

FIDH calls for systemic change in the face of the planetary crisis

Towards a human rights economy as the new model for a rights-based just transition

The world is gripped by an **unprecedented climate crisis**, largely caused by reliance on fossil fuels and rooted in an extractivist economic model underpinned by systemic injustices and the exploitation of people and nature.

There is therefore an **imperative need to accelerate the decarbonisation of economies** to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and ensure that the global temperature increase never exceeds 1.5°C so as to not jeopardise the survival, security, and rights of billions of people.

The recent advisory opinion by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has stated it clearly: **climate action is not a choice, but a legal obligation – and part and parcel of the right to a healthy environment**. States must act now to protect present and future generations from the impacts of the environmental and climate crisis.

In this context, taking note of the Annex on the widespread, serious human rights implications of the triple planetary crisis, the International Federation for Human Rights urgently calls for **a just transition as a series of context-dependent, whole-of-society and multisectoral pathways driven by a vision to shift away from an unjust economic system**.

This new paradigm means moving towards an environmentally safe space that does not overshoot planetary boundaries and simultaneously puts all its resources towards the realisation of human rights and dignity.

We also join the global call for an **immediate, time-bound and just phaseout of fossil fuels**, which includes the elimination of all fossil fuel subsidies and of public and private investments that undermine environmental sustainability and human rights.

All the actors involved need to enact pathways that uphold all human rights, including the rights to health, to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, to clean water, to food, and to an adequate standard of living.

As we already stated at FIDH's Congress in Paris in 2022, **nature needs to be recognised as a subject of rights**, including through a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Nature.

We particularly stress the need for **human rights obligations, standards and principles to systematically inform and guide all transition pathways**, with the following as a foundation:

- procedural justice, with guarantees to enforce the right to access to information and public participation of all parts of society and to secure the needs and leadership of rights-holders and communities;
- redistributive justice, ensuring the redistribution of power, resources and opportunities among and within communities;
- restorative justice, with strong accountability mechanisms to secure effective remedies for all victims of violations and abuses committed both by states and non-state actors;
- equality and non-discrimination, *de jure* and *de facto*, to reverse and prevent replication of systemic injustices, including against groups in situations of marginalisation and/or poverty;
- the principles of "polluter pays" and "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" to

- address historical patterns, including in Nationally Determined Contributions.
- the principles of mobilisation of maximum available resources and non-regression;
 - intergenerational equity for present and future generations.

In this scenario, we also emphasise the need to **reject all forms of militarisation, conflict, occupation, and neocolonialism** that endanger universal peace and human rights while also contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and predation on natural resources.

The countries which are historically responsible for emissions have to **step up their international cooperation** towards least-responsible countries through needs-based and non-conditional finance to support the fight against climate change.

But **companies and investors** also have an enormous responsibility in enabling the climate crisis. We therefore reiterate the need to accelerate the **adoption at international level of a legally binding instrument** that obliges companies, banks and investors to conduct due diligence and play their part in the transition, and provides for efficient enforcement mechanisms and guarantees to hold them fully accountable when they fail to do so.

We need **climate solutions that align with human rights and are led by communities**, avoiding market-driven options that perpetuate injustices and replicate a neocolonial system. Solutions, including the recourse for instance to renewable energies, must protect, conserve, restore, and sustainably manage ecosystems in ways that durably address social, economic and environmental challenges while simultaneously benefiting nature's inherent rights.

Furthermore, it is fundamental that just transition pathways recognise and value the ancestral and present knowledge, cultural practices, and stewardship role of **Indigenous People and Peasant communities** in protecting ecosystems and long-term transitions.

For this reason, we renew our appeal to **respect, protect and fulfil Indigenous Peoples' and Peasant communities' rights**, their Free, Prior and Informed Consent, and their right to self-determination, land and resources.

We also strongly condemn states and non-state actors' attempts at stigmatisation, criminalisation, harassment, violence, arbitrary detention, and any other **measures targeting environmental and human rights defenders** whose vital work advances just transitions.

States and companies need to stand with human rights defenders and communities through **legal safeguards and enabling conditions** for the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, including regarding environmental protest.

A systemic transformation will only be possible if we switch to a **«human rights economy»** that does not put value on economic growth, but on advancing the effective realisation of all human rights and eradicating inequalities and socio-economic exclusion. Such an economy will redirect all policy decisions, frameworks and budget decisions to place the well-being and self-determination of people, communities and the planet at the heart of economic policies, trade agreements, investment decisions, consumer choices, and business models.

In this respect, it is crucial to **reform the international financial architecture** to align it with the human rights framework and democratise the representation of marginalised countries and communities in financial decision-making.

Debt justice measures like debt relief, restructuring, and forgiveness for the most affected countries, need to be adopted, providing them with the capacity to fulfil human rights and finance climate action.

