

Human Rights and Climate Change: Taking The High Road

Ross C. “Rocky” Anderson
Executive Director, High Road for Human Rights

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What do the following have in common?

- The Holocaust
- The genocides in Turkey, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and the Darfur region of Sudan
- The enslavement of millions of women, many of them young girls, who are forced into the sex trade against their will – many of them beaten, gang-raped, and threatened into submission
- The enslavement of laborers who have no way out of their miserable conditions
- The kidnapping of young boys in Uganda and neighboring African countries, who are forced to become soldiers and commit horrendous atrocities, sometimes against their own families
- The state-sanctioned killing of people, almost all of them poor and without experienced legal counsel – in a system that is so flawed that at least 135 people who had been found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of a capital offense have been exonerated, some of them posthumously, on the basis of DNA evidence
- The kidnapping, disappearance, and torture of people as a matter of unprecedented official policy, all in violation of domestic and international law, including the Geneva Conventions and the Covenant Against Torture, and all without any accountability for the unlawful misconduct

- The rendering of our planet as a far less habitable, far more dangerous place, particularly for our children and later generations, as a result of catastrophic, human-caused climate change

All of those share at least three major elements in common:

1. All entail fundamental violations of human rights and the most basic precepts of international law
2. All involve astounding, yet preventable, human misery
3. All have been allowed to occur because of (1) inadequate coverage by the news media; (2) a failure to act by elected and other government officials; and (3) the failure by each of us, acting in an organized fashion, to push effectively for action to be taken to prevent or stop these human rights atrocities.

That's why I founded High Road for Human Rights – and why our dedicated staff and Board members are working so hard to build an infrastructure that will result in people all over the country pushing together – all on the same issues, advocating for the same steps toward solutions through reform of US human rights policies and practices.

The world agreed, following the Holocaust: “Never Again.” Never again will we stand by and fail to act in the face of horrendous human rights abuses against men, women, and children anywhere in the world.

That was a sacred promise – but one that has been broken time and time again.

Why do we say “never again,” but allow our nation and the international community to turn a blind eye repeatedly to human rights atrocities?

It's because of a cycle of complacency in which there are three main culprits:

First, the media fails consistently to provide adequate coverage to these issues. This is nothing new.

- The Jewish Labor Bund in Poland compiled a summary of verified massacres in May 1942, tracing the path of Nazi genocide through Poland, with compelling descriptions. The Bund report described the Chelmno killing center as follows: “For gassing a special vehicle (gas chamber) was used in which 90 people were loaded at a time. . . . On the average, 1,000 people were gassed every day.” The Bund “estimated the number of Polish Jewish victims to be 700,000 already. Their conclusions: Germany had set out to ‘annihilate all the Jews in Europe’ and millions of Polish Jews faced imminent death.”
- What was the response of the US press? About what one would expect for a report about a broken sewer pipe. Probably the first newspaper account of the Bund report was in the *Boston Globe* – at the bottom of page 12. The *Seattle Times* published an article about the Bund report . . . on page 30, under a small headline (imagine, a *small* headline!), “700,000 Jews Reported Slain.” The *New York Times* condescended to devote two inches to the Bund report, noting that 700,000 Polish Jews had been slain, quoting the BBC’s disclosure that “to accomplish this, probably the greatest mass slaughter in history, every death-dealing method was employed – machine-gun bullets, hand grenades, gas chambers, concentration camps, whipping, torture instruments and starvation.” To inches to report “the greatest mass slaughter in history”! And that’s how it went in the US mainstream media throughout the Holocaust.
- During the bloodbath in Cambodia, when some 2 million people died as a result of Pol Pot’s brutality, in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* “[o]nly two or three stories a year focused on the human rights situation under the Khmer Rouge.” And the television coverage was even worse. “Between April and June 1975, when one might have expected curiosity to be high, the three major networks combined gave Cambodia just under two and a half minutes of airtime. During the entire three and a half years of Khmer Rouge rule, the networks devoted less than sixty minutes to Cambodia, which averaged less than thirty seconds per month per network. ABC carried onw human rights story about Cambodia in 1976 and did not return to the subject for two years.”
- We saw the same regarding Rwanda, and now Sudan – and even worse coverage regarding worldwide slavery, when there are more slaves on our planet than at any other time during human history.

