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GANHRI
Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions

OPEN LETTER TO COP31

From climate commitments to human rights-based implementation

Dear Heads of Delegation,

The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), bringing together 119 National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) from all regions, calls on States Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement to make COP31 a turning point for human rights-based climate action. Climate commitments must now translate into effective protection for people, their lives and their rights.

Climate action must deliver measurable reductions in emissions and protect human rights from the harms caused by climate change. It must also respect the rights of people affected by measures taken in response.

Those facing the greatest risks must receive timely support for adaptation and disaster risk reduction. They must also be able to participate meaningfully in decisions that shape their lives.

These efforts must protect present generations while safeguarding the needs and interests of future generations.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), in its advisory opinion on climate change, clarified that States' human rights obligations require them to protect the climate system, including through measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. It affirmed that States must take their human rights obligations into account when implementing their climate obligations, and their climate obligations into account when implementing their human rights obligations. The Court also recognised that the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is essential to the enjoyment of other human rights.

Parties must comply with these obligations in the decisions reached in Antalya and in the laws, budgets and policies through which they implement them.

NHRIs bring independent legal expertise on States' human rights obligations and evidence of the harm that climate change causes to people and communities.

We encourage delegations to engage with NHRIs ahead of COP31 to inform negotiating positions, during COP31 to help shape decisions that protect and fulfil human rights, and after COP31 to support and monitor implementation. NHRIs can also help enable the meaningful participation of affected communities, particularly those at risk of exclusion, while preserving opportunities for them to speak for themselves.

GANHRI urges Parties to pursue five priorities at COP31:

1. Implement stronger mitigation commitments through rights-based laws and policies.

States' human rights obligations require effective action to mitigate climate change. The ICJ, regional human rights courts and UN treaty bodies have clarified this duty.

We call on Parties to keep the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C goal within reach.[1]

Nationally determined contributions must reflect each Party's highest possible ambition and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities in light of different national circumstances.

We encourage Parties to translate these contributions into effective laws, policies and budgets informed by the best available science.

These measures need clear timelines for carbon neutrality, intermediate emissions reduction targets and pathways, and public accountability mechanisms.

Action today must avoid placing disproportionate burdens on younger and future generations. Targets need regular updating in light of scientific evidence, alongside public reporting on progress. Decisions on energy, land use, food systems, transport and industry must take human rights obligations into account. The transition away from fossil fuels must respect and protect human rights and ensure meaningful participation. It must also support workers and affected communities, guided by equality and non-discrimination.

2. Deliver climate finance that reaches people and communities.

As the ICJ confirmed, developed country Parties have a legal duty to provide finance to support mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. This duty forms part of international cooperation, which must be pursued in good faith and with due diligence.

We call on Parties to deliver accessible, predictable and effective support for mitigation, adaptation and for responding to loss and damage, including for small island developing States.

Finance must reach those who need it most. Transparent arrangements, meaningful community participation and effective safeguards can help ensure that resources protect rights, with access to remedies where harm occurs. Alongside climate finance, accountability remains essential: States responsible for breaches of their climate obligations owe full reparation for harm caused by those breaches, where the legal requirements for State responsibility and causation are met.

[1] See UNEP, "Emissions Gap Report 2026: The Point of Return," October 2026. The report finds that global warming is likely to temporarily exceed 1.5°C and sets out pathways to limit the magnitude and duration of any overshoot and return to 1.5°C by the end of the century.

3. Make adaptation and responses to loss and damage responsive to lived realities.

Progress on the global goal on adaptation and national adaptation plans should be measured against the fulfilment of human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. Policies should address risks to rights such as the rights to health, housing, food, water, culture and freedom of movement, and integrate human rights standards as benchmarks for implementation.

Responses to loss and damage must also consider harms that cannot readily be restored, including displacement and the loss of cultural heritage or connections to land.

We call on Parties to involve groups in vulnerable situations in setting priorities, designing measures and reviewing their effectiveness.

4. Ensure a human rights-based just transition.

Work under the just transition programme should help Parties address both the opportunities and the risks of economic change. Climate and industrial policies should protect decent work, access to affordable energy and public services, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

As climate change increasingly drives forced displacement and migration, addressing the situation of migrants, refugees and displaced persons must remain a key priority. A poorly managed transition risks deepening existing inequalities and exacerbating the vulnerabilities of people on the move. It is therefore essential to ensure a just and inclusive transition, grounded in human rights, that addresses their specific protection needs and leaves no one behind.

We call on Parties to ensure that just transition measures take account of the distinct impacts of climate change and climate responses on women and girls, children and young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, Indigenous Peoples and others who face discrimination or exclusion.

Human rights due diligence, consultation and effective remedies are essential where public or private activities may cause harm.

5. Protect participation, civic space and independent scrutiny.

People must be able to obtain information, participate meaningfully and seek justice in decisions about climate action. Environmental human rights defenders must be able to work without threats or reprisals and with effective protection.

We call on Parties, the host country and the COP31 leadership to support safe and inclusive participation throughout the conference and in national follow-up.

Decision-making processes should include mechanisms to assess and represent the needs and interests of younger and future generations, including through intergenerational impact assessments and independent oversight. Governments should enable independent NHRIs, civil society and affected communities to contribute evidence, monitor implementation and have their recommendations considered.

The second global stocktake offers an opportunity to examine whether climate action is working for people, as well as whether collective progress is sufficient.

We call on Parties to draw on independent national evidence, including from NHRIs, when assessing implementation and identifying gaps.

COP31's emphasis on moving from commitments to delivery will be meaningful only if progress can be scrutinised and adjusted in light of its effects on human rights.

GANHRI, Regional Networks and member NHRIs stand ready to work with Parties, affected communities, civil society and United Nations partners to support ambitious, accountable and human rights-based climate action. We urge Heads of Delegation to carry this commitment through the negotiations in Antalya and into implementation at home.

The views expressed are those of GANHRI and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union.

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