultural rights ([A/75/298](https://undocs.org/en/A/75/298)), presented to the General Assembly in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 37/12. It is available in English only on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Annex to the report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Karima Bennoune

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I. International legal frameworks related to climate change, culture and cultural rights

A. Cultural rights standards

1. Cultural rights, including the right of all to take part in cultural life without discrimination, the right to access and enjoy cultural heritage, the right to benefit from scientific progress,[[3]](#footnote-4) and artistic and scientific freedoms, are guaranteed by many provisions of international law. Such provisions include article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and related provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. All these norms have been explained in detail by successive Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights.[[4]](#footnote-5)

2. Article 15 (4) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasizes that both national level action and international cooperation is needed to guarantee these rights. As the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights underscored in its recent General Comment on aspects of article 15, “international cooperation is essential because the most acute risks to the world related to science and technology, such as climate change [and] the rapid loss of biodiversity… are transnational and cannot be adequately addressed without robust international cooperation.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

3. Cultural rights protect in particular

(a) human creativity in all its diversity and the conditions for it to be exercised, developed and made accessible;

(b) the free choice, expression and development of identities, which include the right to choose not to be a part of particular collectives, and the right to exit a collective, and to take part on an equal basis in the process of defining it;

(c) the rights of individuals and groups to participate, or not to participate, in the cultural life of their choice, and to conduct their own cultural practices;

(d) the right to interact and exchange, regardless of group affiliation and of frontiers;

(e) the rights to enjoy and have access to the arts, to knowledge, including scientific knowledge, and to an individual’s own cultural heritage, and that of others; and

(f) the rights to participate in the interpretation, elaboration and development of cultural heritage and in the reformulation of cultural identities (A/HRC/40/53, para.15).

4. Specific standards apply to the cultural rights of particular groups. For example, The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples establishes, in article 31, that “indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, [and] knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora.” In the outcome document adopted at the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, held in 2014, States explicitly confirmed that indigenous peoples’ knowledge and strategies to sustain their environment should be respected and taken into account in developing national and international approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation.[[6]](#footnote-7)

5. The Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas stipulates that: “States shall comply with their respective international obligations to combat climate change. Peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to contribute to the design and implementation of national and local climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, including through the use of practices and traditional knowledge.” (article 18) Peasants and rural people also have the right to training related to climate change (article 25) and to respect, recognition and protection relating to their traditional knowledge (article 26 (3)).

6. Culture should be seen as a pillar of sustainable development.[[7]](#footnote-8) Progress on cultural rights obligations and on the Sustainable Development Goals are two sides of the same coin. Moreover, the safeguarding and promotion of culture contributes directly to many of the Goals – safe and sustainable cities, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, the environment, the promotion of gender equality and peaceful and inclusive societies.[[8]](#footnote-9) Cultural rights are also essential tools for implementing Goals explicitly referencing culture, such as target 4 of Goal 11, on strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage, and target 7 of Goal 4, which requires that States ensure education related to sustainable development, cultural diversity and culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

7. Cultural rights are not a luxury. They are key to the overall implementation of universal human rights and a crucial part of the responses to many current challenges, from climate change to discrimination and poverty. Cultural rights are transformative and empowering, providing important opportunities for the realization of other human rights. The lack of equal cultural rights, combined with economic and social inequalities, makes it difficult for people to enjoy personal autonomy, to exercise their civil and political rights and to enjoy their right to development.[[9]](#footnote-10) As the Special Rapporteur has stressed, cultural rights are not tantamount to cultural relativism.[[10]](#footnote-11) They are not an excuse for violations of other human rights. They do not justify discrimination or violence, and are firmly embedded in the universal human rights framework.

B. Relevant standards on the environment and climate change

1. The environment and climate change

8. The Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Declaration) set out common guiding principles for the preservation and enhancement of the environment. Principle 1 underlines that “Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations.”

9. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) establishes the objective of the “stabilization of green-house gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” in a timeframe sufficient for ecosystems to adapt, maintain food production, and support sustainable development.[[11]](#footnote-12) Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, states have “common but differentiated responsibilities” (articles 3.1, 4.1) and “should take precautionary measures.”(article 3) They also shall develop programs “containing measures to mitigate climate change… and measures to facilitate adequate adaptation.” (article 4.1)

10. State party climate commitments under United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change are strengthened and further specified in the Paris Agreement, which seeks to limit the global temperature rise to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius and to pursue efforts toward a goal of no more than a 1.5 degree Celsius rise, specifies processes for mitigating, i.e. through Nationally Determined Contributions, and includes adaptation and resilience in its objectives. Article 7 outlines the adaptation objective by establishing the global goal of “enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to contributing to sustainable development and ensuring an adequate adaptation...”[[12]](#footnote-13)

11. According to the Paris Agreement’s preamble, “Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity…”

12. This important agreement’s sole specific reference to culture is to note that some cultures recognize the ecosystem as Mother Earth. Its article 7 (5) acknowledges that “adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate.”

2. Climate change as a human rights issue

13. Climate change is a human rights issue.[[13]](#footnote-14) It has the potential to undermine most human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, from the right to life[[14]](#footnote-15) to the right to take part in cultural life and beyond. A human rights approach to preventing and responding to the effects of climate change should empower individuals and groups as active agents of change and not as passive victims.[[15]](#footnote-16)

14. The Special Rapporteur supports the call of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment for global recognition, similar to that in regional instruments, of the human right to a healthy environment. That rapporteur has further explained that: “A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation.” Clearly, we must understand cultural rights to be on this non-exhaustive list.

15. More than 80 per cent of United Nations Member States (156 out of 193) now recognize the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment through their constitutions, legislation or ratification of regional human rights treaties (see A/HRC/43/53).[[16]](#footnote-17) The UN Secretary-General has also endorsed “the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.”[[17]](#footnote-18) As the environment rapporteur noted: “Without a healthy environment, we are unable to fulfil our aspirations or even live at a level commensurate with minimum standards of human dignity”.[[18]](#footnote-19)

16. Some face the very real prospect of the loss of their home countries and of moving their entire populations elsewhere. The effects this will have on their human rights, their development, their political status and legal protections, and their cultures, will be unprecedented. Climate change threatens the very existence of some States and survival of some peoples, thus posing a direct threat to the fundamental right of self-determination. “Human rights law does not provide clear answers regarding the status of populations displaced from sinking island States… However, States have a duty to take action, individually and jointly, to address and avert threats to the right to self-determination, by mitigating climate change.”[[19]](#footnote-20)

17. While it is the sovereign decision of every state to become or remain a party to a treaty, subject to the rules of treaty law, when a state remains outside or withdraws from essential environmental accords such as the Paris Agreement (or fails to implement them), given the ongoing documented human rights impact of climate change, it is acting knowingly in a manner that harms the human rights and cultures of all, and is failing to respect its obligation to cooperate internationally. This should be understood as irreconcilable with the principles of the UN Charter, including articles 55 and 56.[[20]](#footnote-21) A failure to fulfil international climate change commitments is a violation of the State’s obligations to protect the human rights, including cultural rights, of its citizens.[[21]](#footnote-22)

18. Human rights obligations related to climate change should be understood both at the national and transnational levels.[[22]](#footnote-23) Repeated Human Rights Council resolutions note that “the global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation by all countries and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response.”[[23]](#footnote-24)

19. Corporations should comply with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as they pertain to human rights and climate change.[[24]](#footnote-25) "Businesses… must be accountable for their climate impacts and participate responsibly in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts with full respect for human rights."[[25]](#footnote-26) Their obligations include ensuring that people affected by business-related human rights violations have access to effective remedies.[[26]](#footnote-27) This must include cultural rights violations.

20. The Malé Declaration on the Human Dimension of Global Climate Change, the first intergovernmental statement explicitly recognizing the human rights impact of climate change, specifically noted that “climate change has clear and immediate implications for the full enjoyment of… [inter alia] the right to take part in cultural life…” (preamble) It also affirms the Commitment “to an inclusive process that puts people, their prosperity, homes, survival and rights at the centre of the climate change debate.