One additional option is to **design progressive tax systems and measures against tax evasion**, as well as the reform of global tax rules to increase the resources governments can mobilise for the transition.

The just transition is also a labour transition. We need to ensure that it respects, protects and fulfils workers' rights, ensures decent work for all, and promotes effective social dialogue at all stages. The distinct challenges faced by workers in carbon-intensive industries, new sectors emerging from the transition, and the informal economy need to

be duly taken into account. Strong frameworks for workers' protection need to be urgently established.

In this sense, we support **«triple dividend measures»** that reduce the environmental footprint, create decent jobs accessible to all, and provide affordable goods and services for low-income households. We also support accessible, good-quality and sustainable **social protection systems and public services to leave no one behind**, aimed at poverty reduction and social inclusion.

Finally, just transition policies and programmes must fully address the gender dimensions of environmental, labour and social challenges and opportunities, enacting **gender-responsive policies**. They also have to recognise **adequate care as a right as well as a common and shared responsibility**; recognise all forms of care work as productive and valuable work; create adequate conditions to enable and reward care work; guarantee representation of caregivers' and care receivers' voices; and invest in good-quality and public care infrastructure.

All these measures are necessary for the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and full compliance with all conventions, treaties, frameworks, and multilateral agreements adopted within the United Nations framework to address the triple planetary crisis – among them, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Annex

A crisis of exploitation and extractivism

The current reality is one of deeply intertwined and mutually exacerbating crises. The triple planetary crisis of climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, and pollution constituting one element of such a «polycrisis». It finds its roots in an economic system that prioritises economic growth and capital accumulation and that is grounded in large-scale extraction and exploitation of nature, human labour, and social inequities, particularly affecting women, Indigenous Peoples, and groups in situations of marginalisation.

This system leads to the transgression of all planetary boundaries and perpetuates historical and structural injustices often exacerbated by colonial legacies. Additionally, it has exposed countries and communities least responsible for the climate crisis to increased vulnerability, further deepening systemic injustices.

Concerningly, instead of shifting away from unsustainable practices, we are witnessing an intensification of extractivism and an escalating race for critical minerals and natural resources. This is driven in large part by the growing demands of sectors such as the automotive industry (including electric vehicles), the arms and defence sector, and the digital economy (including data infrastructure and cloud computing).

Countries aim to secure privileged access to resources through a growing number of free trade and investor protection agreements while resisting the establishment of binding obligations to protect human rights and the environment. Policy space for environmental and social standards is constrained by these agreements through discriminatory provisions that favour investors at the detriment of populations, such as investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms, stabilisation clauses, and trade disciplines.

While business actors are responsible for a sizeable contribution to climate breakdown, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses, including on an extraterritorial scale, the legal framework has proved ineffective in preventing or reducing business abuses; and corporate capture of regulatory spaces remains.

An immediate transition away from an economy relying on the extraction, production, and consumption of fossil fuels is urgently required to address the climate crisis and its impacts on the enjoyment of human rights. There is an urgent need for a just transition, shifting to a human rights economy that support the fulfilment of basic human needs and ecological integrity within planetary limits. International cooperation, climate finance, technology transfers, debt relief, and trade-related measures may assist in this goal.

The extent of environmental overshoot requires a reduction in the ecological footprint from major polluters, lowering

environmental pressures and inequalities while ensuring well-being, social justice and human rights for all.

A matter of debt justice

The global debt crisis has significantly hampered the ability of many countries — particularly those least responsible for historical greenhouse gas emissions — to respond to climate-induced disasters. 93% of the countries most vulnerable to climate impacts are in debt distress or at significant risk thereof, with such distress expected to worsen as the frequency of climate-induced disasters increases and puts pressure on borrowing costs.

Moreover, the international financial architecture has increasingly shifted from its original purpose to a model heavily reliant on the financialisation and capitalisation of debt — including the expansion of private bond markets and debt instruments for climate finance. This limits countries' sovereignty and makes debt instruments less adaptable to their development and environmental priorities. Furthermore, this trend, in combination with structural gaps and a lack of transparency, contributes to unjust lending practices that disproportionately affect low-income countries and hinder their shift towards regenerative and environmentally sustainable economies.

The need to reject false solutions

Current climate and environmental action has relied on "false solutions" often amounting to mere greenwashing that give an appearance of meaningful climate action while actually functioning to delay effective policies to address the crisis's root causes. False solutions are based on a narrative that mobilises the concepts of "transition" and "nature-based solutions", even though affected communities are excluded from such projects and their environmental impacts are not managed.

