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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Future of the right to work in connection with climate change actions, responses and impacts in the context of sustainable and inclusive economies

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 49/11, is based on the panel discussion on the future of the right to work in connection with climate change actions, responses and impacts in the context of sustainable and inclusive economies, which was held on 27 September 2022. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights concludes that climate change has significantly affected the way in which people work. Climate change and climate action are changing economies and the way in which people work. Effective climate change mitigation and adaptation measures are needed, including changes to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. A just transition to a green, human rights economy is the only viable path to limit the impact of the ongoing climate catastrophe and to safeguard human rights, including the right to work.



I. Introduction

1. Pursuant to its resolution 49/11, the Human Rights Council held a panel discussion on the future of the right to work in connection with climate change actions, responses and impacts in the context of sustainable and inclusive economies, on 27 September 2022. The panel discussion consisted of an opening segment, a thematic segment and a brief closing segment. In the same resolution, the Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to submit a report based on the panel discussion.
2. The Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Katharina Stasch, chaired the panel discussion. The Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada al-Nashif, and the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Ahmed Ihab Abdelahad Gamaleldin, made opening remarks.
3. The panel comprised four panellists: Deputy Director-General for Policy, ad interim, of the International Labour Organization, Victor Van Vuuren; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, Ian Fry; Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and climate change high-level champion for the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Mahmoud Mohieldin; and General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, Sharan Burrow.
4. The present report was prepared on the basis of the panel discussion, in the context of a growing body of related research. OHCHR concludes that the ongoing climate crisis threatens all of humanity. It is part of the three planetary crises of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.¹ In its summary for policymakers of the synthesis report of the sixth assessment report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that the crisis demanded deep and rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and the deployment of carbon dioxide removal methods to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions.²
5. Climate change and climate action require changes to the world's economies and the way in which people work. Effective climate action entails coordinated and decisive efforts at the international, national, regional, government and individual levels, including of businesses, to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impact, as well as to promote and protect the right to work in the context of climate change. The only way to limit the adverse effects of climate change is for States, businesses and individuals to take immediate and specific action to fulfil their respective human rights obligations and responsibilities. OHCHR calls upon Governments to adopt economic policies in line with their human rights obligations with respect to climate action, by drastically reducing the greenhouse gas emissions created by work, production and consumption, while promoting a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.³

II. Panel discussion on the future of the right to work in connection with climate change actions, responses and impacts in the context of sustainable and inclusive economies

A. Opening remarks

6. The Deputy High Commissioner noted that the climate crisis necessitated urgent action to transition towards green, sustainable and inclusive economies that would transform the world of work. States' measures to protect the climate would create new jobs in the clean

¹ For the reports of OHCHR on climate change and human rights, see www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change/reports-human-rights-and-climate-change.

² See www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/.

³ See <https://climatepromise.undp.org/research-and-reports/how-just-transition-can-help-deliver-paris-agreement>.

and renewable energy sector, such as in wind and solar energy production, while eliminating others, for example, those in the coal, gas and oil industries. The transition towards green economies would be challenging. It was fundamental to protect workers from unemployment during that transition and to shape the world of work with policies that would uphold human rights standards and give sufficient attention to economic, social and cultural rights. Investing in the public sector and uplifting those who had been marginalized must be a priority. Education played a vital role in achieving decent work for all. States needed to invest more decisively in people's right to education, including life-long learning. They needed to scale up solutions for experimental and practical learning, develop inclusive vocational training, with an emphasis on climate-responsive technology, and establish public-private partnerships for apprenticeship.

7. Women played a critical role in the economy, yet their contributions were often not recognized. Guaranteeing women's rights and ensuring their meaningful participation was key to sustainable transitions and a just future of work. Currently, 740 million women were making their living in the informal economy. Transitioning away from fossil fuel economies, the Deputy High Commissioner suggested, would provide an opportunity to invest in the care sector, an area in which many women worked, in informal labour, with precarious employment status and no access to social insurance benefits. That would offer an effective way to uphold women's right to safe and fair conditions of work, shift focus to collective well-being and strengthen economies without increasing emissions. States should use their maximum available resources to ensure the right to social protection and access to essential services. Social security systems would help to minimize the impact of job losses generated by climate action, creating access to further education and improving labour market opportunities.

8. The Deputy High Commissioner concluded by saying that it was concerning that the energy and inflationary crisis had led several countries to intensify the exploitation of fossil fuels, rather than accelerate the implementation of renewable energies. It was essential that developed countries and the international donor community provided financial and technical support to low-income countries' efforts towards green, sustainable and inclusive economies.

9. Mr. Gamaleldin said that the right to work was not only essential for realizing other human rights, but also an inherent part of human dignity and social justice and essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Climate change posed an existential threat for all and was the challenge of our times. The international community was called upon to meet that challenge collectively, effectively and rapidly. Workers and communities affected by climate change should be covered by social protection and by broader investments aimed at creating economic opportunities, as well as appropriate training and assistance for job seekers, to ensure a just transition.