3. Standards related to specific groups and peoples

a. Women

21. The Rio Declaration recognized that women have a vital role in environmental management and that their full participation is essential.[[27]](#footnote-28) Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, the Beijing Platform for Action put the spotlight on women and the environment, recommending actions such as involving women in environmental decision-making, integrating gender perspectives in sustainable development programs and establishing mechanisms to assess the impacts of environmental policies on women.

22. The CEDAW committee issued a General Recommendation on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk prevention in the context of climate change.[[28]](#footnote-29) It asserted that “States parties should ensure that all policies, legislation, plans, programmes, budgets and other activities related to… climate change are gender responsive and grounded in human-rights based principles…”[[29]](#footnote-30) It emphasized participation, empowerment, accountability, access to justice and the provision of appropriate information. “Climate equity requires that global efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change prioritize the needs of countries, groups and individuals, including women and girls, who are most vulnerable to its adverse impacts.”[[30]](#footnote-31)

23. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change recognized the link between gender and the environment in 2014 with the Enhanced Lima Work Program on Gender. This program “recognizes that the full, meaningful and equal participation and leadership of women in all aspects of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process and in national - and local - level climate policy and action is vital for achieving long-term climate goals.”[[31]](#footnote-32) In 2017, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Parties agreed on the Bonn Gender Plan of Action to advance gender mainstreaming into all elements of climate action.

b. Persons with disabilities

24. Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires that “States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including… humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.” According to the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, “the measures undertaken in societies to adapt to constant changes brought by climate change do not either take into account the needs of persons with disabilities in terms of accessing to basic services or participating actively in societal life… The challenge of changing environments, as those brought about by climate change, can be overcome by planning for accessible solutions from the start.”[[32]](#footnote-33)

25. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has also emphasized that States must ensure that the requirements of persons with disabilities are taken into consideration when designing and implementing adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures.[[33]](#footnote-34) Experts note that any climate action taken should foster the dignity of persons with disabilities rather than reinforce existing social injustices.[[34]](#footnote-35)

26. In 2019, the Human Rights Council called upon states “to adopt a comprehensive, integrated, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, consistent with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the objective and principles thereof, to address efficiently the economic, cultural and social impact and challenges that climate change represents, for the full and effective enjoyment of human rights for all, particularly to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of persons with disabilities both in rural and urban areas to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change.”[[35]](#footnote-36) Persons with disabilities are also playing leading roles as climate activists.

c. Indigenous peoples

27. Article 29 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms that “Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.” Article 32 confirms that indigenous peoples have the right to determine how their lands and resources are used, and that their free, prior and informed consent is required before projects affecting their lands and resources are undertaken. Effective mechanisms for redress and mitigation must be available when there are negative environmental or cultural impacts. According to the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development, “Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development.” (Principle 22).

4. Disaster response

28. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Reduction (2015-2030) has explicitly referenced cultural measures as among those that should be taken to prevent and reduce vulnerability to disasters and enhance resilience, and it aims at lowering losses in inter alia cultural assets.[[36]](#footnote-37) It notes that, “[d]isaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted.”[[37]](#footnote-38) It is important to “protect or support the protection of cultural and collecting institutions and other sites of historical, cultural heritage and religious interest…”[[38]](#footnote-39) The Framework insists on the need to improve the resilience of cultural heritage as part of improving disaster preparedness and decreasing vulnerability, and to anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risk for cultural heritage.

5. Accountability

29. The Special Rapporteur has been pleased to note a growing jurisprudence at the national and international levels around the world regarding both the human rights impact of climate change, and accountability for damage to culture related to environmental harms.[[39]](#footnote-40) This needs to be expanded and to specifically address the particular question of accountability for damage to culture and cultural rights from climate change.

