

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Human Rights Council

Forty-eighth Regular Session

September 17, 2021

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to development

Statement delivered by Kai Mueller on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Madam President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report and welcome the focus on climate policies. We agree it is essential that responses to climate change respect, promote and consider international human rights obligations.

The Tibetan plateau is one case where a human rights-based climate response is gravely needed. Despite its critical role in the regional climate system – in regulating temperature flows and providing water for at least 1.4 billion people¹ – the Chinese government have failed to consult and work with local Tibetans to respond to climate change. In fact, the Chinese government has pursued development projects that have exacerbated the effects of climate warming.

Policies that have privatized and fenced grasslands, relocated over 1.8 million nomads, and expanded extractive industries have accelerated desertification and the loss of a major carbon sink.

In the context of climate action policies, the project of ‘development’ and the right to development should be considered with serious caution. In the People’s Republic of China, development policies have been framed in environmentally-friendly language, despite disempowering local communities, extracting resources, and damaging the local environment.

We urge the Special Rapporteur and member states to prioritise the promotion of fundamental civil and political rights, so that individuals can access information and participate in policy decision-making, as well as seek accountability and justice for all policies, regardless of whether they are development or climate focused.

Thank you.

¹ You, Qinglong, Jinzhong Min, and Shichang Kang, 2016, ‘Rapid Warming in the Tibetan Plateau from Observations and CMIP5 Models in Recent Decades,’ *International Journal of Climatology*, 36 (6): 2660–70, <https://doi.org/10.1002/joc.4520>.