10. Mr. Gamaleldin said that a just transition involved maximizing the social and economic opportunities of climate action, while minimizing and carefully managing any challenges. A just transition needed to be prioritized by countries and businesses around the globe as a matter of urgency. Given the significance of the environmental and employment challenges, the world would neither have the resources nor the time to address those issues separately or consecutively. Tackling those issues jointly was not an option, but a pressing necessity. As the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change approached, the world had to ensure that the next Conference was an avenue to accomplish the crucially needed progress. He urged all stakeholders to demonstrate the necessary political will to fortify resilience-building, adaptation action and social protection programmes and assist people in the most vulnerable situations.

B. Thematic discussion

11. Mr. Van Vuuren noted that the implications of the climate crisis were being acutely felt across all parts of the world. It was endangering the enjoyment of a host of rights, with particularly severe implications for the right to work. Work was central to the existence of

every individual human being, as well as to the cohesion of societies and the functioning of economies. Work was an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, notably through Sustainable Development Goal 8. In its Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, the International Labour Organization (ILO) had recognized that the world of work was undergoing transformative change and had called for ensuring a just transition to a future of work that contributed to sustainable development.

12. Climate change had a wide range of impacts on the world of work and emerged as one of the greatest threats to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. According to ILO, the equivalent of 80 million full-time jobs could be lost by 2030, because it was too hot to work or because workers had to work at a slower pace. In addition, some measures that were aimed at achieving climate mitigation or adaptation might result in job losses. However, the job losses caused by the effects of climate change far exceeded those linked to ecological transition policies. In fact, those transition policies would come with huge job creation opportunities. According to ILO estimates, 24 million new jobs could be created by 2030, if the Paris Agreement on climate change was implemented. A further 78 million jobs could be created in a transition to a circular economy, and, while shifting to low-carbon and circular economies could result in the loss of some 78 million jobs, there would still be a positive balance of 26 million jobs by 2030. Consequently, it was not action against climate change, but rather inaction, that would destroy jobs and livelihoods at scale.

13. However, Mr. Van Vuuren said, the scale and difficulty of the structural transformations should not be underestimated. Among the challenges was the uneven geographical distribution of job creation and job losses. That was why the notion of a just transition was fundamental to a successful ecological transition. That was also why measures were needed not only to manage the negative social and job outcomes of climate policies, but also to maximize the positive ones. Moreover, a transition to a green economy did not automatically result in inclusive and equitable outcomes and sometimes risked exacerbating existing inequalities, in particular for women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous and tribal peoples or migrant workers. Of the approximately 20 million new jobs expected in sustainable energy transition by 2030, only six million jobs were estimated go to women. However, it was already encouraging to note that the renewable energy sector employed approximately 32 per cent women, compared with 22 per cent in the energy sector.

14. All those complexities meant that addressing inequalities and empowering agents of change was key. Ensuring a just transition for all and promoting and protecting human and labour rights was vital. In 2015, representatives of Governments and workers' and employers' organizations developed guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all. The guidelines represented a policy framework for achieving environmental sustainability with the creation of decent work and the advancement of social justice on the basis of social dialogue and a range of policies.

15. Mr. Van Vuuren noted that the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the right to work, along with the body of international labour standards, were mutually reinforcing. In 2022, the International Labour Conference had adopted a resolution to add the principle of a safe and healthy working environment to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work to protect workers and move towards a human-centred future. A transition to a low-carbon economy, if done justly, provided opportunities for the right to work and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment to be realized together and would secure decent work for all.

16. Mr. Fry said the right to work in connection with climate change was complex. The effects of climate change were forcing many people out of their existing work. That was particularly the case in the agricultural sector. During a visit to Bangladesh, it had become clear to the Special Rapporteur that climate change was having an enormous impact on the right to work. Farmers were being displaced from their land due to climate change induced droughts, floods and storm surge inundation of farmlands. People migrated to cities due the impact of climate change. Many of those people ended up in informal settlements where their rights to water and sanitation, housing and food were severely compromised. Their ability to find meaningful work was limited. The situation was particularly problematic for women and children. That story of displacement, in particular from the agricultural sector, was repeated

throughout the world. Climate change related droughts, floods and severe storms were forcing people from their land and their traditional work practices.

17. Despite those enormous challenges, some civil society organizations were trying to assist communities affected by climate change to rebuild their lives and find necessary alternative employment opportunities. In Bangladesh, the Special Rapporteur had heard of civil society organizations helping to find alternate climate change adaptation strategies, including aboveground vegetable growing, experimenting with more salt resilient food crops and rainwater capture systems to improve access to freshwater. There were many other examples around the globe, although access to adaptation financing was very limited and insufficient to meet global demands.