30. The Special Rapporteur welcome the fact that Torres Islanders have availed themselves of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to allege human rights harms, including to cultural rights under article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, due to alleged failure by the government of Australia to take adequate steps to combat climate change.[[40]](#footnote-41) The view of the Human Rights Committee, expected in 2021, could have a significant impact on building the relevant jurisprudence.[[41]](#footnote-42) The Torres Islanders are the traditional owners of the Great Barrier Reef whose culture and livelihoods are closely interconnected with this ecosystem which has seen the loss of half its coral, and witnessed erosion and inundation. All this may require relocations with a massive human rights impact, as well as overwhelming cultural losses. Getano Lui, deputy mayor of Torres Strait Island Regional Council has explained the close connections between people and place as follows: “What is instilled in us and our ancestors is, if the Torres Strait sinks, we’ll sink with it.”[[42]](#footnote-43)

C. The intersection of climate change, culture and cultural rights

31. There are numerous standards which offer protection for cultural rights or for the environment. There are few specific standards which address the intersection between the two. Those international legal standards that do, such as the World Heritage Convention, should be supported, publicized and implemented. Other relevant standards include the UNESCO Culture 2030 Indicators, launched in November 2019, which feature a specific indicator to measure the role and contribution of culture in climate adaptation and resilience.[[43]](#footnote-44) Another example is the non-binding Pocantico Call to Action on Climate Impacts and Cultural Heritage,[[44]](#footnote-45) which calls for ensuring that cultural heritage voices and expertise are represented in climate policy discussion at all levels.

32. Insufficient attention is paid to culture in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement and Assessment reports of the IPCC. Conversely, sustainable development and climate change are inadequately addressed by cultural instruments. While existing legal standards should be interpreted so as to apply fully to issues at the intersection, the possibility of filling this specific normative gap, including through non-binding agreements, general comments, guidance and jurisprudence, should be considered. In any case, dialogue and cooperation between bodies tasked with monitoring implementation of these respective standards should accelerate. There is a need to identify the synergies between environmental, cultural rights and cultural heritage standards, disaster related standards, human rights standards, standards on displacement and the Sustainable Development Goals,[[45]](#footnote-46) as the threats to human rights discussed in this Annex and the report to which it is attached, will be experienced across all these areas.

D. Sovereignty, climate change and cultural rights

33. The meaning and application of sovereignty, a core component of international law and the UN charter, and its relationship to culture, territory, boundaries, and rights, must be carefully considered in the context of climate change. The transboundary activities which states engage in or permit on their own territory are gravely undermining the sovereignty – even the existence – of some other states and their cultures. The International Court of Justice has recognized the state obligation to prevent significant transboundary environmental harm as part of customary international law.[[46]](#footnote-47) A State's extraterritorial human rights obligations entail the obligation to exercise due diligence to ensure that its activities and those of actors over whom a State exercises authority or effective control do not cause foreseeable environmental harm that infringes the human rights of persons and groups outside its territorial boundaries.[[47]](#footnote-48) These obligations extend to activities that contribute to climate change.

34. Threats to the sovereignty of indigenous peoples over their land, as well as to their land and tenure rights, have a direct impact on their ability to counter the negative effects of climate change, and undermine their ability to play a positive role in determining which cultural practices and aspects of traditional knowledge are brought to bear on it in ways that affect climate change.[[48]](#footnote-49)

35. Moreover, should states’ territories be, for example, inundated due to sea level rise and become inaccessible or submerged, the Special Rapporteur believes that their sovereignty, and its related benefits, such as fishing rights and rights concerning underwater cultural heritage, should be recognized as continuing.[[49]](#footnote-50) All these questions will have significant impacts on the enjoyment of cultural rights, and many other human rights, and should be given careful consideration.

II. Examples

36. This section contains a small selection of diverse examples from different regions illustrating many issues raised in the report. Some are drawn from submissions. These examples should be understood in conjunction with the relevant section in the main report.

A. The negative impacts of climate change on culture, cultural heritage and cultural rights

1. Cultural heritage

a. Risks to cultural heritage

37. Coastal heritage sites such as Kilwa Kiswani in Tanzania and Rapa Nui in Chile, are particularly vulnerable to sea-level rise. Many submissions mentioned such threats, for example to Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians in Ukraine from flooding.[[50]](#footnote-51) The Chinguetti Mosque in Mauritania is being damaged by erosion.[[51]](#footnote-52) The Christian monuments of Ravenna, Italy are also imperilled.[[52]](#footnote-53)

