**Cultural Rights & Climate Change**

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**Submitted by:** Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights (an organization in special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council).

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**First: The negative impacts of climate change on culture and cultural rights**

Culture is the total fabric of ideas, beliefs, customs, traditions, directions, languages, symbols and other social patterns that distinguish a particular group of people from other groups, and that defines their shared patterns of behaviors and their way of thinking that are reflected in their daily activities; such as dressing, eating, greeting, celebrating events and other diverse social practices[[1]](#footnote-1). In this context, making culture in societies is closely linked to a variety of key factors, including natural factors and climate change that has proven critical to making culture.[[2]](#footnote-2) When the concentration of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and other harmful gases increase in the atmosphere, not only the average sea level but also temperature increase, changing natural factors in some areas inhabited by certain groups, affecting their customs, traditions, behaviors and every day practices, an overall and direct threat to their culture.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Different peoples live the consequences of climate change, from rising sea levels and increasing temperatures to increasingly frequent extreme weather vents such as severe storms, which is reflected in their culture at all levels. In this context, increasing the range of drought-affected areas as a result of climate changes may affect Pastoralism, which is the traditional culture of particular groups, thereby threatening their own social structures. The Maasai people set a clear example of the groups whose culture may be negatively impacted due to climate change. The Maasai are pastoralist ethnic tribes from Africa, specifically inhabiting the rangelands that straddle across the southern part of Kenya and northern part of Tanzania. Despite the tribe’s pasture-based cattle farming, the climatically stressed arid areas, in which they are living, that are characterized by high temperatures and persistent droughts, negatively impact their livestock and cattle herds due to lack of grass, which is directly seen in their habits and diet[[4]](#footnote-4). The Marsh Arabs of Iraq have long suffered from water scarcity as a result of climate change; hence, affecting the status of women- the backbone of the Marsh Arab community.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In this context, the Turkana people, who are traditionally pastoralists living in northwestern Kenya, specifically between the borders of Ethiopia and South Sudan from the north and Uganda from the west, suffer from the loss of grazing-related jobs that they depend on in their daily life, causing them to search for alternative livelihoods, which, as a result, affects their habits, traditions and culture. Drought and the scarcity of basic water resources due to climate changes were the main reasons why many individuals in this group have lost their different grazing-related jobs, along with their homes and daily lifestyle[[6]](#footnote-6). However, the heavy environmental losses caused by climate changes were the reason why the habits and traditions of the residents of Torres Strait Islanders along with Indigenous Australians, have changed.[[7]](#footnote-7)

While fishermen suffer from switching their cultural identity, their different types of hunting, and their social life styles as a result of steeper reduction in polar ice caps due to climate change[[8]](#footnote-8), this is in addition to influencing the social habits of the Quechua-speaking rural people in southern Peru[[9]](#footnote-9). Climate change disturbs the ecosystem and threatens the diversity of plant and animal species linked to the cultures of some peoples, such as threatening iconic, culturally significant habitats found in the highlands of England, which are linked to the various expressions and cultural contexts with the destruction of relevant local landscapes[[10]](#footnote-10).

In the previous context, food shortage has aggravated the suffering of families in Haiti, Nepal, Niger and the Himalayas through the loss of their different dietary patterns, and this deficiency is caused by a lack of crops due to climatic changes that these people depend on in their different food patterns that are part of their culture.[[11]](#footnote-11) Afghan livestock herders suffer from the drought caused by climate change, affecting their daily lives and routines[[12]](#footnote-12).