- And here's what Ross Gelbspan has said about the complicity of the media in connection with the failure of the US to combat climate change:

Although the scientific community has known since 1996 that we are changing our climate, the U.S. press has done a deplorable job in disseminating that information, and all its implications, to the public. . . . For many years, the press accorded the same weight to the "skeptics" as it did to mainstream scientists. This was done in the name of journalistic balance. In fact, it was journalistic laziness.

The second major player in the cycle of complacency is, of course, our elected and other government officials.

Historically, elected officials do not act to stop major human rights atrocities unless they perceive that there are going to be political costs to them if they fail to act. FDR took no steps to rescue European Jews and failed to stand up to a largely anti-Semitic State Department. Bill Clinton sat on his hands during two major genocides. If Rwandans had a powerful lobby like AIPAC – the American Israel Public Affairs Committee – the genocide in 1994 would have been stopped in a day. Sad to say, elected officials will not act to stop human misery, particularly if it is occurring outside of the US, unless there is a public call for them to do so.

Congressman Frank McCloskey wanted Congress to take action to stop the killing, torture, rape, and ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of Bosnians. However, he was rebuffed repeatedly by his Congressional colleagues who said that they hadn't heard from their constituents about the genocide. Hence, since they perceived their constituents didn't care about it, they were not going to do anything about it. There is little question but that if the American people had pushed for effective international leadership by the US to stop the human rights outrages in Bosnia, it would have happened. *We could have stopped the tragedies, but we did not.*

That leads us to the third and most crucial player in the cycle of complacency: And that is the American people – ordinary people in local communities who, if organized and willing to take action, could make *all* the difference.

Two weeks into the Rwandan genocide, President Clinton's National Security Advisor, Anthony Lake, responded to pleas by human rights workers for action by saying, you have to make more noise. We have to hear from the public if we are to do anything. No noise was made, the public remained quiet, and 800,000 people were killed while the US and the rest of the international community stood by without lifting a finger – exactly what the Hutus were counting on as they killed at the average rate of 8,000 people every day for 100 days.

The same thing has been happening with respect to climate change and the enormous human rights implications.

As we were developing High Road for Human Rights, and discussing with various people our unique approach, we often saw them nod in agreement as we talked about genocide, human trafficking, and torture as being part of our human rights agenda. But as we mentioned climate change as being one of the areas of human rights focus for High Road, we often noticed a confused look on the faces of many of those with whom we were discussing the issue. They would say things like, “Climate change is an environmental, trade, or economic issue.” “Why would you combine climate change with those human rights issues?” we were often asked.

Although many of the human rights threatened by climate change have been well established since at least the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and although anthropogenic climate change has been recognized by much of the mainstream scientific community for decades, the discussion about whether human activities resulting in climate change should be viewed through a human rights lens has, amazingly, barely begun. The human rights community has been astoundingly derelict, ignoring the greatest human rights threat ever faced.

On December 11, 2007, John von Doussa, President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in Australia, noted:

Whilst there is now plenty of discussion about the responses that governments should be making to address the predicted consequences of climate change, the focus seems to have been largely

on the economic, trade and security issues. The social and human rights implications rarely rate a mention.¹

A Background Paper entitled “Human Rights and Climate Change” was issued by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 2008.² That Background Paper notes:

In responding to climate change, governments have traditionally approached it as an ecological problem or more recently, as an economic one. To date the social and human rights implications of climate change have received little attention.³

During the December 2007 Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, noted as follows:

In the lead up to this momentous gathering in Bali, the world heard extensively about the grave threat that climate change poses on the environment and economic growth. Much less was heard about the human dimension of climate change.⁴

In that address, less than two years ago, Ms. Kang noted “the need for strategies to deal with climate change, whether in terms of adaptation or mitigation, to incorporate the consequences for humans, as individuals and communities.” “Furthermore,” she said, in a statement unprecedented for a U.N. official, “some suggest, as I certainly would, that the existing body of human rights norms and principles offers a solid foundation for responsible and effective thinking and action in this regard.”⁵