18. The Special Rapporteur then spoke about the just transition concept, saying that it was well-documented that efforts were being made to transition people working in the fossil fuel industries to green and decent jobs. Most of the work in that area was primarily focused on developed countries. For instance, Germany had created a Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment and Scotland a Just Transition Commission, and the European Union was establishing a Just Transition Mechanism. Despite those initiatives, the fossil fuel industry continued to receive massive subsidies, primarily in tax concessions. The International Monetary Fund estimated that the fossil fuel sector had received \$4.7 trillion in subsidies in 2015. Others placed that subsidy more conservatively at around \$700 billion. Such subsidies entrenched the industry in a position that contradicted the obligations for all countries to reduce their emissions. Furthermore, corporations were using the Energy Charter Treaty to lock in fossil fuel contracts. Such actions were completely irresponsible. In addition, strong workers' lobbies based on the fossil fuel industry were placing significant obstacles to countries transitioning to renewable energy economies. That was particularly the case in Australia, where fossil fuel unions used electoral lobbying to undermine efforts to transition towards a greener economy.

19. For developing countries, little attention had been given to finding just transition policies. Developing countries faced the dual challenge of providing energy justice for their population and at the same time finding self-sufficiency and renewable energy options to meet their obligations under the Paris Agreement. Many developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, were lacking the necessary technology to transition to a renewable energy economy and provide the necessary safety nets for workers who might be compelled to move out of the fossil fuel industry. Workers should be provided with skills training as a means of seeking alternative employment opportunities, in particular in the renewable energy sector. Little appeared to be happening, as the corporate sector had few obligations in developing countries and Governments had limited economic flexibility to support such actions. An exception was the promise of a large amount of money pledged to South Africa at the United Nations climate change conference in 2021.

20. The Special Rapporteur concluded by saying that climate change was having an enormous impact on the economies of many developing countries. That in turn affected the opportunities of millions of people to the right to work. The effects of climate change on those workers were not of their own making. The major greenhouse gas producing countries were responsible. It was time that the polluters paid for the loss and damage that they were causing. Too many people were placed in destitute situations and denied their basic human rights because of the effects of climate change. The international community, in particular the major greenhouse gas emitting economies, had to realize their responsibility and support those that were least able to find alternative work opportunities due to the actions of the major polluters. For that reason, there was an urgent need to establish a loss and damage fund to address some of those issues.

21. Mr. Mohieldin said that, when addressing the adverse effects of climate change, it was imperative to adopt a holistic approach within a more comprehensive agenda for sustainable development. It was not realistic to have climate action without considering the Sustainable Development Goals. After all, climate action was the thirteenth of a more comprehensive action plan of 17 Goals, including Goal 8, on decent work and economic growth. A just transition to a low emissions and climate resilient economic model meant ensuring that climate action protected the planet, the people and the economy. The process of phasing in low emission technology and phasing down high emission ones had to meet the rights and

needs of all those affected by such a transition, including with regard to their right to work. It was necessary to achieve more progress on addressing the vulnerability of labour markets in carbon-intensive sectors facing transition risks. Jobs and well-being should be at the centre of the transition. Ensuring that all workforces found secure pathways in those sectoral redeployments was a key element of a successful just transition. While some sectors and communities might experience direct job losses due to the transition to low-carbon economies, in the aggregate, more jobs could be created by the development of green sectors.

22. Mr. Mohieldin then mentioned two initiatives. He noted that, on the road to the twenty-seventh Conference of the Parties, the presidency, United Nations regional commissions and climate champions had launched a series of five regional forums on climate initiatives to finance climate action and the Sustainable Development Goals, which had brought together key stakeholders from the public and private sectors, with the aim of scaling up investment and finance to deliver on climate ambitions and development goals. More than 100 projects had been presented. Climate projects could also be implemented at the local level to address the challenges of poverty and unemployment. For that purpose, the Government of Egypt had launched the national initiative for green and smart projects as a pioneering initiative in the areas of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, addressing the effects of climate change and implementing digital transformation.

23. Ms. Burrow said that there was no greater crisis than that created by our misuse of fossil fuels. She noted that the crisis was a crisis of inequality. The climate emergency required financing for those who did not create the emergency, but who had been suffering from the impact. Working people were suffering everywhere, and major reforms were needed to build a just and sustainable future. The pandemic had exposed the fault lines. During the pandemic, people working in essential services went to work every day so that the rest of us could survive, but they did so on very low pay. Nurses, service workers, transport workers – all those essential workers were not only paid little, but had nearly no health and safety protection.

24. Working people and their families were not able to afford the current price spikes caused by the abhorrent Russian invasion of Ukraine. Facing those cost-of-living crises, international solutions were key. Climate change did not know borders. Solutions had to be shared, such as the technology and the financing for mitigating and adapting to climate change, but we also needed to acknowledge that a just transition meant that people had a right to design their own futures. Unions had to be at the table negotiating for displaced workers, securing pensions for older workers and income support, skills support and redeployment support for younger workers.

