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## Dispatches: Protecting the Climate, Protecting Human Rights



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Policymakers are converging on Bonn, Germany this week to hammer out details so countries can begin implementing the [Paris climate agreement](#). As they work, they would do well to remember the [speeches](#) given by government leaders at the April 22 [signing ceremony](#) at the United Nations.

Tuvalu's Prime Minister, Enele Sopoaga, reminded his colleagues that, "Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote, and consider their respective obligations on human rights." Hilda Heine, the president of the Marshall Islands, committed to "exhaust every possible measure to assure basic human rights and protection of local communities" in the country's response to climate change. Heads of state and ministers of Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru also explicitly referred to respecting human rights in the implementation of the agreement. These three countries, along with Mexico and the Philippines, had also [championed](#) human rights during the Paris negotiations. But this time, more than 20 countries emphasized the need to protect the most vulnerable including women, indigenous peoples, and children as a key to translating the climate agreement's ambitious goals into action.

During the Bonn conference, diplomats should consider ways to ensure international funding is used not only to protect the climate, but also the rights of marginalized people who are harmed by the effects of climate change and whose governments will need to act to protect their rights. Hundreds of millions of dollars are expected to be put into adaptation – funds that could help those in danger of losing their homes, communities, and livelihoods. Unfortunately, the money could also foster corruption, mismanagement, and waste.

Last week, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, John Knox, [called](#) on climate negotiators to urgently begin the "hard work of safeguarding the environment and human rights." In a [letter](#) to the negotiators, he made concrete recommendations on how to do this. As delegates design a new international climate mechanism to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and foster sustainable development, they should adopt specific safeguards for projects set up under the so-called [Sustainable Development Mechanism](#), he wrote. This includes assessing the potential social and environmental impacts of the projects, making sure affected communities can participate in planning projects, and effective grievance procedures. These steps would help to "ensure that proposed projects do not run rough-shod over the human rights of indigenous peoples and other communities that are most directly affected by them."



Women climate change activists demand respect for rights at Paris Agreement signing ceremony outside the United Nations in New York, April 2016.

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The delegates in Bonn should walk the talk and follow these recommendations to protect the human rights of marginalized communities affected by climate change – in line with the statements delivered by their political leaders just four weeks ago.

## Topic

- [Environment](#)
- [United Nations](#)

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## Links

- [1] <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf>
- [2] <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/22april/>
- [3] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/19/signing-climate-change-deal-just-beginning>
- [4] <https://www.hrw.org/view-mode/modal/289949>
- [5] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/03/un-human-rights-crucial-addressing-climate-change>
- [6] <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19962&LangID=E>
- [7] [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/Letter\\_to\\_SBSTA\\_UNFCCC\\_May2016.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/Letter_to_SBSTA_UNFCCC_May2016.pdf)
- [8] <http://carbonmarketwatch.org/news-paris-treaty-establishes-new-carbon-trading-mechanisms/>
- [9] <https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=Dispatches%3A%20Protecting%20the%20Climate%2C%20Protecting%20Human%20Rights%20-%20https%3A//www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/16/dispatches-protecting-climate-protecting-human-rights>
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- [14] <https://plus.google.com/share?url=https%3A//www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/16/dispatches-protecting-climate-protecting-human-rights>
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