

KEYNOTE MESSAGE FROM THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR



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(video message)

Last year, I made a visit to Bangladesh. During this visit, it became very evident that climate change is having a huge impact on the human rights of people of Bangladesh.

Without a doubt Bangladesh is a highly vulnerable country to the impacts of climate change. A study carried out by the International Institute for Environment Development found that 42.6 percent of rural households had reported exposure to floods, 40.7 percent to storms, and 82.6 percent had been affected by at least one slow-onset climate-related disaster.

The country's geography makes it one of the top 10 most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change.

As part of my visit, I travelled to Sylhet District in the north of Bangladesh and saw the aftermath and subsequent impacts of a flash flood that had struck the countryside in June 2022. The flash flood was unprecedented in the history of the nation, and caused an enormous amount of damage. Some 95 percent of the town of Sunamganj was under water.

I met with a group of rural women from a community near Sunamganj who had suffered greatly from the flash flood in June. Their livestock, including ducks, chickens, and cattle, had been washed away and the peanut and rice crops ruined.

Compounding these losses was the ongoing burden of having to pay rent for the land that they were living on. According to the testimonies from these women it was suggested, it



would take at least two years for the community in Sunamganj to have sufficient yields from their crops to recover from the economic losses they had suffered as a consequence of the floods.

Meanwhile they are paying rent for the land they are using. This was a clear example to me that land tenure issues compound problems associated with the impacts of climate change. If people do not have secure land tenure, their lives are very uncertain .

I also visited a community of Munda people who live by the Chuna River near the Sundarbans. The sea has taken much of their lands through hurricanes and storm surges.

Again, the women I spoke to have been disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change. This is affecting the right to health, water and sanitation, and education. Land security is also a major issue in the region. Much of the land has been taken over by large-scale shrimp and crab farms, leaving small-scale farmers little opportunities for an existence.

Many hundreds of thousands of people are migrating to the capital, Dhaka. Each year, climate change and the lack of land security have made their life in rural areas impossible.

Inevitably, these people end up in informal settlements where their right to safe drinking water, sanitation, food, health, and education are denied. Some people end up being recruited into modern slavery or trafficked in the sex trade.

I also met with indigenous peoples from Bangladesh. These people are denied their right to land because the government does not recognize indigenous peoples.

Overall, the intersection of climate change and land tenure is creating enormous problems for many people in Bangladesh. For people to be guaranteed a secure future, every effort must be made to reform land tenure systems in the country to ensure that everyone has a right to land unencumbered by the need to pay rent to rich landlords.

So, to conclude, I wish you all the best with your conference and I sincerely hope that you are able to find long term solutions to address the nexus between climate change and land tenure issues.