25. In the ensuing debate,⁴ participants said that climate change presented an existential threat, which was further exacerbated in the context of vulnerable countries. The representative of Australia noted that climate change would directly affect the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, including livelihoods and the right to work, in particular in the Pacific region, where leaders had declared a climate emergency and reaffirmed that climate change remained the single greatest threat to livelihoods. The representative of Costa Rica noted that ecosystem degradation, water scarcity, droughts, forest fires, ocean warming

⁴ Contributions were received from: Australia, Bhutan, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, European Union, Germany, Honduras, Iraq, Libya, Lithuania, on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Nepal, Poland, Portugal, on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Senegal, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community, Tunisia, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Arab Emirates, United Nations Development Programme and Viet Nam, on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Contributions were also received from: Centre Europe-tiers monde, China Association for Science and Technology, FIAN International, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Make Mothers Matter, Conselho Federal da Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil and Shaanxi Patriotic Volunteers Association. Due to time limitation, not all delegates were given the floor. All contributions received by the secretariat are available at <http://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/51/Pages/Statements.aspx?SessionId=61&MeetingDate=27/09/2022%2000%3a00%3a00>.

and the increasing frequency and strength of climate events were some of the effects of climate change that negatively affected the working conditions and livelihoods of millions of people. The representatives of Maldives and the Marshall Islands pointed to the special vulnerability of small island developing States, as the fragile land and marine ecosystems of those States and their related economic activities were sensitive to invasive globally emitted contaminants and overexploitation, while storm surges and sea level rise degraded fresh groundwater resources and salinized agricultural land. The representatives stressed that 85 per cent of the land of the Cook Islands, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands was situated less than five metres above sea level, inexorably forcing the displacement of entire populations, assuming that the temperature rise would continue.

26. The representative of Viet Nam, speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, said that climate change might render entire regions unproductive and make workplaces too hot for work, thereby leading to climate-induced migration, the proliferation of informal work and unemployment. Those impacts were only expected to become more pronounced in the coming decades. Lithuania, speaking on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries, noted that, by 2030, 80 million jobs, including those in essential services, might be lost due to rising temperatures. The representative of Mauritania added that overheating at work posed a risk to occupational health; consequently, by 2030, West Africa was expected to lose about 5 per cent of working hours or about nine million jobs.

27. The representative of the European Union agreed that rising temperatures and heatwaves threatened workplace safety of workers working both outdoors and indoors. Workers in agriculture and forestry were highly exposed to the impact of rising global temperatures. Changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather events disrupted farming cycles and seriously affected the income of farmers and their families. The representative of Centre Europe-tiers monde added that the climate crisis was increasingly affecting rural areas and the production of subsistence crops. The increase of severe drought, fires and floods affected living conditions and the right to work of peasants and other people working in rural areas. Peasants had always been able to build resilient food systems in the face of climatic events. For instance, the representative of Centre Europe-tiers monde added, after Hurricane Ike hit Cuba, more than 90 per cent of the monocultures were affected compared with less than 50 per cent of the agroecological farms. Most of those farms – about 90 per cent – recovered within two months. Similarly, in the United States of America, during periods of drought, yields of agroecological crops of maize and soybeans were 31 per cent higher than those of industrial crops. The representative of Iraq noted that water scarcity and drought were among the most important consequences of climate change, as many Iraqi agricultural communities had been forced to leave their lands, especially in wetlands, where there had been a loss of biodiversity and a collapse in ecosystems that had harmed the health of people living in those places, violating their rights to life, decent living and health.

28. The representative of Maldives noted the special vulnerability of small island developing States and noted that Maldives had implemented a gender action plan that year that was aimed at improving the participation and representation of women in planning, decision-making and the implementation of climate action plans, so that women benefitted equally from related employment and training opportunities.

29. Speakers said that the right to work and climate change were inextricably interconnected and that the right to work was an essential human right. The representative of Senegal noted that the integration and consideration of climate issues in all areas of human rights was now an imperative for development. Global warming would lead to exacerbating poverty and an increase in job insecurity. Combating climate change and environmental degradation contributed to ensuring a healthier world where everyone could work safely and with dignity. Special emphasis needed to be placed on promoting decent work for those most affected by climate change. The representative of the Conselho Federal da Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil noted that economic productivity needed to be dissociated from environmental degradation and the irregular and irresponsible use of natural resources.

30. Several representatives noted that their countries were moving to support the development of new clean energy industries and the decarbonization of existing industries. The representative of Costa Rica emphasized that a paradigm shift in production and consumption models was necessary to be able to face the planetary crisis. Participants noted

that the transition had to be managed carefully. As the representative of Ecuador noted, it had to be socially just, inclusive and sustainable. The representative of Poland agreed, saying that it was of the utmost importance to guide climate action by the concept of a just transition – a concept that was a true realization of the human rights-based approach. The representative of Trinidad and Tobago, speaking on behalf of States members of the Caribbean Community, said that it was imperative to consider new and creative ways to limit job loss associated with climate action, so that the fulfilment of those commitments did not produce increased economic and social vulnerability, especially among the most marginalized.