¹ John von Doussa, “Climate Change: Catastrophic Impacts and Human Rights,” University of Adelaide Research Tuesday, December 11, 2007 (<http://www.safecom.org.au/climate-change-human-rights.htm>)

² “Human Rights and Climate Change,” 2008 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/papers/hrandclimate_change.html)

³ *Id.* at 2 (page references to web site publication)

⁴ “Climate Change and Human Rights,” Address by Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate change and its Kyoto Protocol, 3-14 December 2007, Bali, Indonesia.

(<http://www.unhchr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/0/013DC0FAA475EC87C12573B10074796A? . . .>)

⁵ *Id.*

In June 2007, the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, noted that, because Tuvalu's very existence is at great risk because of rising oceans, climate change presents an unprecedented threat to Tuvalu's "fundamental rights to nationality and statehood, as constituted under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international conventions."⁶ In November, 2007, the representatives of the Small Island Developing States met in Malé and issued a Declaration on the Human Dimension of Global Climate Change, expressing concern "that climate change has clear and immediate implications for the full enjoyment of human rights."⁷

The International Council on Human Rights Policy did not add climate change to its research program until 2007.⁸ Its first publication on the issue, "Climate Change and Human Rights," was published in 2008. As noted in that publication, "the mainstream climate change literature and debate has, until very recently, given little or no attention to human rights concerns."⁹

When one considers the well-established fundamental human rights to which there is now almost universal agreement, one must wonder why the consideration of climate change in a human rights context has taken so long, particularly since the application of human rights principles will aid significantly in combating climate change.¹⁰ The human rights community, by and large, has been almost completely missing in action, leaving it for the environmental community to educate and advocate, neglecting the enormous human rights implications of climate change and the significant advantages of framing climate change as the greatest human rights threat in the history of humankind.

⁶ Apisai Ielemia, "A Threat to Our Human Rights: Tuvalu's Perspective on Climate Change," June 2007 (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1309/is_2_44/ai_n27399052/pring?tag=artBody:coll)

⁷ Malé Declaration on the Human Dimension of Global Climate Change, Adopted November 14, 2007

⁸ "Climate Change and Human Rights: A Rough Guide," International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2008, at inside cover.

⁹ *Id.* at 2.

¹⁰ "The paucity of rights-specific information is not, of course, merely a *cause* of the negligible analysis of the human rights dimensions of climate change, it is also a *consequence*. Given their salience to the main themes discussed in the IPCC's fourth assessment report, for example it is remarkable that human rights are scarcely signaled in almost 3,000 pages of analysis. This would appear to indicate a near complete disciplinary disconnect, an impression borne out by a glance at the 10,000-strong participants' list for the recent (thirteenth) Conference of the Parties of December 2007, among whom no more than a tiny handful hailed from human rights backgrounds. . . . Since the IPCC reports are essentially literature reviews, the shortage of rights references no doubt indicates a mere vacuum in the literature rather than any conclusion, bias or failing on the part of the IPCC authors. That vacuum says as much about an absence of interest in climate change among human rights professionals to date as vice versa." *Climate Change and Human Rights: A Rough Guide*, at 3.

The consequences experienced already from human-caused global warming include the severe melting of glaciers around the world, the Arctic Ice Cap, parts of Greenland, and the Antarctic; rising oceans; desertification of millions of acres of previously productive lands; the killing of major coral reefs; the destruction of major forests by bark beetles that now survive warmer winters; major droughts; and significantly reduced snowpack in areas that depend upon snowpack for water supplies.

Business-as-usual spells disaster for our Earth and for many, if not most, of its inhabitants. Hundreds of millions of people will be driven by rising oceans from their coastal-area homes; water will be unavailable to farmers and others depending on major glacial systems, including the Himalayas and the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau, which feed all the major rivers of Asia; forests will be killed off at a rapidly-increasing rate; deserts will expand; fisheries will collapse; many species will become extinct; and heat waves will kill more and more people. Planet Earth will be a very different, far less habitable place for our children and those who follow. The earliest and most severe effects will be sustained mostly by particularly vulnerable people in many parts of the world.