38. As stressed by the Maldivian Minister of Environment during the Special Rapporteur’s mission, a temperature rise of 2 degrees Celsius or more will result in 60 to 90 per cent of the country’s coral reefs being destroyed, leaving the islands exposed to being washed away by the ocean. He further underscored that the culture and language of Maldives are also specifically threatened by the possibility of “environmental catastrophe”.[[53]](#footnote-54) In Kiribati, Christian cemeteries are “fighting against alarmingly swift erosion.”[[54]](#footnote-55)

b. Remedial measures to protect tangible heritage sites

39. Effective remedial measures to protect tangible and natural heritage sites have included re-designing boundaries and buffer zones to facilitate migration of species, preventively draining a glacial lake to avoid the occurrence of an outburst flood, improving dykes to prevent coastal flooding, and supporting traditional methods to protect a site from sand encroachment.[[55]](#footnote-56)

c. Commemorating heritage losses

40. One significant example of good practice in commemorating natural heritage losses is the ceremony and plaque bearing “A Letter to the Future,” marking the melting of Okjokull, in Iceland, the first glacier lost to climate change.[[56]](#footnote-57) The plaque notes: "In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it."

2. Traditional knowledge and ways of life

41. Fishing traditions, such as those of Sama-Bajau people of Southeast Asia,[[57]](#footnote-58) and agrifood traditions, such as the Mediterranean diet and the Palestinian nutritional culture,[[58]](#footnote-59) and even wine production,[[59]](#footnote-60) are seen in some places as imperilled.[[60]](#footnote-61) For the Vezo fishing women in Madagascar, loss of biodiversity is a main threat to their traditional fishing practice.[[61]](#footnote-62)

42. Traditional medicine is reportedly jeopardized in Fiji.[[62]](#footnote-63) Pacific island nations witnessing increased hurricanes are experiencing the decimation of trees used to make traditional boats. Nieu lost an entire museum (later rebuilt) and 90% of the island’s artefacts.[[63]](#footnote-64) The Pazyryk culture of Central Asia is threatened by thawing permafrost.[[64]](#footnote-65)

3. Harmful cultural practices

43. Climate change has been reported to play a role in increasing harmful practices against women such as child marriage of girls and FGM. This is reportedly the case, for example, in Kenya among the Maasai where in the face of resulting drought and hunger, girls are reportedly being exchanged for cattle, and subjected to FGM to increase their bride price.[[65]](#footnote-66)

4. The cultural rights of women

44. Work toward gender equality, including in regard to culture, is vital for improving climate change response. For example, when Hurricane Mitch struck La Masica, Honduras, in 1998, the population was able to evacuate due to early action from warning systems and disaster management plans. Six months prior, the population received gender-sensitive training on early warnings and women were able to assume the traditionally male role of monitoring the early warning system.[[66]](#footnote-67)

5. Impact on cultural rights of indigenous peoples

45. In the U.S. state of Louisiana indigenous people are facing forced displacement due to sea level rise, and ancestral lands and sacred sites are endangered.[[67]](#footnote-68) In Guyana, indigenous people are moving from the savannah to forests in times of drought and changing planting patterns.[[68]](#footnote-69)

46. Linguistic diversity and indigenous languages may also be eroded. For example, there is a risk that the Sami language and cultural practices will be lost in Finland due to climate change and resulting migration.[[69]](#footnote-70) Adaptation to arctic sea ice, marine mammals, and tundra are defining features of Inuit language, knowledge and ways of life, which are consequently now all under threat.[[70]](#footnote-71) These developments also have a gendered impact. For example, in Nicaragua, the drying up of lagunas has deprived indigenous women of a social space to gather and exchange.[[71]](#footnote-72)

B. The positive potential of culture, cultural heritage and cultural rights to enhance responses to climate change

47. The Inupiat in Point Hope, Alaska, are using contemporary storytelling as a critical form of cultural adaptation to climate-induced changes to homeland, sense of place, and environmental kinship, that threaten their culture and cultural identity. “Storytelling reveals and fosters adaptation, allowing residents to maintain their connections to dramatically shifting places and cope with an uncertain future.”[[72]](#footnote-73)

