



## **Oxfam Ireland's submission to the Civil Society Cross Sectoral Steering Group's response to Ireland's second Universal Periodic Review Cycle**

### **Climate Change and Climate Justice**

Climate change has begun and will continue to undermine human rights on an unprecedented scale across the world. International human-rights law states that, '*In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence*<sup>1</sup>.' But – as the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has documented in detail – rich countries' continued excessive greenhouse-gas emissions are depriving millions of people of the very water, soil, and land on which they subsist.

In 1992, Ireland committed to return their annual emissions to 1990 levels by 2000. However, by 2005 we had allowed our collective emissions to rise more than 15% above 1990 levels<sup>2</sup>. In failing to tackle climate change with urgency Ireland is effectively complicit in eroding the human rights of millions of the world's poorest people. Continued excessive greenhouse-gas emissions primarily from industrialised nations are – with scientific certainty – creating floods, droughts, hurricanes, sea-level rise, and seasonal unpredictability<sup>3</sup>.

### **Climate Change and Human Rights**

Oxfam believes that realising human rights is essential to lift people out of poverty and injustice. Our staff and local partners work with communities in over 100 countries, and are increasingly witnessing the devastating effects of more frequent and severe climatic events on poor people's prospects for development. Due to excessive greenhouse-gas emissions produced primarily by rich countries, development gains made in recent years are actually being reversed. Speaking at the United Nations Human Rights Council's Annual Discussion on Human Rights and Climate Change in March 2015<sup>4</sup>, former Irish president and previous UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson stated that those most vulnerable to climate change were populations that were already in vulnerable situations owing to factors such as geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status and disability.

According to the IPCC, climate change could halve yields from rain-fed crops in parts of Africa as early as 2020, and put 50 million more people worldwide at risk of hunger. Almost half a million people today live on islands that are threatened with extinction by sea-level rise, and up to one billion people could face water shortages in Asia by 2050 due to melting glaciers. These impacts are likely to lead to mass migration across borders, and increase conflict related to resource scarcity. Millions of people – especially in developing countries – are now highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and are losing the rainfall, crop land, biodiversity, and seasonal predictability that they depend on for their rights to life, security, food, shelter, health, and culture. The 2015 Joint statement by UN Special Procedures on the occasion of World Environment Day states that "a

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<sup>1</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 1.2, and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 1.2.

<sup>2</sup> Sustainable Energy Ireland, 2006 [http://www.seai.ie/Publications/Statistics\\_Publications/Archived\\_Reports/Energy\\_in\\_Irl\\_1990-2005\\_Final\\_Nov06\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.seai.ie/Publications/Statistics_Publications/Archived_Reports/Energy_in_Irl_1990-2005_Final_Nov06_WEB.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> IPCC, 2014. [https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5\\_SYR\\_FINAL\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5_SYR_FINAL_SPM.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> OHCHR, 2015 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15658&LangID=E>



*human rights perspective to climate change not only clarifies what is at stake; it also helps to ensure that responses are coherent, effective and responsive to the concerns of those most affected.<sup>5</sup>*

### Importance of International Cooperation for Climate Justice

In 1992, countries signed an international treaty, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to acknowledge the impacts of human activity on the climate and set out a decisive plan on how to prevent further temperature increases and deal with the inevitable consequences of these. However, by 1995 it was clear that the emission reductions proposed in the Convention were not sufficient to deal with the increasing threat of climate change and in 1997 the Kyoto Protocol was adopted. This was a legally binding commitment by developed countries to reduce their emissions according to agreed targets.

In 2010, governments worldwide agreed that emissions need to be reduced so that global temperature increases are limited to below 2 degrees Celsius. This has also been reiterated on an EU level. However the International Energy Agency warned in June of this year that global temperatures could jump by as much as 4.3 degrees by the end of the century if more ambitious targets were not adopted<sup>6</sup>.

In February 2015 Ireland was one of 18 countries who signed the Geneva Pledge on Human Rights and Climate Action<sup>7</sup>. The pledge is a voluntary initiative undertaken by countries to recognise the injustice faced by the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world who are hit the hardest by the impacts of climate change. By signing the Geneva Pledge, Ireland has committed to incorporating human rights knowledge and practice into climate change policies at a national level and at an international level, through collaboration with representatives of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the processes of the Human Rights Council<sup>8</sup>.

Continued failure to meet the targets set out in these international commitments will have devastating consequences for our planet. Climate change is an intrinsically complex problem that has impacts not only for the environment, but other global issues such as poverty, economic development, food security, conflict and natural disasters. There is an urgent need for a concerted international effort to take immediate action and reducing emissions must lie the heart of the global response to climate change.