31. Participants agreed that countries needed to progress towards a green economy, in accordance with the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, with ambitious mitigation and adaptation actions always being guided by a human rights and gender-sensitive approach in order to create inclusive and enabling environments for all members of society. The representative of Nepal added that people affected by climate change had to be provided with social protection and that new employment opportunities had to be created for them. In addition, the representative of the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted that a gender-just transition had to address the fact that, across the world, the majority of women were still working in the informal economy, in small enterprises or in low-level, low-income employment. If gender inequality was not addressed adequately, women and girls, specifically those living in marginalized and vulnerable situations, faced a risk of exacerbated exclusion and precarious working conditions, as they tended to perform much of the transition-critical work, such as sustainable agriculture and the preservation of natural resources and ecosystems.

32. The representative of Make Mothers Matter noted that it was time for a redefinition of work as a holistic concept that combined both paid and unpaid work, and called upon States to acknowledge that the multiple crises that the world faced were rooted in an economic system that had failed to recognize, value, protect and invest in what's essential to our well-being – care and support for caregivers, to seize the opportunity of the multiple crises to transform the economic systems at every level, moving beyond the “gross domestic product growth” narratives and short-term profit making, and to repurpose the economy as a caring economy, one that was human-centred and served the well-being of both people and our planet.

33. Focusing on farm workers and the agricultural sector, the representative of Centre Europe-tiers monde suggested that, according to article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, adopted in 2018, States had the obligation to take appropriate measures to establish and promote sustainable food systems that were sufficiently labour intensive to contribute to the creation of decent jobs. The representative of FIAN International added that a just transition to agroecology that was in line with human rights and interpreted in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas was key to ensuring effective responses to climate change that protected the right to work for rural and urban workers.

34. The representative of Libya noted the importance of working on developing the social protection system, upgrading social insurance and developing vocational training and technical education programmes to keep pace with the new specializations required by the labour market due to climate change, while noting that countries in conflict were among the most vulnerable to the damage of the climate change crisis due to their limited capacity to adapt to it.

35. The representative of Bhutan noted that climate change did not respect national boundaries. All countries had to contribute to remain under a 1.5°C temperature rise and international cooperation and solidarity under international frameworks was essential to reaching that goal. The representative of Iraq asked the international community to provide technical assistance to the least developed countries and small countries that lacked the necessary resources to implement adaptation plans, action programmes and effective strategies to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement to mitigate and reduce the negative impact of climate change. The representative of Samoa urged the international community to share knowledge and improve data collection and technology transfers, as well as access to technical and vocation education and training, to realize a just transition, in particular for island nations. The representative of the United Arab Emirates also stressed the importance

of strengthening international cooperation and noted that the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which would be hosted by the United Arab Emirates in 2023, would provide a great opportunity to renew international commitments to joint action to develop and implement innovative solutions to protect the right to work and create frameworks to secure promising prospects for work for future generations.

36. The representative of Portugal, speaking on behalf of Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, noted that the universal periodic review mechanism could play a major role in promoting the right to work in the context of climate change and the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and was a decisive tool for advancing the right to work.

III. Analysis of the impact of climate change on the right to work

37. Human activities, through the emission of greenhouse gases, have caused climate change. Global greenhouse gas emissions continue to increase, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned. The Panel further noted that the increase arose from unsustainable energy use, land use and land use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production.⁵

38. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the top 10 emitters (China, United States of America, India, Russian Federation, Japan, Brazil, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Germany and Mexico) jointly emitted 65.1 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions in 2018.⁶ The per capita level of emissions varied, from the high per capita level in countries such as Qatar, Palau and Bahrain, of 66.23, 58.27 and 37.81 tons of greenhouse gas emissions per capita, to 0.55 and 0.54 tons of greenhouse gas emissions per capita in Burundi and Rwanda.⁷

39. The fossil fuel sector is by far the largest contributor to global climate change, accounting for over 75 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90 per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions.⁸ Emissions reductions in carbon dioxide from fossil fuels and industrial processes have been less than emissions increases from rising global activity levels in industry, energy supply, transport, agriculture and buildings.⁹

40. Climate change negatively affects the effective enjoyment of human rights, including the right to work. Climate change has and will have an enormous impact on employment, jobs, the labour market and the world of work. All economic sectors will be affected by climate change, however, some economic sectors, including the agricultural, fisheries and tourism sectors, are more sensitive to climate change and weather-related events.¹⁰

41. Over 1 billion people are employed in the agricultural sector, which is the second greatest source of employment worldwide after the services sector.¹¹ In developing countries, a much larger part of the population tends to work in this sector, and, in general, 40 per cent of the sector's workforce are women.¹² The effects of climate change, including increased temperatures, rising sea levels, extreme weather events, intensified droughts and flooding, variability in precipitation and rainfall patterns, land degradation, water scarcity and the salinization of freshwater, will affect agriculture and agriculture workers,¹³ resulting in low

⁵ See www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/.

