



STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. MOHAMED NASHEED – CVF THEMATIC AMBASSADOR ON
AMBITION

Human Rights Council 48th Session Side Event

Addressing the adverse impact of Climate Change on the full and effective enjoyment of
human rights

15 September 2021

I am here as Ambassador of the Climate Vulnerable Forum chaired by H.E. Sheikh Hasina.

We have a Manifesto and part of it related to the Council and this session.

As we all know, climate change is a human rights issue.

How could it not be?

After all, as the recent IPCC report makes clear, climate change is already upon us.

And many of the weather disasters that we see – from floods, to wildfires, to coral bleaching, to typhoons – have been made much worse by climate change.

A more extreme and unpredictable climate is directly threatening a number of fundamental rights:

... the right to life, the right to food, the right to a livelihood, the right to development, to name a few.

I believe that the creation of a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change is of utmost importance.

I want to specifically focus on this issue in my remarks now.

When you think about it, it is amazing that this position has not already been created. The need for it is so obvious.

I think you may be aware or will hear it today.

We have an important vote coming up, on whether to establish this Rapporteur.

I really hope that all countries vote in favour.

I would be very disappointed to see anyone abstain, or vote against.

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The Human Rights Council is designed to protect human rights.

And climate change is the biggest threat to human rights this century.

I think the Council would lose a lot of respect and credibility if it decides to ignore climate change, and refuses to create the position of a Rapporteur.

We need to protect our rights.

In this regard, I am heartened that the European Union recently announced it would support the creation of a Special Rapporteur. This is a very welcome move.

Europe is the cradle of human rights, so it is good that they have properly aligned themselves on this issue.

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So, what might a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change do?

Coming from a climate vulnerable country, I believe the Special Rapporteur could play an extremely useful role.

Every time there is a big weather-related disaster – perhaps a super typhoon, a flood, or a terrible coral bleaching event – the Rapporteur could visit that country and issue a statement from the United Nations which, if appropriate, could assign blame for the disaster.

And some of that blame would surely go to the countries that have pumped the sky full of poison gasses, and continue to do so even when they know they are ruining the planet.

Countries might be to blame for a climate disaster, for example, if they have not aligned their emissions targets to 1.5 degrees.

These are the countries responsible – and culpable – for the climate-induced tragedies happening elsewhere on the planet.

And perhaps the countries who keep promising money to poor, vulnerable countries for adaptation – and yet that money never seems to come – also share some of the blame.

Especially if the damage caused by a weather event is made much worse, because the vulnerable country was unable to protect itself.

Of course, assigning blame is a tricky thing.

Perhaps the giant flood was really caused because a dictator chopped down all the forests.

Or perhaps the tidal surge was made much worse because a regime removed all the mangrove forests and turned them into prawn farms.

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Or perhaps the government poured concrete all over the coral reefs, leaving them more vulnerable to rising sea temperatures.

The Special Rapporteur would need to get to the bottom of this.

They would be to have a look at the situation, and see which factors caused the catastrophe.

But I don't think this sort of analysis would be impossible.

Special Rapporteurs do this sort of analysis all the time.

As some of you may know, as well as someone who talks a lot about climate change, I also talk a lot about the need for human rights and democracy.

This has often got me into a lot of trouble in The Maldives, where I spent most of the 20s and 30s in and out of jail.

In the dark days of our dictatorship in the Maldives, which lasted 30 years, the UN often sent a Special Rapporteur to have a look at what was going on, to assess the situation, and to assign blame.

If I had been accused of terrorism, for example, and sent to prison, the UN would come and have a look.

And the Special Rapporteur would see if I was really a terrorist, or if in fact I had simply called for democratic reform.

The reports the UN Special Rapporteur issued were extremely important and helpful.

They were the view of a respected UN office.

We in the democracy movement, whose rights were being trampled on, used these reports as a way to pressure the regime to relent, and allow for freedom and democracy.

I see a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change doing a similar thing.

They would protect human rights from abuses – protect the most vulnerable, who would gain a new advocate.

Human rights abuses caused by the weather.

They could assign blame.

And their reports could be a useful tool that people can use to pressure governments to mend their ways.

Perhaps a government needs to spend their adaptation money in a better way.

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Perhaps another government needs to reduce its emissions.

If climate change is one of the biggest threats to human rights, climate action therefore must be one of the biggest opportunities to safeguard those rights.

So let's see the creation of a Special Rapporteur as a positive thing.

Something that could help to unleash a new wave of climate change.

Action on adaptation.

And action on emissions.

And ultimately, action on human rights.

Who in their right mind would not want to support this?

I thank you.

ENDS