48. Traditional land management and land monitoring systems, traditional construction and planning techniques may also be relevant. For example, in Majuli Island in Assam, India, the vernacular housing using locally available bamboo and constructed on stilts has developed to respond to the evolving local context, notably regular floods. These structures facilitate dismantling and relocation when needed.[[73]](#footnote-74) Other examples include traditional open-walled housing in Samoa that performs well in high winds or pile dwellings in Cuba that function during flooding and are relatively easy to rebuild,[[74]](#footnote-75) the system of “khettaras” in Morocco, underground draining galleries (canals or aqueducts) in a desert environment, which are a historical, artistic and cultural work testifying to the ingenuity of humanity to deal with climatic aridity while respecting resources.[[75]](#footnote-76)

49. In the Africa region, pastoralists are helping meteorologists make better predictions.[[76]](#footnote-77)

50. The Initiative of the Amazon Sacred Headwaters is an indigenous initiative in which different indigenous peoples that have bordering ancestral lands have come together to promote regional governance guided by indigenous traditions/principles, harmony, and cooperation, highlighting the importance of fomenting a relationship between humans and Earth. The Amazonian indigenous confederations in each country cooperate to protect 30 million hectares of rain forest. The Initiative “seeks to create a mosaic of indigenous-titled territories based on their traditional knowledge of geographic ecological boundaries.”[[77]](#footnote-78) It aims to “create a united front against the pressures on these indigenous territories and address climate change by keeping forests standing and fossil fuels in the ground.”[[78]](#footnote-79)

51. At the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2018, Greece, UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organisation held a side event titled “Cultural Heritage Partnership to Enable Ambitious Climate Action.” Greece invited countries to commit to mainstreaming cultural heritage into climate change policies and planned to host a high-level summit on the topic in 2020 which was postponed due to the pandemic.

52. Positive examples of artistic initiatives include, Pathway to Paris which brings together musicians, artists, and activists from diverse regions “to help raise consciousness surrounding the urgency of climate action and offers solutions to turning the Paris Agreement into action,” often through concerts during international climate meetings, at which the audience is challenged through artistic performance to engage in advocacy.[[79]](#footnote-80) The project “Storytelling With Saris” connects women in the U.S. with women in Bangladesh who are experiencing climate change.”[[80]](#footnote-81)

III. Climate change, climate change denial and the right to science

53. The Special Rapporteur’s mandate includes scientific freedom and the right to benefit from scientific progress and its adaptations. The application of these rights in the context of climate change deserves its own dedicated report in future. She expresses her deep concerns about ongoing climate change denial and the denigration of science and expertise that accompanies and enables it.[[81]](#footnote-82) This is often a sponsored narrative and has a grave effect on the ability of societies to adequately comprehend the threats to their rights and cultures, and to take the actions needed to respond. As a result of denial, sometimes based on economic or religious arguments, and advocated by even some world leaders, some governments are actively moving in the wrong direction, away from protecting cultures and cultural rights from catastrophic climate change. Recent scholarship finds parallels between the denial of science related to climate change and to the COVID-19 pandemic, and indicates that “leadership is crucial to changing attitudes and conquering denial.”[[82]](#footnote-83)

IV. Conclusion

54. **A spirit of urgent optimism could be a useful guide, remembering the words of Berta Cáceres (1973-2016): “Let us come together and remain hopeful as we defend and care for the blood of this earth and its spirit.”**

1. \* A/75/50 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CulturalRights/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CulturalRights/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx) . [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. A/HRC/20/26. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See, e.g., [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CulturalRights/Pages/InternationalStandards.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/CulturalRights/Pages/InternationalStandards.aspx) and [A/74/255](http://undocs.org/en/A/74/255), paras.19–31. For standards related to the protection of cultural heritage, see also A/71/317, paras.14-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. E/C.12/GC/25, para.81. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. General Assembly resolution 69/2, para. 36, cited in A/HRC/36/46, para.56. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. United Cities and Local Governments- Secretariat of the Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Governments, *Culture 21- Culture, Climate Change and Sustainable Development: Briefing*, 2016, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Jyoti Hosagrahar, “Culture: at the heart of SDGs”, *UNESCO Courier*, Issue April–June, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. A/HRC/31/59, para.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. A/73/227, paras.11, 14 and 48–55. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 1992, Art. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. A/HRC/31/52. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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