⁶ United Nations Environment Programme, "State of the climate", Climate Action Note, 9 November 2021. Available from www.unep.org/explore-topics/climate-action/what-we-do/climate-action-note/state-of-climate.html.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change.

⁹ See www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/.

¹⁰ Lene Olsen, "The employment effects of climate change and climate change responses: a role for International Labour Standards?", Global Union Research Network discussion paper, No. 12 (Geneva, ILO, 2009), p. 4.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

crop yields, low crop production income and decreased work productivity due to heat stress. The sector is known for its poor working conditions, low pay, income and work insecurity and poverty.¹⁴ Climate change will additionally burden workers in the sector, in particular small-scale subsistence farmers.¹⁵ According to recent research, high temperatures reduce productivity and induce farmers to increase the use of land and to change their crop mix during the agricultural season. This reaction attenuates the negative effects of high temperatures on output, but exacerbates the drop in yields.¹⁶

42. The fishing sector, together with the forestry sector, encompasses about 5 per cent of the global workforce.¹⁷ Changing ocean currents and ocean acidification due to climate change affects fishery cycles, making stocks less predictable.¹⁸ Overexploitation of these natural resources beyond their maximum sustainability may lead to the collapse of entire industries.¹⁹ Given that coastal fishing relies directly on the biodiversity of the ocean and its capacity to renew fish stocks, better and sustainable management of ocean biodiversity is important for the continuation of employment in this sector and for food security.

43. The tourism industry is one of the most human resource intensive industries and is a major generator of jobs in many economies.²⁰ The industry creates more than 230 million direct and indirect jobs, representing some 8 per cent of the global workforce.²¹ Between 60 and 70 per cent of the workforce in the tourism sector are women.²² Rising sea levels have a direct impact on coastal areas and islands. Some coastal communities are already being relocated because of climate change, and some islands will be uninhabitable by 2050, with further displacement following. The effect on the life of the populations concerned, including on the labour market of those islands, is enormous.²³ The same holds true for mountainous regions, which are climbing and winter destinations. The skiing industry, as well as expeditions to mountains, is greatly affected by the ensuing decrease of snow in lower altitudes and the melting of glaciers in higher altitudes.²⁴ In addition, mountain regions, such as the Himalayas and the Tibetan plateau, play a pivotal role in monsoonal circulations. The effects of climate change on mountain regions could alter monsoon flow and intensify monsoon precipitation, affecting agricultural conditions and tourism in the region.²⁵ People employed in these sectors are increasingly losing their jobs. Connected industries, such as hotels, have been affected, which has an impact on the right to work of employees in the tourism sector and will increase in the future, if specific actions are not taken immediately.²⁶ This will have a significant impact in lower- and middle-income countries whose economies are heavily dependent on tourism.²⁷

44. Although the magnitude may differ, the impact of climate change on other sectors is also significant. Extreme weather events accompanied by heatwaves have a direct impact on the health and productivity of workers. The increasing prevalence of heat stress reduces

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See [A/HRC/53/47](#).

¹⁶ See Fernando M. Aragón, Francisco Oteiza and Juan Pablo Rud, "Climate change and agriculture: subsistence farmers' response to extreme heat", *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, vol. 13, No. 1.

¹⁷ Guillermo Montt, Federico Fraga and Marek Harsdorff, "The future of work in a changing natural environment: climate change, degradation and sustainability", ILO Future of Work Research Papers, No. 4 (Geneva, ILO, 2019), p. 7.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Olsen, "The employment effects of climate change", p. 5.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁵ See Thomas Kohler, André Wehrli and Matthias Jurek, eds., *Mountains and Climate Change: A Global Concern*. Sustainable Mountain Development Series. (Bern, Centre for Development and Environment, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and Geographica Bernensia, 2014).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Robert Steiger and others, "Impacts of climate change on mountain tourism: a review", *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19 August 2022.

worker performance. Slowing down is a natural defence mechanism against heat exposure.²⁸ According to ILO, estimates based on labour force trends suggest that, by 2030, the percentage of total hours of work lost owing to heat stress may rise to 2 per cent, a labour productivity loss equivalent to 72 million full-time jobs.²⁹