International law enshrines certain fundamental human rights, beginning with those set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. An elaboration of other human rights has been set forth in later human rights treaties. Those having most relevance to climate change are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Human rights are understood to be the “rights that exist because one is a human being”¹¹ – rights that apply to everyone equally. Living a life of dignity is at the core of human rights. The Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that “the inherent dignity . . . of . . .

¹¹ Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights, in Theory and Practice*, Second Edition, (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), at 10.

all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” “In a similar way, other human rights treaties acknowledge that the protection of basic human dignity is the foundational basis of human rights recognition.”¹²

Among the rights impacted by climate change are the rights to life, liberty and security of person, guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹³ The right to life of children receives specific protection in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Climate change is having, and will increasingly have, an enormously adverse impact on human life, both directly and indirectly. In fact, it may have a greater impact on the right to life than any other event in history. The effects may be abrupt, as during a severe heat wave, like the one that took 35,000 European lives in 2003; during a hurricane that is far more intense as a result of warmer ocean waters; or during a rapid flood caused by radical shifts in precipitation patterns. The effects may also appear more gradually, as with adverse impacts on agriculture and water resources, and the spread of vector-borne diseases.

These effects of climate change implicate other expressly guaranteed human rights, such as the right to adequate food under several international treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, where the state parties recognize “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing,”¹⁴ and that additional steps may be needed to ensure “the fundamental right to freedom from hunger and malnutrition.”¹⁵ As noted in the earlier referenced Background Paper of the Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission:

There is little doubt that climate change will detrimentally affect the right to food in a significant way. Regional food production is likely to decline because of increased temperatures accelerating

¹² James Peter Louviere and Donald A. Brown, “The Significance of Understanding Inadequate National Climate Change Programs as Human Right Violations,” 2008 (*citing Henry Shue, Basic Rights, Subsistence, Affluence, U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), at 13.)

¹³ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also provides that “every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.” Article 6(1), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

¹⁴ Article 11(1), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

¹⁵ Article 11(2), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

grain sterility; shift in rainfall patterns rendering previously productive land infertile; accelerating erosion; desertification and reducing crop and livestock yields; rising sea levels making coastal land unusable and causing fish species to migrate; and an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events disrupting agriculture.¹⁶

Whether the right to water is expressly guaranteed under international treaties or as an essential part of the other guaranteed rights, such as the right to life, the right to secure an adequate standard of living, or the rights to health and food, the adverse impacts of climate change on the right to water are likely far greater than any other threat ever posed to that right. Lester Brown's latest Plan B book, *Plan B 3.0*, is appropriately subtitled "Mobilizing to Save Civilization." In that book, Brown demonstrates that the violations of the right to water are not limited to future projections; they have already occurred, and are occurring at rapidly increasing rates. I offer here only a few examples provided in Brown's *Plan B 3.0*:

[T]he Gangotri glacier, the principal glacier that feeds the Ganges River, is melting at an accelerating rate and could disappear entirely in a matter of decades. The Ganges would become a seasonal river, flowing only during the monsoon season.

Glaciers on the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau that feed the Yellow and Yangtze rivers are melting at 7 percent a year. . . . [T]wo thirds of these glaciers could disappear by 2060.

These glaciers in the Himalayas and on the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau feed all the major rivers of Asia, including the Indus, Ganges, Mekong, Yangtze, and Yellow Rivers. It is the water from these rivers that irrigates the rice and wheat fields in the region.¹⁷

According to Brown, water tables are now falling in countries that contain more than half the world's people, including the big three grain producers – China, India, and the United States.¹⁸ Compounding the problem is the inundation of salty sea water from rising oceans, threatening the drinking water supplies of coastal regions.