Governments and businesses often co-opt the multifaceted concept of «just transition» as a rhetorical device to indicate actions, policies or projects which, while supposed to tackle climate change, are already resulting in human rights violations. These violations might skyrocket as efforts to decarbonise the economy gain speed. All of these are occurring without changing the baseline model of economic growth or preventing climate breakdown from worsening.

Geopolitical and neocolonial trends

The extraction and trade of minerals employed in decarbonisation policies, such as renewable energy projects in their current design, is at the centre of intensifying geopolitical tensions and conflicts.

The presence in fragile states of minerals used in decarbonisation policies like EV batteries and digitalisation, coupled with expected increases in demand for these minerals in the decades to come, point to the emergence of a number of potential hotspots for neocolonial extraction, social unrest and deepening inequalities in areas where these reserves are located.

There is a serious risk of predatory control over these resources by armed groups or military pressures by states to secure access, including through occupation and increased militarisation.

Indigenous Peoples' and Peasant communities' rights

Local communities, Peasants, and Indigenous Peoples have a critical role in developing and implementing long-term, sustainable, and effective solutions to the planetary crisis.

Extraction activities, mono-crop plantations, construction of mega-dams, large-scale wind and solar infrastructure, and other projects and activities in their current corporate-oriented design are often carried out on Indigenous Peoples' territories and Peasants' lands without their consent. This activity exposes them to increased human rights violations, land grabbing, environmental degradation, and water depletion and contamination.

69% of minerals and metals projects linked to decarbonisation of the energy sector – such as renewable projects – are located on or near Indigenous Peoples' or Peasants' lands, two groups whose land and collective rights are protected by international instruments. Therefore, it is crucial for respecting their rights to ensure Free, Prior and Informed Consent regarding any project affecting these lands or territories.

The necessity to better protect environmental and human rights defenders

Affected communities and environmental and human rights defenders face heightened reprisals, shrinking civic space, criminalisation, strategic litigation against public participation, violence and harassment from both governments and non-governmental actors. They are attacked for denouncing how the triple planetary crisis, extractivism, unsustainable human activities, and false solutions are affecting communities and ecosystems. Such a crackdown on freedom of association and expression undermines mechanisms for both accountability and public participation around environmental issues.

Particularly in supply chains linked to the energy transition (e.g. renewables, EV batteries), the requirements for meaningful engagement of affected communities, effective protection of human rights, and human rights and environmental due diligence are often ignored.

Human rights violations are exacerbated by other intersecting forms of marginalisation and exclusion, closed civic space, and oppressive regimes.

The case for a just labour transition

The climate crisis is posing serious threats to the safety and health of workers worldwide, while also leading to growing loss of employment and income insecurity. At the same time, policy responses to climate change imply important structural transformations that, if not human rights-based, risk leading to and aggravating labour rights violations. It can also multiply all forms of discrimination and cause losses of livelihoods and employment.

The transition to fossil-free, environmentally and socially sustainable economies can become a strong driver of job creation and upgrading, social justice, and poverty eradication. However, that can only happen if the labour transition is properly managed with the full engagement of governments, workers, trade unions, and human rights defenders.

Intersectional concerns

People in poverty are less able to protect themselves and recover from the effects of the triple planetary crisis due to their vulnerable socio-economic situation. Many mitigation and adaptation policies tend to benefit the more affluent groups due to their higher financial resources, their ability to cover any upfront costs for adaptation, and their greater representation in debates and initiatives around the transition.

The current economic system also depends on the exploitation, invisibilisation, and lack of recognition of care work. By care work, we design the ensemble of paid and unpaid activities – both direct and indirect – that produce, sustain and provide for human life and the environment. A majority of care work, particularly unpaid one, is performed by women and girls, mostly from marginalised groups. Intersecting inequalities heavily condition the distribution of and access to care services, impacting the rights of both caregivers and care receivers. In this context, the triple planetary crisis exacerbates such care duties, including those linked to environmental care, and the related human rights violations.

Avenues for systemic change grounded in human rights

Keeping in mind all of the above, it is urgent now more than ever to ensure human rights guide the transition processes, ensuring that communities affected by the crisis are at the centre of decision-making and that adequate reparations for past harms are integrated into policy frameworks.

The human rights framework with its agreements, obligations, standards and principles can play a transformative role, providing a solid foundation for guiding and ensuring that no one is left behind throughout the transition process.

Moreover, FIDH already affirmed in its 2022 Congress resolution that nature must be recognised as a subject of rights independently from its use to humankind, since ecosystems and natural communities have the right to exist and be preserved and restored. It also recognised the clear interconnection and interdependence between the environment and human rights.

In the context of discussions around systemic changes, the «human rights economy» has been proposed as a paradigm shift away from existing growth-oriented considerations. The foundations of such an economy are detailed in the resolution Calling for systemic change in the face of the planetary crisis: Towards a human rights economy as new model for a rights-based just transition.