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Accelerating Impacts from Short-Lived Climate Pollutants Threaten Human Rights

Washington, D.C., July 13, 2011 - Climate pollutant emissions violate human rights and require rapid reductions to protect the world's most vulnerable people, according to a joint submission to the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights by the Center for Human Rights and Environment (CEDHA) in Argentina and the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development (IGSD) in Washington, D.C., and Geneva.

Climate pollutants and associated adverse impacts from a warming world violate basic human rights to life, health, water, food, equality before the law, effective judicial remedy, residence and movement, self determination, clean environment, and to be free from interference with one's home. States have a mandatory obligation under international human rights law to adopt special measures to protect the fundamental rights of the inhabitants of the world's most vulnerable regions from climate impacts. The joint submission identifies specific fast actions to reduce emissions of climate pollutants. It is available [here](#).

“The Human Rights Council is the highest organ of the U.N. Human Rights System, and has an affirmative duty to ensure the international protection of the basic rights of human beings,” stated Romina Picolotti, President of CEDHA. She added, “We are operating under circumstances of extreme emergency with climate change and the failure to act immediately will imply, not only massive human rights violations, but also will rob the U.N. Human Rights System of its purpose and *raison d etre*.”

Black carbon soot, ground-level (tropospheric) ozone, methane, and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) are collectively known as short-lived climate pollutants. They remain in the atmosphere for days to a few decades, and are responsible for up to half of global climate change and the associated adverse impacts. They can be cut quickly using existing technologies and often using current laws and institutions. Reducing them can cut the rate of global warming in half and the rate of warming in the Arctic by two-thirds. The Arctic is currently warming at twice the rate of the global average, and Arctic melting is predicted to contribute to sea level rise of as much as 5 feet by the end of the century, according to the [International Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program](#). This is more than two and a half times higher than the sea level rise projected in 2007 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

In addition to causing up to half of global climate change, these short-lived climate pollutants are causing serious harm to public health. Black carbon soot kills as many as 2.4 million people each year, mostly women and children. Ground-level ozone also causes other debilitating health effects, as well as significant damage to food crops. Protecting vulnerable people and places from increasing climate impacts requires fast mitigation of short-lived climate pollutants.

“Any pollutant that kills more than two million women and children every year is a crime against humanity, especially when we currently have the technology and infrastructure to immediately stop this deadly pollution and prevent these needless deaths,” states Durwood Zaelke, President of IGSD.

Emissions of black carbon and ground-level ozone can be reduced quickly by implementing 16 measures identified by [U.N. Environment Programme and World Meteorological Organization](#). Developed from a review of over 2,000 possible measures, these 16 measures include: coal mine ventilation, controlling manure emissions, applying diesel particulate filters to vehicles, replacing traditional cookstoves, kilns, coke ovens and heaters with clean modern equivalents and fuels, and banning open field burning. On an international level, mitigation policies should be pursued through existing international agreements as recommended by [UNEP](#).

International and national measures can also be taken to reduce production, use, and emission of HFCs. Many climate-friendly HFC alternatives are already available. The Montreal Protocol can be amended to reduce the production and use of HFCs. The Federated States of Micronesia has made such a proposal. A similar joint proposal to phase out HFCs with high global warming potential has been made by the United States, Mexico and Canada.

In addition to cutting the short lived climate pollutants, it is critical to cut emissions of carbon dioxide, which is responsible for the other 50% of global warming. Cutting carbon dioxide is essential for long-term climate protection. However, because a significant fraction of the carbon dioxide emitted today stays in the atmosphere for thousands of years, cutting carbon dioxide pollution does not produce immediate cooling of the climate system, and does not provide relief to the vulnerable peoples and ecosystems they depend upon, which are already suffering adverse impacts of global warming.

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The Centro de Derechos Humanos y Ambiente is a non-profit organization that aims to build a more harmonious relationship between the environment and people. Its work centers on promoting greater access to justice and guarantee human rights for victims of environmental degradation, or due to non-sustainable management of natural resources, and to prevent future violations. To this end, CEDHA fosters the creation of public policy that promotes inclusive socially and environmentally sustainable development through community participation, public interest litigation, strengthening democratic institutions, and the capacity building of key actors. For more information, visit <http://www.cedha.org.ar>.

The Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development’s mission is to promote just and sustainable societies and to protect the environment by advancing the understanding, development and implementation of effective, accountable and democratic systems of governance for sustainable development.

Beginning in 2006, the Institute embarked on a “fast-action” climate mitigation campaign to promote non-CO₂ strategies that will result in significant emissions reductions in the near-term, to complement cuts in CO₂ that are essential for the long-term. These strategies include reducing emissions of local air pollutants, such as black carbon, methane, and ground-level (tropospheric) ozone; mitigation of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) through the Montreal Protocol ozone treaty; and carbon-negative measures such as biosequestration through expanded biochar production. For more information, visit www.igsd.org.