**Maat for Peace’ submission on “climate and racial justice”**

**Introduction**

Extreme weather events and environmental degradation pose a widespread threat to human rights worldwide. Increased emissions of greenhouse gases arising from human activity contribute to harmful natural disasters such as droughts, floods, sea-level rise, heat waves, and extreme cold, in addition to the loss of biodiversity and the collapse of ecosystems, affecting the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, including the right to life and the right to access on water and sanitation, the right to food, the right to health, the right to housing, and the right to development.

All human beings are exposed to extreme weather events, but these phenomena affect the most marginalized individuals and groups that suffer from poverty and discrimination. **These groups include refugees, indigenous peoples, people of African and Asian descent, and other ethnic minorities**. Most of them live in areas with high rates of pollution and the spread of toxic chemicals from industries that harm the environment. These areas are known as sacrifice areas, and their representation in various decisions to combat climate change and environmental degradation is ignored. The decision is made by people outside of those communities, even though they are most affected by them. The environmental deterioration related to the high pollution rates and climatic changes in those societies is attributed to racism, discrimination, inequality, and the continuation of colonial domination over them, but in different ways from the past. Therefore, **Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights** discusses in this report the impact of climate change on marginalized groups who suffer from racism and discrimination. It also highlights the continued existence of sacrifice areas in some parts of the world while ignoring the voices of marginalized groups and excluding them from decision-making processes related to combating climate change, eliminating pollution, and improving the ecosystem.

**The disproportionate effects of climate change and environmental degradation on ethnically marginalized groups**

Ethnically marginalized groups of indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, and refugees, who suffer from discrimination in accessing social and economic services, are always the most affected by environmental and climatic extremes, even though they are the most vulnerable in the communities to which they belong. The natural disasters related to extreme climates such as droughts, floods, cyclones, and ocean acidification harmed them and their rights in terms of high levels of poverty, food insecurity, high rates of diseases, destruction of homes, and lack of water resources and quality. If they compare to the other social groups, the same disasters may harm them, but they recover faster.

**At the level of indigenous peoples** who tend to live in marginal and exposed areas due to their lifestyle dependent on land, natural resources, and ecosystems to meet their basic needs and livelihoods, climate changes affect their rights compared to other groups of society. In Canada, climate crises are increasing inequalities between Aboriginal people and other groups; it is difficult to access water resources in light of climate changes comparing with other groups. That harms their economic rights because of their dependence on water to carry out their economic activities such as agriculture***[[1]](#footnote-1)***. Many toxic substances, such as sulfur dioxide harm the **Aamjiwnaang** people of Canada, which may affect their lung and cardiovascular function. That is because they lived near the Chemical Valley area, which has more than 40 factories for chemical materials, which affects their health rights more than the rest of the citizens in Canada. Estimates confirm that GI infection **was 26 times higher in Indigenous communities** than in the rest of Canada, indicating a higher level of waterborne microbes in their supply***[[2]](#footnote-2)***.

In Iraq, the Marsh Arabs suffer from water scarcity due to climatic changes, which affect their agricultural production and threaten their existence. In other social groups, their agricultural production has not been the same affect***[[3]](#footnote-3)***. In the United States of America, indigenous peoples often suffer from environmental racism. The companies take advantage of American land laws and work to establish environmental projects on their lands, which exposes them to pollution and toxic substances more than other groups of society[[4]](#footnote-4). Coastal Native American tribes suffer from ocean acidification, which affects their diet; the government marginalized them and did not address the issue***[[5]](#footnote-5)***.

**At the level of ethnic minorities**, climatic disasters impact them more than other groups of societies due to the distinction they are exposed to when obtaining social and economic services, especially concerning adequate housing and public services. In the United States of America, people of African descent and Asian descent are forced to accept lower-paying jobs while living in very cheap housing and are unfit to receive the consequences of climate change compared to the rest of society, which puts them at risk*[[6]](#footnote-6)*. The storm that hit the US state of Texas in February 2021 exposed inequality among citizens. The most vulnerable and marginalized black and Latino communities faced disproportionate health consequences, losing electricity and heat and struggling to recover financially; their houses were affected more than the rest of the society due to their unpreparedness to deal with climatic changes*[[7]](#footnote-7)*.

People of African descent are three times more likely to die from pollution than the rest because their homes are close to energy-intensive factories; it threatens the environment and their health*[[8]](#footnote-8)*. Cancer threatened more than one million African Americans due to unclean air. Approximately 13.4% of African American children also had asthma, compared to only 7.3% of white children. These are all effects of severe environmental degradation*[[9]](#footnote-9)*. On the other hand, many estimates confirmed that the access of people of African and Asian descent in the United States of America to heat adaptation tools such as air conditioning during severe climatic fluctuations is less than the other citizens. All previous indicators confirm that environmental racism exists in American society*[[10]](#footnote-10)*.