45. During this century, a significant proportion of the more than 4 billion people who live in areas particularly affected by climate change could experience negative health and safety effects, as well as reduced work capacity, because of climate change.³⁰ On the Arabian Peninsula, the deadly effect of heat stress on migrant workers during the preparation of the World Cup of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association held in Qatar has been widely reported and studied.³¹ The World Health Organization has concluded that we do not need to look at the future to see the health impact of climate change. Heat exposure is already killing people in countries like Kuwait. Migrant workers are an especially vulnerable group in the region.³² Indeed, agricultural workers, construction workers and others who do strenuous labour are among the most vulnerable to heat. In addition, indoor workplaces with insufficient cooling or air filtration pose problems. Workers may be exposed to various illnesses, such as chronic kidney disease, disfiguring injuries associated with sweaty, slippery hands or even death from heat stroke, a heart attack or more than two dozen other potentially deadly outcomes linked to heat stress.³³ Apart from heatwaves, air pollution has a devastating effect on the health of employees; indeed, many of the sources of outdoor air pollution are also sources of high carbon dioxide emissions.³⁴

46. The effects of climate change on human rights and the right to work are a direct consequence of operating fossil fuel economies, which are firing up the climate catastrophe while amassing wealth and political influence, which are often used to grow even further wealth and political influence, at the cost of undermining the level of enjoyment of human rights by almost everyone. Moving to a green economy through a just transition provides an opportunity to mitigate climate change while moving towards more just societies.

47. Mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change is imperative and has a direct impact on the world of work. ILO has emphasized that there is potential for a just transition to create new job opportunities, resulting in a net gain in jobs, in particular in the renewable energy sector, while ensuring that workers in fossil fuel industries are not left behind. According to ILO, a transition to a green economy has the potential to create millions of new jobs globally, in particular in sectors such as renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable transport.³⁵ ILO states that if a just transition is pursued, the negative employment effects of decarbonization can be minimized and the positive employment effects can be harnessed. In the guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all, ILO outlines the key principles and steps for a just transition, which include the creation of decent work and green jobs. A just transition can promote decent work opportunities, in particular for groups that have historically been excluded from the labour market.³⁶

48. Investment in climate action is creating jobs in green frontier technology. Electric vehicles, solar and wind energy and green hydrogen are expected to reach a market value of

²⁸ ILO, “The employment impact of climate change adaptation: input document for the G20 Climate Sustainability Working Group” (2018), p. 15.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

³¹ See Bandana Pradhan and others. “Heat stress impacts on cardiac mortality in Nepali migrant workers in Qatar”, *Cardiology*, vol. 143, Nos. 1 and 2 (2019), pp. 37–48.

³² See World Health Organization (WHO), “Migrant workers bear the brunt of extreme heat in Kuwait: case study on climate change and heat”, 10 August 2021. Available at www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/migrant-workers-bear-brunt-extreme-heat-kuwait.

³³ See, for example, ILO, “The employment impact of climate change adaptation”.

³⁴ See www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/air-quality-and-health/health-impacts/climate-impacts-of-air-pollution.

³⁵ See ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with Jobs* (Geneva, 2018). Available at www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_628654/lang--en/index.htm.

³⁶ See www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf.

\$2.1 trillion in 2030 – four times greater than their value today.³⁷ The solar industry in the United States is, for example, creating jobs 20 times faster than the overall economy, while the world’s largest renewable energy job market is in China, with 3.4 million working in the industry.³⁸ Job creation is indeed led by the renewable energy sector, among others.³⁹ In 2021, renewable energy jobs reached 12.7 million globally.⁴⁰ Job losses are concentrated in petroleum refining (loss of around 1.6 million jobs), crude petroleum extraction (around 1.4 million), production of electricity by coal (around 0.8 million) and the mining of coal (around 0.7 million).⁴¹

49. Of the 163 industries analysed by ILO, only 14 had employment losses of more than 10,000 jobs.⁴² The focalization of employment losses in a few industries is due to the fact that reaching the 2°C goal requires the downsizing of carbon-intensive industries, which are, in general, very capital-intensive and source input from other capital-intensive industries; a large percentage reduction in output in these industries leads to comparatively small reductions in employment. Job creation and the effects may be unequal across regions. ILO estimates that there will be net job creation in the Americas, Asia and the Pacific region and Europe, and,⁴³ in contrast, there will be net job losses in the Middle East and Africa.⁴⁴

50. Very few developing countries have the capacities needed to take advantage of frontier technology, which will generate new jobs, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.⁴⁵ In contrast, they will be the most severely affected by accelerating climate change and, even when excluding China from the calculation, are likely to emit more than half the annual global total of greenhouse gas emissions as early as 2030.⁴⁶ Developing countries should not be considered as a monolithic group. They have different, although overlapping, interests, given their circumstances. Small islands, for example, have temporarily responded to natural disasters by borrowing to rebuild and protect the livelihoods of their citizens, but, as the scale and intensity of climate change accelerates, their fiscal flexibility is fast eroding.⁴⁷

51. Since job gains and losses are not distributed equally across countries and regions, international solidarity and cooperation will be essential. States should support each other in furthering a just transition to a green economy that ensures environmental sustainability, decent work, social inclusion and poverty eradication in the context of a human rights economy.