In this context, climate changes has also affected the food habits of the peoples of Sama-Bajau, Australian ethnic groups from Southeast Asia whose origins goes back to the southern Philippines. These groups have unique methods of fishing that helps marine life to reproduce and replenish without disrupting the balance of nature. However, climate changes have disturbed these fishing methods, threatening their source of livelihood by some local fishermen, which is reflected in the threat posed to their food habits on the one hand and the threat to their traditional work patterns on the other hand.[[13]](#footnote-13)

In the same context, climatic changes affect agriculture and the production of agricultural crops. Changing temperature and rainfall reduce agricultural crop production, and global warming increases the number of insect pests, jeopardizing the production of basic crops such as wheat, soybeans, and corn[[14]](#footnote-14). Droughts occur globally due to global warming, which leads to a lack of food crops, water scarcity and decreased livestock productivity, which is the source of proteins, affecting, as a result, the food habits of some peoples that depend on wheat, beans and corn in their food as a basic meal representing a constant lifestyle and part of its culture[[15]](#footnote-15). By way of illustration, agricultural production in Palestine has been negatively impacted due to high temperatures, increased droughts, and low rainfall due to climate changes, decreasing olive production that many families in Palestine depend on in their daily life. This is a threat to the nutritional culture of the Palestinian people.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In this context, the rising sea level resulting from climate change may pose a threat to the cultural and social characteristics of the population living in coastal areas, and this in turn affects their traditional cultures and lifestyles as a result of moving to new areas with ultimately different characteristics[[17]](#footnote-17). This, in addition to changing their dietary pattern as a result of the shortage of the basic foods they were depending on. In the light of the foregoing, it can be said that the different climatic changes have affected the pattern of customs, traditions and work of some groups in specific communities in a way that might threaten the core of their own culture.

* **Examples of specific natural resources, local sites used for cultural practices or seasonal patterns:**

Climate change is a serious threat to many cultural heritage sites and it includes threats of floods, rains, hurricanes and other related phenomena. In this context, hurricanes caused by climate change threaten the cultural aspects of the population on the island of Niue, which is located in the South Pacific, by damaging the resources that preserve their material culture, including the stock of the Dysoxylum forsteri, which is used to make distinctive rides boats that are an important symbol of the culture of the inhabitants of this region. It is worth noting that Hurricane Hita in 2004 contributed to the destruction of important artifacts, including Niue (Formerly Huanaki Cultural Centre and National Museum), which was the central place of gatherings, participating in traditional dances, singing and orally telling the history of the culture of the population.[[18]](#footnote-18)

In this context, the monuments in the Altai mountain range that include the treasures of the Pazyryk culture and their cultural inscriptions, which is one of Central Asia’s cultures, are at risk due to thawing permafrost caused by the high temperature related to the results of basic climate changes. In Tanzania, the island now known as Ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani in Tanzania, which is considered one of the most important Islamic monuments of Muslim culture that is at risk of catastrophic erosion due to the effect of increasing waves resulting from the rise in the sea level and this impacts the population in this region as well, where Kiswani is a tourist attraction for Muslims worldwide and brings them a source of livelihood.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In the same context, there are 31 primary sites linked to different cultures that are subjected to collapse due to different climate changes such as Ambientable Boinde National Park in Uganda, the home of nearly half of the remaining endangered mountain gorillas whose extinction may be partially attributed to high temperatures. Lake Malawi National Park in Malawi enjoys the largest diversity of freshwater fish worldwide; however, it is threatened by draught caused by climatic changes that impact different ethnicities depending on fish as a basic meal[[20]](#footnote-20). Weather changes in desert cause erosion and threat other cultural heritage in those sites such as Chinguetti Mosque in Mauritania.[[21]](#footnote-21)

