

Statement at the 62nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Annual panel discussion on the adverse effects of climate change and human rights

19/06/2026

Mr Chair,

Peace Brigades International (PBI) welcomes the Council's focus on climate finance and its human rights dimensions. PBI accompanies human rights defenders in Guatemala, Honduras and Colombia — countries where the climate crisis is not an abstract threat but a lived reality, and where those protecting ecosystems do so at tremendous personal cost. Our statement draws directly from this field experience and calls on the Council and Member States to ensure that climate finance architecture is redesigned to reach and protect those who are already on the frontlines of climate action.

The gap between climate finance and those who need it most

Current climate finance flows are both quantitatively insufficient and inequitably distributed. As the concept note for this panel rightly identifies, least developed countries and climate-vulnerable communities receive a disproportionately small share, while the majority of finance remains debt-creating and inaccessible to local actors. PBI's experience on the ground confirms and deepens this picture: the communities most affected by climate change, and most effective in protecting biodiversity-rich ecosystems, are systematically excluded from climate finance mechanisms.

This exclusion is not only unjust — it is ecologically counterproductive. Redirecting climate finance toward frontline communities is the most effective investment available if the goal is genuine ecosystem protection.

Guatemala: indigenous communities as ecosystem guardians

In Guatemala, indigenous Chortí communities of Olopa and Quetzaltepeque, Poqomam communities of Chinautla, and Q'eqchi communities of Alta Verapaz are among the primary defenders and guardians of their territories' ecosystems. These communities possess generations of knowledge about the land, water and biodiversity they protect. They represent, in practice, one of the most effective and rights-aligned responses to the climate crisis.

Yet these same communities face persecution, criminalization and attacks precisely because their defense of the environment obstructs extractive and economic interests.

Climate finance that bypasses them — or worse, that funds projects implemented without their free, prior and informed consent — reproduces the very dynamics that are driving environmental destruction.

PBI calls on the Council and Member States to direct political and financial support toward these communities and the organizations that defend them, recognizing that protecting environmental defenders and financing climate action are not separate agendas but one and the same.

Honduras: one of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries

Honduras is among the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, and it is indigenous and Afro-descendant communities that bear the heaviest burden of this vulnerability. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and the degradation of natural resources disproportionately affect these populations, threatening their livelihoods, food security, access to water and their broader enjoyment of human rights.

In this context, environmental human rights defenders play a critical role. They are not merely advocates — they are practitioners of the kind of community-based, rights-aligned environmental stewardship that climate finance urgently needs to support. Yet they continue to be targeted by attacks, harassment and criminalization, including by companies and criminal groups operating with near-total impunity.

Honduras illustrates a fundamental contradiction at the heart of current climate finance architecture: the populations most exposed to climate impacts, and most active in responding to them, remain among the least able to access available funds. PBI urges the Council to call on Honduras and international donors to adopt urgent measures to protect environmental defenders and to ensure that climate finance reaches and empowers indigenous and Afro-descendant communities directly.

Colombia: compounding crises at the intersection of climate, conflict and corporate presence

In Colombia, ethnic and peasant communities face humanitarian and climate crises that are deeply intertwined with socio-environmental conflict and the territorial control exercised by armed groups. This situation affects the entire national territory, but can be directly observed, among others, in the work of organizations and communities such as the Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral Sostenible de la Periferia Amazónica (ADISPA) in Putumayo, the communities of Jiguamiandó in Chocó, and the community council of Bahía Málaga in Valle del Cauca. These are areas of high biodiversity where the presence of national and transnational companies compounds both violence and environmental degradation, and where the pressure on land and natural resources directly threatens the rights and lives of those who defend them.

PBI also wishes to highlight the differentiated and largely invisible risk faced by women defenders in Colombia — including women who search for the disappeared — who in many cases are also the primary defenders of territory, nature and environment. Any human rights-based approach to climate finance must integrate gender-responsive safeguards and ensure the meaningful participation of women, particularly those from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, in decision-making processes around climate finance.

Recommendations

PBI calls on the Council, Member States, and international financial institutions to:

1. Ensure that climate finance reaches frontline communities through **direct, simplified access mechanisms** that reduce bureaucratic barriers and do not require intermediaries who are distant from affected populations.
2. Make **free, prior and informed consent** a binding prerequisite for any climate finance project affecting indigenous peoples' lands, territories and natural resources.
3. Integrate **explicit protections for environmental human rights defenders** into climate finance governance frameworks, recognizing that defenders are central actors in any credible climate strategy and must be protected as such.
4. Adopt **gender-responsive safeguards** across all climate finance instruments, ensuring the meaningful participation of women defenders and the recognition of their differentiated risks and contributions.
5. Establish **robust accountability mechanisms** to ensure that climate finance does not inadvertently fund projects that criminalize, displace or harm the communities protecting the ecosystems at stake.
6. Recognize that **supporting environmental defenders is a climate investment** — politically, financially and ecologically — and treat it as such in national climate strategies and international financing commitments.

Thank you.