### Relevance for Ireland

Ireland is one of the 195 Parties to the UNFCCC and one of the 192 Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. Furthermore, under the European Commission's Climate and Energy Package, Ireland is required to deliver a 20% reduction in non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. However despite these high profile commitments, Ireland is currently failing to meet the agreed targets to reduce emissions.

According to the latest EU Commission assessment, Ireland will fail to meet the EU 2020 target of a 20% reduction in emissions compared to 1990. This is mainly due to increasing emissions from the

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<sup>5</sup>OHCHR, 2015 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16049&LangID=E>

<sup>6</sup> The Irish Times, 2015. <http://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/ireland-to-secure-lower-emissions-target-in-eu-deal-1.2252070>

<sup>7</sup>The Geneva Pledge, 2015. [http://www.fes.de/GPol/klimanewsletter/Genf\\_2015-02-27\\_The-Geneva-Pledge\\_13022015-final.pdf](http://www.fes.de/GPol/klimanewsletter/Genf_2015-02-27_The-Geneva-Pledge_13022015-final.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> MRFCJ, 2015 <http://www.mrfci.org/news/geneva-pledge-human-rights.html>



agricultural and transport sectors. Agriculture in particular currently comprises 32%<sup>9</sup> of all our emissions. A further anticipated increase in animal numbers within the dairy and meat sectors will no doubt continue to contribute to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In total, agriculture emissions are projected to increase by 12% by 2020 on current levels<sup>10</sup>, unless climate smart measures are put in place with immediate effect.

Reducing Ireland's reliance on fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy such as solar or wind is also imperative in ensuring that Ireland meets its' emission targets. Achieving climate justice will ultimately require a global transition to a decarbonised economy. This transition to a zero-carbon economy is challenging but will bring other benefits including improvements in public health, reductions in fuel poverty, new economic opportunities, improved energy security and greater resilience to climate change.

#### Obligations under International Human Rights Law

Ireland's failure to tackle Climate Change effectively and meet its commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, directly contradicts our obligations to other International Laws and Conventions such as:

- Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which states that *"everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."* This is threatened by the increase in deaths, disease and injury as a result of intensified heat waves, floods, storms, fires and droughts caused by climate change.
- Article 25 of the UDHR also states that *"everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing"*, however rising sea-levels are expected to exacerbate inundation, storm surge, and erosion, threatening vital infrastructure, settlements, and facilities that support the livelihoods of millions of people, particularly those in island communities.
- Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which recognises the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger is in violation as climate change poses an extreme threat to food security. Future climate change is expected to put close to 50 million more people at risk of hunger by 2020 and an additional 132 million people by 2050.
- Article 12 of the ICESCR requires that that *"state parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."* The increased intensity and frequency of floods and droughts as a result of climate change will lead to more cases of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever as well as malnutrition. Over 150,000 people are currently estimated to die each year from diarrhoea, malaria and malnutrition caused by climate change.

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<sup>9</sup> The Irish Times, 2015. <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/where-does-obama-s-climate-plan-leave-ireland-1.2306981>

<sup>10</sup> EPA, 2013. [http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/epa\\_ghg\\_emission\\_proj\\_pub\\_2013\\_final.pdf](http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/epa_ghg_emission_proj_pub_2013_final.pdf)



- Both Article 1.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) and Article 1.2 of the ICESCR, recognise that “*in no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.*” Climate change puts this at risk as it threatens natural resources and biodiversity. For example, by 2020 between 75 million and 250 million people in Africa are likely to face greater water stress due to climate change. In addition, approximately 20-30% of plant and animal species assessed so far are likely to be at increased risk of extinction if average global temperatures rise more than 1.5-2.5 degrees.

#### Oxfam Ireland’s recommendations

- Negotiate an international agreement which will achieve the UNFCCC objective of avoiding dangerous anthropogenic climate change.
- Include human rights knowledge in delegations to the UNFCCC in line with the commitment given by Ireland in the Geneva Pledge on Human Rights in Climate Action.
- Enact legislation and adopt policy to move rapidly to an economy based on energy efficiency and renewable energy.
- Implement agricultural and land use policies which will reduce emissions and prioritise global food security with healthy low-carbon food for all.
- Meet Ireland’s 2020 emission targets through domestic action.
- Keep our promise to provide new and additional climate finance for adaption and mitigation in developing countries, including making contributions to the Green Climate Fund.