On the other hand, the displaced and refugees in the Syrian camps suffer from difficult humanitarian conditions due to the extreme climatic phenomena that affect them and the lack of the necessary means to deal with it. It leads to the deaths spread due to extreme cold in the winter or the high heat in the summer. In addition, snow storms and rain destroyed the contents of the tents in which a large number of refugee and displaced families live. In January 2022, 15 children died due to the cold, and humanitarian institutions did not provide services that protect these children from extreme climatic changes[[11]](#footnote-11).

**The lack of participation of ethnically marginalized groups in decisions about climate and environmental degradation**

Statistics show that African voices are not well represented in climate peaks, so climate justice for them does not exist[[12]](#footnote-12). On the other hand, there are an estimated 476 million indigenous peoples; there are no groups about them or delegations to represent them in international conferences on combating climate change, even though they are among the groups most affected by it[[13]](#footnote-13). Despite some national practices that included indigenous peoples in the consultations to combat climate change, especially in Canada[[14]](#footnote-14), their representation at the international and national levels is weak in some areas.

**Experiences of environmental racism and communities living in areas of sacrifice**

Many indigenous peoples and ethnically marginalized minorities suffer from pollution and toxic substances in some areas around the world, known as sacrifice areas, with high pollution rates due to industrial activities nearby and inhabited by ethnically marginalized groups. So, their lives are at risk due to the various impacts caused by environmental degradation in those areas. These areas have climatic changes detrimental to them without being prepared to deal with them[[15]](#footnote-15).

Numerous studies and researches reviewed by Maat confirm that these areas are in many countries. In Africa, sacrifice areas are active in many countries, led by the Kabwe region in Zambia; it is considered the most polluted place in the world due to abandoned mining residues and constant pollution. From the waste of open lead mines, despite the cessation of mining activity harmful to the environment in this area, the local communities living there still struggle with the environmental and health effects resulting from lead poisoning, which sometimes leads to death[[16]](#footnote-16). And estimates confirm that more than 95% of children living in that area have high levels of lead in their blood[[17]](#footnote-17).

In Canada, the Chemical Valley in Sarnia, Ontario, contains more than 40 facilities operating in the chemical industries and oil refining, which causes widespread environmental damage. Serious health problems are caused by air pollution and related diseases such as respiratory diseases and asthma, as well as high rates of cancer[[18]](#footnote-18).

In the USA, Crab Alley in Louisiana is an outright threat to the environment because it contains more than 150 chemical plants. The region is inhabited by many ethnic minorities of black skin, who are exposed to rates of disease, especially cancer, higher than the normal rate for the rest of the regions in the United States of America[[19]](#footnote-19).

In Russia, the Norilsk region has become one of the most polluted places on Earth. It suffers from very high levels of air, water, and soil pollution, due to the activities of the Norilsk Nickel Mining Company, which poisoned rivers and destroyed forests, which harms the environment. Estimates show that no industrial company generates as much sulfur dioxide pollution as Norilsk Nickel[[20]](#footnote-20). The most affected communities in this region are the indigenous people of Taimyr, whose members face high rates of respiratory diseases and cancer. That is despite the company's recent efforts in cooperation with many indigenous peoples' organizations to confront the environmental degradation resulting from its activities[[21]](#footnote-21).

**Recommendations**

Wealthy societies will be able to pay money to find solutions to the climate crisis. But poor and marginalized communities from ethnic minorities to refugees and indigenous peoples will continue to suffer. That is why we face the danger of climatic apartheid, which is manifested in inequalities in bearing the consequences of climate change on the one hand and leaving poor and marginalized communities in areas exposed to pollution and environmental degradation on the other. Therefore, Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights recommends the following:-

* The necessity for companies to bear their responsibility in the areas of sacrifice by reducing their activities that pollute the environment and providing more aid to the affected communities.
* The necessity of the marginalized groups' participation in the consultations on combating climate change, especially at the global level.
* The necessity of addressing the aggravation of environmental inequalities while raising the capabilities of marginalized groups to overcome the consequences of climate disasters.
* The need to build early warning systems in areas of marginalized communities to enable them to prepare for climate disasters with the support of developed countries. That is in addition to strengthening the infrastructure of these areas to respond to climate changes effectively.
* The necessity for countries to adopt measures that stabilize the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. That is achieved by the fair application of carbon pricing policies, which is a mechanism to bear companies and individuals due to environmental pollution. So they pay money against the emission of carbon dioxide gas into the air, in what is known as a carbon tax, forcing them to abandon environmental pollution. That is in addition to relying on ending fossil fuel subsidies and relying on other sources of renewable energy, which are sometimes expensive in areas of marginalized groups, especially indigenous peoples.
* The necessity of using technological applications to combat climate change, in particular in highly polluted areas known as sacrificial societies.

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5. RACIAL DISPARITIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE. Princeton Student Climate Initiative. <https://bit.ly/3HlIWis> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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10. How Communities Of Color Are Hurt Most By Climate Change. Fores . <https://bit.ly/3mJ1VK4> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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