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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

**Joint written statement* submitted by Brahma Kumaris
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The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[01 February 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

2021: The year to act on climate change and human rights, and to recognize the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all

The climate crisis constitutes one of humanity's greatest challenges, contributing both directly and indirectly to human rights violations around the world. A key role of the United Nations and the Human Rights Council in the twenty-first century must be to stand with the vulnerable segments of society. The time to act is now.

At the end of 2019, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, on behalf of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), called upon the Human Rights Council to establish a new Special Procedures mandate on Human Rights and Climate Change. During the 44th session of the Human Rights Council in 2020, Member States of the CVF and Pacific Island States reiterated this call for the mandate to be instituted without delay to assist, identify and better protect those most affected by the impacts of the climate crisis.

These calls echo demands made by civil society organisations, including the Geneva Interfaith Forum (1) which has been calling for the establishment of a mandate for a new Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change since 2010.

While acknowledging the Council's efforts to address the adverse impacts of climate change on human rights through various mechanisms and activities, it currently lacks the means to address the climate crisis in a comprehensive way, including clarifying States' legal obligations or providing effective support to States and affected communities.

As faith groups we express deep concern over the suffering of both people and Mother Earth as a result of the intertwined climate and global health emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing patterns of inequalities. There is now an increased urgency for the Council to address the climate crisis in a more permanent, wide and sustained manner, to protect people from its adverse impacts, promote the respect for and protection of human rights in all climate responses, and ensure access to justice and empowerment.

In particular, a new Special Procedures mandate would ensure a long-term focus on climate change issues at the Human Rights Council and bring a human rights dimension into climate change policies. It would contribute to enhancing complementarity between the climate change legal framework and the international human rights regime. Here, independent human rights monitoring bodies can play a valuable and more important role. Moreover, the creation of a new mandate would strongly convey the message that human rights must be integral to climate change discussions.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the whole of humanity in various ways, it brings to light our collective responsibility to take action now to ensure that we do not return to behaviors that leave the vast majority of the human family behind, and that we forge a healthy future.

Resolutely adopting a human rights-based approach to the intersecting environmental, climate and COVID-19 crises is key to secure the respect for the dignity of life, particularly for the segments of the population who are already in vulnerable situations and feel more acutely the impacts of these multifaceted crises.

The COVID-19 crisis also confirms the need to recognize the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all. A healthy environment is essential for human health, and for human societies to flourish. More than one hundred and fifty states recognize a right to a healthy environment in their constitution and laws. It is time to recognize the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all, and the Human Rights Council should be the frontrunner of this global recognition as this is also crucial to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals towards 2030.

Adopting a rights-based approach is key to “making peace with nature” which is “the defining task of the twenty-first century” as the UN Secretary Antonio Guterres recently declared.(2)

(1) This statement is submitted on behalf of the Geneva Interfaith Forum (GIF) on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights, which is composed of the following organizations: Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, Franciscans International, Dominicans for Justice and Peace, The Lutheran World Federation and Soka Gakkai International.

(2) See <https://unfccc.int/news/un-secretary-general-making-peace-with-nature-is-the-defining-task-of-the-21st-century>