Breakfast debate – Human rights and climate change  
5 March, 2015

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Two great issues, two great challenges for today’s world bring us together here today - Human Rights and Climate Change.

This week, we have been listening to statements made in the Human Rights Council High Level Segment of the dire state of affairs of human rights around the world. We have been reminded of numerous situations of abuse and violation of human rights. And in response we have cried out for the need for further strengthening of this central pillar of the United Nations and, as such, of the international community. We have heard, and added our voice, to the pledge and promise to do more, in particular for those most vulnerable.

Likewise, on the road to COP21 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that will be hosted in Paris, it has been made abundantly clear that we are reaching a point of no return. Changes in climate have caused impacts on natural and human systems on all continents and oceans, and will continue to occur even if drastic measures are taken today. We, the international community, have taken stock of the urgency of the matter, and in response have made pledges and promises. The new legally binding instrument should provide a clear roadmap for this generation and the next to tackle the impacts of climate change.

These two great issues, these two great challenges are clearly interwoven. The negative impact of climate change on the effective enjoyment of human rights has been reiterated time and time again in the international scenario. The decisions of the Human Rights Council and of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, attest to this fact. In this sense, the linkages between human rights and climate change have been proven beyond any doubt. Numerous inventories of said impacts are available to exemplify the precarious situation of many.
Costa Rica is proud to be an active member of the Climate Vulnerable Forum. It was born of the determination of low-emitting countries acutely vulnerable to climate change to show moral leadership on climate change through actions as well as words. It has been pioneer in having many of its members voluntarily commit to achieving carbon neutrality – as is the case with Costa Rica, with the goal set for 2021, the 200th anniversary of our independence.

CVF is, hence, a platform that brings together countries with high vulnerability to the impacts and effects of climate change with a view to share knowledge, exchange best practices and lead by example, in tackling this, the most daunting challenge of our times.

At this point you are probably thinking – I did not come out today to hear the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica tell me these things. Where is his insight? What is his added value to this discussion? Well. I do not want to disappoint so here is goes …

Dialogue. Frank and open dialogue. Dialogue at all levels. It is necessary at the international level – tomorrow in the Human Rights Council within the panels established by resolution 26/27, is a fine example. In this regard, allow me to acknowledge the leadership role assumed by Bangladesh and the Philippines. We should strive for a dialogue that moves the issue forward. The Human Rights Council has held numerous activities to address the issue. Important conclusions have been reached, and provided guidance for our work. We have also outgrown many of them. It is time to be bold and discuss what are the next steps and not content ourselves with repeating the outcome of previous events. It is time to recognize the concerns and positions of stakeholders, take stock and propose further course of action.

Dialogue is also necessary at the national level. It is particularly important for governments to have a meaningful internal conversation. The different ministries, agencies or bureaux that deal with human rights and with the environmental issues need to sit down and exchange knowledge, best practices and, hopefully, generate coherent policy. It is a well-known fact that in governments, in developing and developed nations, big and small, governments are not quite as efficient as we would have hoped. Sometimes

1 Malé Declaration, Malé, Maldives, 10 November 2009.
the left hand is not aware of what the right hand is doing. Let us end that, or at least minimize it. Let us make it a priority to enhance communication regarding this specific issue. Ministries for Foreign Affairs, because of their nature, are well placed to facilitate this exchange.

As previously noted above, the international community has taken stock of the negative impact of climate change on the effective enjoyment of human rights. Inversely, it has affirmed that human rights obligations, standards and principles have the potential to inform and strengthen international, regional and national policy making in the area of climate change. Yet this is not happening in a systematic way.

In this sense, allow me to call your attention to the Geneva Pledge for Human Rights in Climate Action. This initiative was announced last 13 February during the closing of the eight part of the second session of the ADP. In signing up to the Pledge, States make a voluntary non-binding commitment to enable meaningful collaboration between national representatives in the processes of the HRC and of UNFCCC to increase understanding on how human rights obligations inform climate action. They further commit to facilitate the exchange of expertise and best practices between human rights and climate experts at a national level. The Pledge was launched with the support of 18 countries from all regions of the world and having different levels of development. The Geneva Pledge focuses on national actions, where we have added control. Some may see it as anodyne, but on further examination realize that there is a clear need for this. We invite all States to sign up to the Geneva Pledge or, if you are not into that sort of thing, act according to its spirit.

An enhanced dialogue will allow for improved key climate policy decisions by considering human rights implications, improved climate response design and implementation, and strengthened community resilience.

Regarding climate policy decisions, for instance, a decision on whether or not to strengthen the global temperature goal of all climate policy – now 2 degrees (but potentially 1.5 degrees) - is usefully informed by human rights perspectives. For example, would 1.5 degrees have a greater positive impact on human rights enjoyment than 2.0 degrees?

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2 A/HRC/Res/26/27
Vis-à-vis **climate response design and implementation**: When effectively upheld, procedural rights promote multi-stakeholder and community involvement in the design and implementation processes of actions responding to climate change. This invariably results in more equitable and more effective actions addressing climate change and is therefore worthwhile promoting. Additionally, procedural rights help to avoid human rights violations linked to efforts to address climate change through international implementation mechanisms, such as the Clean Development Mechanism or REDD+.

Apropos **community resilience**: Human rights also have the potential to form part of an adaptation response to climate change. Countries with strong human rights protections and high capacity to ensure human rights enjoyment, are better equipped to withstand adverse effects of climate change. Therefore, promoting strong human rights protection and capacity is complementary to building resilience to changes in the climate.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Certainly there is much that can be done to facilitate the strengthening of national policies through an interdisciplinary approach to tackling climate change via actions respectful of human rights.

The enhancement of national dialogue can also be reflected in the manner in which States fulfill their international obligations and commitments. National reporting in the UN human rights system and national reporting within the UNFCCC is a prime example of this. These spaces serve to inform on internal situation of our own State and to share our views on the global outlook, and also serve to highlight priorities and areas of interest. Let’s make it a priority to report on the human rights and climate change intersections, on our strengths and weaknesses, on the opportunities and threats. This, I believe, will pave the way for international cooperation with a purpose.

If we are convinced that the issue at hand is an important one, that the challenges it presents require we pay special attention to it, let’s act with that focus in mind. Let us bring it to the forefront of our agenda, let us seize any opportunity to raise awareness and generate support.
In conclusion, I urge you, no, I challenge you to take action to further the debate of human rights and climate change – take concrete national actions, propose innovative avenues of discussion, let’s be bold and lead by example – let’s move out from the spiral dialogue, from the comfort zone we dwell in, and take this discussion to the next level.

Thank you.