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Human Rights in Climate Pact Under Fire Norway, Saudis, US Blocking Strong Position

A handful of countries were blocking human rights references in important parts of the climate change agreement as ministers gathered in Paris on December 7, 2015 to continue climate change negotiations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said today.

Norway, Saudi Arabia and the United States have been criticized by some countries and nongovernmental organizations for seeking to eliminate key references to rights in the document. Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and the Philippines have advocated including human rights language.

“The draft text released Saturday sets out a commitment by countries to respect human rights and gender equality in all their actions related to climate change,” said Joe Amon, health and human rights director at Human Rights Watch. “However, some countries are seeking to remove these references, and the strong emphasis in the document on human rights, from Article 2, the purpose section of the agreement.”

The important role of respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights in relation to the impact of climate change on vulnerable populations has been increasingly [recognized](#) in international climate change negotiations. At the negotiations, groups including trade unions and coalitions representing indigenous peoples, women, youth and people in small island nations have been particularly vocal in calling for strong rights language in the treaty.

But countries including Norway, Saudi Arabia and the United States are opposing including the reference to human rights in Article 2, though it was included in previously negotiated versions of the agreement emerging from meetings in Geneva and Bonn. Countries that support including the language say it would guide countries toward an effective response to climate change.

Nongovernmental groups have pointed out that every country in the climate negotiations already is bound by at least one human rights treaty, and the inclusion of strong rights language in the purpose of the agreement reinforces the understanding that addressing climate change is not only about protecting the planet, but also the people living on it. Including rights in Article 2, they say, would help ensure that human rights are taken into account in carrying out the agreement.

“Norway, Saudi Arabia, United States are at risk of being labelled ‘human rights deniers’ in addressing climate change,” said Ashfaq Khalfan, law and policy programme director at Amnesty International. “Norway is claiming to be a bridge builder on the issue of human rights, but rather seems intent on blowing up an essential bridge between environmental protection and human rights.”

Several countries from all regions have been speaking out for attention to human rights, in particular Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and the Philippines. In the negotiations, delegates from a number of countries have emphasized that including human rights language reflects core principles for mitigating and adapting to climate change, and provides guidance to governments on their obligations to ensure that human rights are protected in carrying out the agreement.

They have said that human rights is essential to the success of the agreement and should therefore be included in Article 2. The current draft also emphasizes ensuring gender equality, food security, intergenerational equity, the integrity of natural ecosystems, and a just transition of the workforce.

The current text in Article 2.2 reads as follows: “This Agreement shall be implemented on the basis of equity and science, and in accordance with the principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances, and on the basis of respect for human rights and the promotion of gender equality [and the right of peoples under occupation].”

John Knox, the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights and the environment, has also underscored the obligations of countries to address the human rights aspects of climate change.

“It is now beyond debate that climate change threatens the enjoyment of a vast range of human rights,” Knox said on December 3rd. “Moreover, it is inherently discriminatory, harming most those who have contributed least to the problem.”

More details on positions of the opponents is below.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are members of the [Human Rights and Climate Change Working Group](#).

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Opponents' Positions

After facing pressure from nongovernmental groups, **Norway** released a [statement](#) claiming to support including human rights in the main section of the pact, but not in Article 2. The statement, however, does not identify where it should be included, and it is nearly too late

to include such a reference elsewhere that would reflect its relevance to all aspects of climate change.

The **United States** has spoken in favor of human rights language but has opposed the reference to human rights in the purpose of the agreement, diminishing the importance of a central role of respect for human rights in the response to climate change.

Saudi Arabia has said that the reference to human rights in Article 2 should be removed if a reference to “the right of peoples under occupation” is not included in the same sentence. But ensuring that human rights are respected would encompass the rights of all, including people under occupation as well as all disadvantaged groups.

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