52. A human rights economy is based on the premise that better integration of human rights principles and obligations and commitment to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals into economic policies will yield better outcomes for people and the planet. Considering people’s needs and the adverse effects of economic activities on the human right to a healthy environment is key to fighting climate change. A human rights economy guides economic policies, trade policies, investment decisions, consumer choices and business models by aligning them with human rights to measurably enhance the

³⁷ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), “Green technologies: coherent policy action needed for developing countries to reap the benefits”, 16 March 2023. Available at <http://unctad.org/news/green-technologies-coherent-policy-action-needed-developing-countries-reap-benefits>.

³⁸ See Sharan Burrow, “How will climate change affect jobs?”, World Economic Forum, 1 December 2015.

³⁹ Montt, Fraga and Harsdorff, “The future of work in a changing natural environment”, p. 15.

⁴⁰ See International Renewable Energy Agency and ILO, *Renewable Energy and Jobs: Annual Review 2022* (Abu Dhabi and Geneva, 2022).

⁴¹ Montt, Fraga and Harsdorff, “The future of work in a changing natural environment”, p. 15.

⁴² ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018*.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ UNCTAD, *Technology and Innovation Report 2023: Opening Green Windows* (United Nations publication, 2023).

⁴⁶ See Amar Bhattacharya, Homi Kharas, and John W. McArthur, “Developing countries are key to climate action”, The Brookings Institution, 3 March 2023.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

outcomes for all. By focusing economic policies on people and the planet, a human rights economy is a valuable tool for overcoming the climate crisis and guiding climate action.

IV. Conclusions

53. Climate change is a planetary emergency. Immediate mitigation measures are needed to safeguard the planet and human rights, including the right to work. States and businesses must mitigate climate change by addressing unsustainable production and consumption patterns. A just transition to a green, human rights economy that aligns human rights and the economy and is centred on people and the planet must be prioritized.

54. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the importance of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all. Uncontrolled climate change will compromise the ability of countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 8 and could reverse gains made in economic prosperity, social progress and poverty reduction. Sectors that are particularly vulnerable to climate change are among the biggest global employers and of particular importance to women, young people and others who may be in vulnerable situations.

55. Rights-based climate action requires a fundamental restructuring of the energy sector, phasing out fossil fuels and ensuring access to safe and affordable renewable energy.

56. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions implies shifts being made within and between economic sectors. A global transition towards a low-carbon and sustainable economy will result in a net job gain.

57. To benefit from the green technology revolution, proactive industrial, innovation and energy policies advancing green technology are needed in all countries, in particular developing countries. International solidarity and cooperation will be key to achieving this goal. All countries must work together to ensure the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights, including in those countries most affected and least responsible for climate change.

58. In its Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, ILO recognized that the world of work was undergoing transformative change and called for ensuring a just transition to a future of work that contributed to sustainable development. The ILO guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all and the human rights framework remain the basis for just transition policies.

V. Recommendations

59. To transition to a human rights economy, States should align economic policies with their human rights obligations, including to respect, protect and fulfil the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. They, as well as businesses, must aim at drastically reducing the greenhouse gas emissions created by work, production and consumption, while promoting a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.

60. States, in particular those harbouring large-scale fossil fuel sectors, should integrate the true cost of those business activities into its price, terminate the climate-endangering exploitation of fossil fuels and their support for the fossil fuel industry, including new exploration and exploitation, subsidies and tax breaks, and accelerate the transition to renewable energies, as the Secretary-General has urged them to do. They should implement the recommendations on curbing the emissions from the fossil fuel industry contained in the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change and OHCHR.

61. States should use their maximum available resources to ensure the right to social protection and access to essential services. Social security systems can help to support a just transition and to minimize the impact of job losses, by creating access to continuing education, improving labour market opportunities and transitioning individuals into newly created sustainable jobs.
62. States should invest more in the right to education, including in lifelong learning. They must scale up solutions for experimental and practical learning, develop inclusive vocational training and establish public-private partnerships for apprenticeships.
63. Current and historical greenhouse gas emitting economies, industries and businesses should provide financial support and technical assistance to those affected by their actions, in particular those countries that lack the necessary resources to implement a just transition, including through climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.
64. Combating climate change can only be done jointly and in solidarity. All States should therefore share knowledge and benefits from scientific developments in green technology, as well as access to education and training, to realize a global just transition and to enable all countries to fulfil their human rights obligations, while mitigating and adapting to climate change.
65. In implementing a just transition, States must pay special care in addressing the concerns of people in vulnerable situations and to ensure their participation in the decision-making process. Special attention should also be paid to vulnerable regions, such as coastal regions or small island developing States.
66. Governments must align human rights, economic, trade, investment, environmental, science, technology, innovation and industrial policies and prioritize sustainable investments that can shift consumer demand towards greener goods and boost investment in research and development.
67. States should reform their agricultural sector and take measures to establish and promote local, sustainable food systems, to transition to agroecology and to safeguard the rights of people in vulnerable situations, in particular women and children.
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