¹⁶ "Human Rights and Climate Change," 2008 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, at 4 (citing Alan Dupont and Graeme Pearman, *Heating Up the Planet: Climate Change and Security* (Lowy Institute Paper 12, 2006), at pp. 30-31 (<http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=391>))

¹⁷ Lester R. Brown, *Plan B 3.0 – Mobilizing to Save Civilization*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), at 4.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 68.

All of this, of course, impacts the public health, which is guaranteed as a basic human right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that “everyone has the right to a standard adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family.”¹⁹ Likewise, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that state parties must ensure that every child enjoys the “highest attainable standard of health.”²⁰ Climate change will have numerous severe impacts on public health. As one example, a joint study by the World Health Organization and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine found that global warming may have already caused more than 160,000 deaths a year from malaria and malnutrition and that the number of climate change-caused deaths from disease could double by 2020.²¹

Other essential human rights are threatened by climate change, including the right to human security, the right of indigenous people to strengthen their cultural life, and the right to maintain livelihoods and homes. Also, procedural rights are implicated, including the right of people to transparency and accountability regarding all matters that affect their rights, such as the measures being taken to mitigate the human causes of climate change and to provide for adequate adaptation, as well as the right to participation in decision-making.

As noted by the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, “most of the work on climate change has to date focused on mitigation and adaptation strategies to address its causes and consequences to the environment.”²² Not until very recently has there been any significant discussion of whether climate change should be addressed within a human rights framework.

If a human rights approach were taken, would anything be different in terms of combating climate change and, if so, would it be an improvement over the status quo?

¹⁹ Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights. See also Article 12(a) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which guarantees the right of everyone to “the enjoyment of the highest standard of physical and mental health.”

²⁰ Article 24, Convention on the Rights of the Child.

²¹ Shaoni Bhattacharya, “Global Warming Kills 160,000 a Year,” *New Scientist*, October 1, 2003.

²² “Climate Change and Human Rights,” Address by Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol, 3-14 December 2007, Bali, Indonesia.

Succinctly answering the question, the Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission posed the issue as follows:

What . . ., if anything, does the modern human rights discourse offer or require from governments when developing appropriate responses to the impacts of climate change? The answer, it appears, is “a lot”. As noted by the Deputy High Commissioner, states have a positive obligation to protect individuals against the threat posed to human rights by climate change, regardless of the causes. The most effective means of facilitating this is to adopt a “human rights-based approach” to policy and legislative responses to climate change; an approach that is *normatively* based on international human rights standards and that is *practically* directed to promoting and protecting human rights.²³

As outlined earlier, essential human rights have been identified under international law. The standards – the norms – have been set. There are, according to human rights international law, the bearers of duty, and those to whom duties are owed. State parties are ultimately responsible to ensure that the human rights to which the international community has agreed to adhere are honored and enforced. These standards and principles provide a principal advantage of addressing climate change through a human rights framework.

Other tremendous benefits in combating climate change will accrue from addressing the issue in a human rights context – by constantly putting a human face to the problem. As the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights has noted, “[a] human rights perspective shifts the focus more directly to individuals and to the effect of climate change on their lives.” No more will the discussion be so abstract to most people. To put a face to the issue – considering the impacts on real people, with real families, and real heartbreak – will create more political and moral will than all the statistics about parts-per-million carbon dioxide atmospheric concentration. Recent research demonstrates that people are far more emotionally moved, and hence moved to act, when they learn of personal stories and impacts on individuals rather than impersonal facts and figures.²⁴

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *See, e.g.*, Paul Slovic, “‘If I look at the mass I will never act’: Psychic numbing and genocide,” *Judgement and Decision Making*, Vol. 2, No. 2, April 2007, pp. 79-95.

