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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Sikh Human Rights Group, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[6 February 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation: A Pluralistic View

The multiple challenges and issues of climate change and other forms of environmental degradation, racial inequity and the COVID-19 pandemic demand recovery efforts that prioritise women, young people and other marginalised communities. Therefore, it is a human rights imperative that State Governments and other relevant stakeholders act upon the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Developments recommendation, at paragraph 6 of his report A/HRC/48/56, that Governments and by association their electorate should consistently promote open channels for participation at all stages of the planning, implementation and monitoring of climate-related policies and programmes for all relevant stakeholders. Opportunities should be provided for equal and meaningful participation in all relevant planning and decision-making processes of the most disadvantaged sectors of society, including persons with disabilities, women, children and young people, minorities, indigenous peoples, peasants, persons of African descent and members of other disempowered and marginalised groups.

The Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) believes that there is a tendency, amongst the international environmental protection community and prominent international environmental organisations and agencies, such as the United Nations, towards universalising ethical values and attempting to form environmental protection Conventions, Treaties, Regulations and agreements based on an assumption that there is one universal worldview. In this type of so-called universalism is the idea that one universal ideology of ethics can justifiably permeate all international agreements and can therefore be directly applicable to all categories of persons and cultures around the world. That this universalistic outlook is the key to solving all of the environmental issues that currently persist around the globe. However, the SHRG believes that what the above model fails to include is the fact that different people, cultures, civilisations and countries have different approaches, which also change over time, to political, economic, social policies based on historical and cultural influences that determine their governance or their individual approaches when it comes to tackling environmental issues.

Almost all cultures, civilizations and community belief systems have some concepts, rules and taboos that can inform us about the human relationship with the environment. Their deep understanding, reverence, experience and wisdom, reflects the consciousness of our evolving place in the environment. Through our affiliates Repository of World Views of Nature project; we can see how indigenous peoples have sophisticated environmental protection concepts that date back to prehistory. (1)

However, what has occurred through the dominance of colonial legacies is many environmental organisations and agencies marginalising the wisdoms that cultures and community beliefs carry about human relationships with nature, and which were embedded in traditions, customs, festivals and outlooks. Therefore, in pursuit of imposing a universal rule of law and a colonial mentality as a philosophical basis to the political doctrine underpinning our global societies, dominant culture has displaced and disenfranchised peoples' own value systems that have served the close coexistence between nature and human societies since before the dawn of humankind.

The SHRG believes that it is only when people from different cultures, civilizations, belief systems, indigenous peoples, and members of other disempowered marginalised and vulnerable groups rediscover the reverence for nature, biodiversity, and other life forms in their own way, through their own customs, beliefs and cultures that the human population as a whole will act with greater passion for the protection of our environment, take ownership of their development and move away from what is currently found under the prevailing utilitarian, legalistic and rationalistic approach.

This approach has, at least in theory, been adopted in Norway under the Environmental Information Act that includes provisions for public participation in environmental decision-making, while the Planning and Building Act provides extensive opportunities for residents to advocate for local plans that advance sustainability. A national guide to public participation in planning was published in 2014, with special attention paid to the protection of the interests

of vulnerable groups. In 2018, Norway adopted a new Local Government Act, which requires all local and regional authorities to establish three councils, to represent young people, older persons and persons with disabilities. Norway also formalised a consultation procedure with the Sami indigenous people in 2005, fulfilling the right of indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making processes.

In 2017, Finland followed suit and created their Agenda 2030 Youth Group to serve as an advocate for the UNs Sustainable Development Goals and to participate in national planning and implementation to achieve them. The Agenda 2030 Youth Group comprises 20 people from diverse backgrounds, aged between 15 and 28 years old, from all over Finland. The group organised a debate on climate change for presidential candidates and a youth climate summit in 2019, which involved 500 young people.

Consequently, the SHRG very much hopes that prominent State Governments from both the northern and southern hemispheres will follow suit. For history clearly dictates that it is only when politically and economically powerful decision making bodies take decisive and coordinated action towards achieving a common objective that less advantaged decision making bodies feel empowered to go against the grain and follow suit.

However, let us not forget the vital contributions of older persons in the context of global climate change adaptation and mitigation and/or the salient fact that meaningful and effective action to address climate change requires the participation of all affected communities and groups. Therefore, it is essential to respect, protect and fulfil older persons' participation rights as enshrined in international human rights law, and to create meaningful opportunities for their involvement in climate action, including taking the necessary steps to provide them with relevant climate information and/or to overcome the many barriers to their inclusion. For not only do older persons bring unique and important contributions to climate action but they often support their families and local communities financially and through informal care work and contribute to decision making and conflict resolution.

We would like to respectfully remind the international community that, and as stated at paragraph 52 of the OHCHR's report entitled A/HRC/47/46, older persons possess important knowledge of science, history, tradition and culture that inspire and support actions by current and future generations. They also wield significant voting and economic power that can be mobilised for the implementation and enforcement of effective climate policy.

Furthermore, and as stated at paragraph 54, traditional environmental knowledge has the potential to play a crucial role in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Traditional knowledge is useful in defining earlier environmental baselines, identifying impacts that need to be mitigated, providing observational evidence for modelling, providing technologies for adapting, and for identifying culturally appropriate values for protection from direct impacts or from impacts of adaption measures themselves. The aforementioned may include the historical understanding of weather patterns and of the signals that presage coming disasters, methods of reducing the risk of and surviving such disasters, and agriculture and herding methods that create less environmental harm whilst maintaining production levels. Traditional environmental knowledge can also include a holistic understanding of the natural ecosystems, giving greater visibility to environmental changes and to human responsibility for them. Traditional knowledge that incorporates a longer time scale can also help to generate adaptability to climate change, by recognising that people are accustomed to living in a shifting environment.

Consequently, older persons, like young people, are clearly invaluable and underutilised human resources that have largely been ignored by international institutions, State Governments, prominent environmental organisations and agencies and to some extent by civil society. However, and as noted at paragraph 55, this cohort wields enormous resources that can be invaluable when seeking climate solutions and addressing the negative human rights impacts of climate change. Their foremost benefit can be found within their traditional knowledge and years of experience. For instance, retirement has allowed many older persons to become devoted to educating themselves on climate issues and/or to becoming involved in climate action. For not only do they possess the knowledge and skills necessary to purposefully engage and organise young activists, but they also possess the ability to utilise

their powerful standing within society to amplify the voices of younger people and/or other marginalised groups that have often been neglected or ignored.

In conclusion whatever view one is minded to adopt in regards to the above mentioned matters, one salient fact should remain clear and that is it is only when people from different cultures and members of disempowered and marginalised groups rediscover the reverence for nature, biodiversity, and other life forms in their own way, through their own customs, beliefs and cultures that the human population as a whole will act with greater passion for the protection of our environment, take ownership of their development and move away from what is currently found under the prevailing utilitarian, legalistic and rationalistic approach.

Since the 2002 Johannesburg World Conference on Sustainable Development, the SHRG has been raising the issue of a pluralist approach at UN to the environment. This call for pluralistic approach is reflected by UNESCOs publication of SHRGs book entitled Universalism and Ethical Values for the Environment. (2)

1 www.eubios.info/networks/repository_of_ethical_world_views_of_nature

2 ISBN: 978-92-9223-302-0