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Written statement* submitted by Elizka Relief Foundation, 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.

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* 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.



Human Rights Situation in Light of Climate Change in Ethiopia

Background

The impact of climate change in Ethiopia is often cited as one of the extreme examples of the negative impacts of climate change on human rights, mainly because Ethiopia has been ravaged by floods and droughts for decades, especially in the northern part of the country.

Severe drought caused by consecutive failed rainy seasons in Ethiopia, especially in the Northern parts including Tigray, Wollo, Afar, Harar and Somalia, have decimated crops and caused abnormally high livestock deaths and water shortages, which have led to instability and food insecurity. The flood waves also displaced 139,199. Environmentally displaced persons live in underdeveloped and relatively marginalized sites and settlements, which contradicts the right to adequate housing. Climate change has also affected the right to good health, as many diseases spread as a result of the lack of rainfall, as well as the activities of women in Ethiopia.

In this context, Elizka Relief Foundation participates in the interactive dialogue about the oral briefing of the International Committee of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, focusing on climate change, severe droughts and their human rights repercussions, in particular, the right to health, food, and housing, as well as focusing on the rights of women as one of the vulnerable and marginalized groups.

First: Droughts in Ethiopia and their impact on the right to food

Climatic hazards in Ethiopia are linked to precipitation intensity, variability, and timing. Indeed, drought is a frequent phenomenon in Ethiopia, which severely affects the lives of millions of people around the country. 80% of the farm families have suffered a decline in agriculture over the past two decades.

Agricultural productivity in Ethiopia has sharply declined due to insufficient rainfall and its erratic distribution during the cropping season. The rainy season in northern Ethiopia is shorter than the crop growing period, indicating that most of the crops require not less than 80 days, however, the rainy season is not often exceeding 65 days. (1)

In addition to the above, Ethiopia suffers from the effects of the “El Niño” phenomenon on biodiversity, natural resources, the ecosystem, agriculture, water availability, soil fertility and public health. The year 2014-2015 was considered the hottest year ever, which caused significant damage to yields and food insecurity. El Niño 2015 caused huge damage to the production of major field crops (sorghum and sesame) in northern Ethiopia.

Decades-long droughts in Ethiopia, especially in the Northern parts including Tigray, Wollo, Afar, Harar and Somalia, have decimated crops and caused abnormally high livestock deaths and water shortages, which have led to instability and food insecurity. Due to lack of water for humans and livestock, several thousand people have suffered, and the lack of food has caused malnutrition, especially for children, and with further impacts on the pastoralists and semi-herders of Somalia and Afar, food insecurity has been a challenge to the Ethiopian government. (2)

Second: The increase in the number of climate migrants... The right to adequate housing:

During the rainy season in Ethiopia, rainfall was very low in some areas, and so heavy in other areas, which resulted in the internal displacement of about 202,202 people in October 2019 due to several flood incidents in Afar, Oromia and Somalia. (3) In September 2021, there were about 4.23 million internally displaced, mainly due to the bloody conflict that displaced 3.5 million (85%), drought which displaced 307,871 (7%) and monsoon floods that displaced 139,199 people (3%). (4)

Indeed, IDPs live in specified camps and settlements, in relatively underdeveloped environments. Semi-urban host communities are characterized by precarious socio-economic conditions, including chronic malnutrition, limited access to basic social services and economic infrastructure, and poor livelihood opportunities.

Fifty percent of families live in temporary, poor-quality shelters, made of old tarpaulins, old clothes, sticks and trees, sometimes three or more families share the same shelter, which violates the right to adequate and adequate housing. These camps and shelters also suffer from the effects of extreme weather, and these refugees lack security and may be exposed to theft. The challenges are multiplied for vulnerable groups. (5)

Third: Climate change and its human rights implications for the right to health care

Health centers across Ethiopia are severely understaffed, the hospital in Werder has one poorly equipped ambulance. In addition, there is electricity and water shortage, and the infrastructure depend on fuel to generate electricity 24 hours a day. There is also an acute shortage of life-saving medicines to treat disease outbreaks.

The Dolo region reported the highest number of measles cases in 2018. Malaria, chikungunya, dengue, acute watery diarrhea, cholera and meningitis are other concerns. The outbreak of these diseases is due to below-normal rainfall, lack of safe water, poor management and shortages of medicines and medical supplies.

The prevalence of open defecation practice among camps residents also exacerbates the risk of disease. Families displaced by drought are still living in temporary shelters after more than three years. Health care in Javu and Korakl is very poor, mostly due to the remoteness of health facilities that are not available within the camps. (6)

Fourth: Extreme weather phenomena and their impact on women's rights among vulnerable and marginalized groups

Climate change impacted Ethiopia in many sectors. Some aspects of the gender and climate change aspect were well articulated, particularly on the additional burden and increased time that is taken up by women in the rural context to fetch water, including by pastoral women who may spend 4 to 5 hours a day (on average) on this. Similarly, in the energy sector, studies revealed that women spend up to 3,796 hours a year collecting firewood, due to the lack of alternatives and efficient energy sources.

In health, climate change places an additional burden on women's health mainly due to their needs (limited WASH facilities for women and girls), their prescribed roles within the households (indoor air quality related to cooking and its health implications) and the additional work they have to do (fetching water and fuelwood collection which has major safety risks for women and girls), which poses a significant safety hazard for women and girls. (7)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Millions of people are already suffering from the severe catastrophic effects exacerbated by climate change in Ethiopia, which has affected the violation of many of the basic rights of citizens in Ethiopia. Within this framework, Elizka Relief Foundation presents a set of recommendations as follows:

First: The International Committee of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia should direct its attention to the violations of human rights in the wake of the severe climate changes that Ethiopia is experiencing, and issue more recommendations to the Ethiopian government on measures to reduce the effects of climate on human rights for the Ethiopian government.

Second: The Ethiopian government should encourage investment in the field of climate change mitigation, with the aim of increasing national initiatives aimed at reducing the impact of climate change on human rights in Ethiopia.

Third: In light of the poor awareness of farmers, investors, agricultural experts and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector about the time of the occurrence of extreme weather attacks, there is a need to launch awareness initiatives aimed at educating these groups, especially the El Niño and La Niña phenomenon, under the supervision of the relevant UN bodies, especially the International Committee of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia.

Fourth: International donor institutions should fund more programs to support those affected by the effects of climate change in Ethiopia, especially in conflict areas such as the Tigray region in northern Ethiopia, where those affected suffer from double challenges represented by conflict, COVID-19, and finally the scourge of drought, and therefore there is a need for more initiatives to help those affected.

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