As Mary Robinson, President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, has written:

The human rights framework reminds us that climate change is about suffering – about the human misery that results directly from the damage we are doing to nature. . . . [I]f we build human rights criteria into our future planning, we will better understand who is at risk and how we should act to protect them.²⁵

A related advantage is that when harms to actual people are prioritized, as they must be in a human rights framework, human rights standards provide thresholds of minimum acceptability as to who will be impacted, how, and why. As noted by the International Council on Human Rights Policy, “a policy orientation based on human rights thresholds potentially provides a platform for broad-based dialogue on burden sharing of a kind that has frequently lacked in climate change debates.”²⁶

Viewing climate change through a human rights lens will also provide the best means of focusing on how mitigation and adaptation efforts will impact those who are most vulnerable. Instead of only a larger economic, cost-benefit analysis, policies relating to climate change will, within a human rights framework, be required to take into account impacts on individuals and equities as between different people and different communities. Discrimination will be prohibited. Related to those considerations will be the allocation of resources and financing of both mitigation and adaptation measures. For particularly vulnerable states, and when indigenous populations might be adversely impacted, mitigation and adaptation policies would have to take into account the specific impacts on specific people and communities, with a view in advance to the likely human rights effects of measures such as deforestation, biofuel substitution, and emissions trading.²⁷

Procedural safeguards, including broad dissemination of information and participation in policy-making, would be a unique advantage of addressing climate change in a human rights framework. Along with greater

²⁵ “Climate Change and Human Rights: A Rough Guide,” International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2008, Foreword by Mary Robinson, at iii.

²⁶ *Id.* at 7.

²⁷ *Id.* at 7.

participation and more truly democratic processes would be greater accountability and transparency regarding how, why, and by whom policies are made.

One reason proffered for the disconnect between those historically involved in climate change policy-making and the human rights community has been that, on one hand, “the study of climate change began among meteorologists, became firmly entrenched in the physical sciences, and has only gradually reached into the social sciences,” with the basic orientation remaining in the field of economics, while “[h]uman rights organizations . . . are unlikely . . . to take up issues framed as ‘hypothetical’ or scenario-based, quite aside from the disciplinary boundaries that have long existed between environmental and human rights law.”²⁸

However, with the unequivocal human rights standards that are firmly part of international law, and with the tremendous advantages of applying a human rights framework to climate change – the most urgent challenge facing our planet today – the human rights community and those who have historically constituted the primary climate change community must join forces, with an emphasis on human impacts, now and far into the future; equity; and effective, practical, urgent solutions. The human rights community need not, and must not, refrain from participating until it is too late to prevent or significantly ameliorate the otherwise-imminent global tragedy of irreversible catastrophic climate change.

The Australian Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission provides an extraordinary conclusion with respect to the crucial role of the human rights community in successfully combating climate change:

The values that inspired the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provide a powerful point of reference in the climate change context. That document was an international response to the human tragedy of extreme nationalism, fascism and world war. It established a set of entitlements and rights – civil, political, cultural, social and economic for ‘all members of the human family’ to prevent the ‘disregard and contempt for human rights that have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of

²⁸ *Id.* at 3.

mankind’. While the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were looking back at a human tragedy that had already happened, we are now looking at a human rights tragedy *in the making*. Allowing that tragedy to evolve would represent ‘a systematic violation of the human rights of the poor and of future generations’.²⁹

Let us all join to “make more noise” about what could be the most devastating violations of global human rights in history, to breathe life into the long-ignored principle of “Never Again,” and to effectively and collaboratively act with the urgency necessary to combat catastrophic climate disruption and the resulting world-wide tragedy that will occur if we fail to meet our most basic moral imperatives.

The mission of High Road for Human Rights is to organize people throughout the nation to make more noise – to take effective grassroots actions – so that elected officials are never again able to excuse their failures to act on the ground that they are not hearing from their constituents.

We ask High Road members to join with us in committing to at least one grassroots action – to join with others to meet with editors, editorial boards, or reporters to gain improved reporting on High Road issues; to provide presentations to local classes, faith groups, or civic organizations; to write letters to the editor or op-ed pieces, or to join with others and participate in every public meeting attended by any members of Congress.

High Road was formed because the essential grassroots organizing, education, and advocacy were not being done. We invite you to join in and support our efforts. Embrace your democracy – use the tools we are fortunate to have in this great nation, but which are so under-utilized. Join us on the High Road and, together, we will help bring about changes that will make this a healthier, more just and peaceful world.

²⁹ “Human Rights and Climate Change,” 2008 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, at 15.