**Second: The Positive potential of culture and cultural rights to enhance responses to climate change**

Many traditional societies use many methods to avoid the damage caused by climate change. Among these practices, the population in the northwestern region of India uses some strategies to overcome recurrent droughts and water scarcity in order to benefit from the water resources by developing the skills of protecting ponds, and other water resources. This renews groundwater and prevents rainwater from leaking into the ground while recharging the aquifers and improving the water balance of the land, in addition to the fact that families in this area have a mechanism for harvesting surface water that happens through collecting rainwater and save them for subsequent use in order to overcome draught.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Indigenous Knowledge Systems [IKS] have been applied and used by rural communities in Africa to predict weather and seasonal changes in their environment, and thus implement adaptation and mitigation strategies that would help reducing CO2 emissions that cause high temperatures, leading to droughts and many other related phenomena[[23]](#footnote-23). In the Sahel region of Africa, the dependence of the local population on organic farming system contributes to reducing carbon dioxide emissions while the use of a comfortable farming system has led to growing forests, in addition to applying forestry agriculture that has been proven very effective in carbon sequestration and achieving some balance in the richness of food crops and forests.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Some of the unique cultural strategies adopted by population in the rural area of Motoco in Zimbabwe, has countered climate fluctuations and various climate changes, which include coverage, construction of large warehouses for production, and the construction of temporary walls on the banks of rivers in order to store water for being used in dry seasons, which contributed significantly in adapting to drought, rain scarcity and low crop production resulting from climate change[[25]](#footnote-25). It is evidenced from the above that the traditional systems of some local cultural groups have been very effective in reducing the impacts of climate change.

**Third: measures taken and recommendations**

Defenders of cultural rights related to the environment face a range of different challenges, the most important of which is life-threatening dangers they are exposed to. Many defenders of cultural rights have been killed for defending the cultural rights of some of the indigenous people and their cultural heritage. The Indian ecologist Erta Caceres, who was an active defender of waters, rivers, forests and lands of the indigenous people as well as the rights of peasants, was killed in March 2016 by a group of Hindus, for organizing a campaign against the project of building Agua Zarka Dam along the sacred Gwalkark river, which affects the rights of indigenous peoples.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In the context, many environmental activists face the risk of detention, arbitrary imprisonment, and torture by different governments. For example, the Iranian government detained 8 environmental activists in Tehran from the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation, a local environmental group[[27]](#footnote-27), while Iranian environmental activist Nilofer Bayani was subjected to at least 1,200 hours of interrogation and torture by the intelligence branch of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to force her confess to charges brought against her, including cooperating with the hostile state of the U.S[[28]](#footnote-28). These activists face the dangers of losing work and dropping out of school as a result of the government's continued repression.[[29]](#footnote-29)

* **Recommendations should be made to States and other stakeholders:**

In sum, it can be said that the international community, with its various bodies and agencies, must take a set of measures to limit the spread of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere to ensure reducing the intensity of carbon emissions and stop floods and hurricanes, causing scarcity of rain and drought and other related phenomena that affect collective behaviors and the way of thinking, which are reflected in their daily life practices, from changing dietary habits, ways to make food and other daily lifestyles, accordingly M**aat for Peace, Development and Human Rights** recommends the following:

* The need for countries to adopt many measures that stabilize the greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and this is achieved by following many things, including the fair application of carbon pricing policies, which is a mechanism that makes companies and individuals bear the consequences of environmental pollution, so these people pay money as a result of carbon dioxide emissions to in what is known as a carbon tax, which forces them to abandon environmental pollution, in addition to relying on ending fossil fuel subsidies and relying on other sources of renewable energy that are sometimes expensive in different countries.[[30]](#footnote-30)
* The necessity of adapting to climate changes in order to implement a flexible food production system in the world, which requires making institutional, technological and economic changes not only in the food-exporting countries but also in the countries that import it, by creating an advanced food storage system that contributes to reducing the damage caused.
* Support regional and international cooperation to develop systems for monitoring and early warning of climate disasters in a manner that contributes to their reduction, while adopting modern technology research that limits various climatic impacts such as the use of geoengineering to create systems in agriculture that contribute to increasing agricultural production and enhancing its utilization.
* The necessity of supporting the traditional orientation methods of distinct cultural societies in facing climate changes and limiting them, such as methods of weather prediction and coverage, building large warehouses for production and building temporary walls on the banks of rivers in order to store water.
* The necessity of stopping the pursuit of environmental activists, by governments, whether by killing, imprisonment, imprisonment or threatening their work.

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