



PALAIS DES NATIONS – 1211, GENEVA 10, SWITZERLAND

6 November 2024

**Open Letter from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Volker Türk, on priorities for human rights-based climate action at the 29th
Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on
Climate Change**

Excellency,

The 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 29) is the second of four pivotal environmental negotiations taking place this year. These negotiations are about our collective future. We are badly behind in our efforts to achieve the goals of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement, and even further behind when it comes to protecting the human rights of people affected by the climate crisis. COP 29 presents a stark choice – between business as usual and our current devastating trajectory for the planet and for humanity, and a pathway towards a rapid, equitable and just transition that upholds human rights. As governments prepare to engage at COP29, I urge you to ensure that human rights inform your negotiations and their outcomes by taking the following steps.

1. Aligning climate commitments with human rights and science

All States are expected to renew their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) by the 30th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC next year. I urge every government to align its climate commitments with its human rights obligations. This requires transformative ambition to keep the 1.5 degree Celsius target within reach, while also being guided by human rights and the latest science including the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. People, particularly those most affected by climate change, must also be meaningfully involved in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and review of NDCs.

2. Enhancing accountability for businesses

Under international human rights law, States have an obligation to take adequate measures to protect people from human rights harms caused by businesses, to hold businesses accountable, and to guarantee access to remedy for victims when such harms occur. This includes human rights harms that result from climate change. Businesses also have responsibilities, including to respect human rights and to provide access to remedy as set out in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (Guiding Principles). I urge you to take effective measures to hold businesses to account for their contributions to climate change, and to ensure access to remedies.

All Permanent Representatives
of Member States and Permanent Observers
of non-Member States to the United Nations Office at Geneva



In addition, human rights safeguards [grounded in the Guiding Principles] must be built into efforts to mobilize private sector finance under the new collective quantified goal on finance and to operationalize carbon markets under Article 6.4 of the Paris Agreement. To advance accountability, the role of businesses, including State-owned businesses, in climate negotiations must be more transparent. Finally, it is well past time we phase out fossil fuels, starting with an equitable and immediate phase out of subsidies and a ban on fossil fuel advertising.

3. Backing climate commitments with adequate human rights-based resource mobilization

At COP29, States have an opportunity to adopt a new collective quantified goal on climate finance. This goal must be dramatically more ambitious than its predecessor [in the order of trillions rather than billions], satisfying actual global needs for climate action, including with respect to mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. Periodic review of the goal will be needed to ensure finance that upholds human rights obligations and that is adequate, effective and accessible to the people and countries that need it most. To do this, my Office urges prioritization of public, grant-based and concessional finance, that takes into account human rights, including gender equality and the rights of people in vulnerable situations; and that is sourced in accordance with the principles of equity, common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities, and polluter pays.

4. Fulfilling the rights of those disproportionately affected by climate change

With many people already impacted by climate change around the world, adaptation and loss and damage are urgent human rights priorities. COP29 represents a critical opportunity for States to ensure adequate resources and attention are paid to these issues, including implementation of the Global Goal on Adaptation, the development of National Adaptation Plans, and the mobilization of resources for loss and damage.

5. Standing up for people's rights to participate, freedom of expression and assembly

Around the world, I have heard growing concerns about crackdowns on speech and activism by environmental human rights defenders, including through prosecution, harassment, unlawful detention and even killings, and about the lack of access to and transparency in climate decision-making. Those standing up for the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment often include Indigenous Peoples, peasants, people of African descent, youth, and local communities. Racism in the environmental sphere increases the risk of environment-related harms, along with exclusion from decision-making, participation, access to information and to justice. I urge you to ensure rights-holders are meaningfully included in environmental decision-making, including at COP29.



Now, more than ever, human rights-based solutions are essential to addressing the climate crisis, paying particular attention to those most impacted by climate change, and demanding that those most responsible take the urgent steps needed to address and remedy the damage being done. My Office is ready to support governments and other actors in this regard. I look forward to our continued engagement.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'V. Türk', is centered on the page.

Volker Türk