

UN says environmental threats greatest challenge to human rights

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Human rights such as access to water are increasingly under threat by environmental 'threat multipliers' [Mike Hutchings/Reuters]

United Nations, September 14 (RHC)-- Environmental threats are worsening conflicts worldwide and will soon constitute the biggest challenge to human rights, the United Nations has warned.

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet said on Monday climate change, pollution, and nature loss are severely affecting human rights, while countries across the globe fail to take the necessary action.

“The interlinked crises of pollution, climate change and biodiversity act as threat multipliers, amplifying conflicts, tensions and structural inequalities, and forcing people into increasingly vulnerable situations,” Bachelet said. “As these environmental threats intensify, they will constitute the single greatest challenge to human rights of our era.”

The comments came as part of a global update delivered by Bachelet at the opening session of the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. The former Chilean president said environmental threats were already “directly and severely impacting a broad range of rights, including the rights to adequate food, water, education, housing, health, development, and even life itself”, hurting the poorest nations the hardest.

The UN rights chief cited “murderous climate events”, including the fires in Siberia and California, and floods in China, Germany and Turkey. Bachelet warned severe droughts could additionally force millions of people into misery, hunger and displacement.

Addressing the environmental crisis is therefore “a humanitarian imperative, a human rights imperative, a peace-building imperative and a development imperative”. “It is also doable,” she added.

Bachelet’s office is pushing for more ambitious climate commitments at the 12-day COP26 climate talks in Glasgow, set to begin on October 31st. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic offering an opportunity to focus on environment-friendly projects. “This is a shift that unfortunately is not being consistently and robustly undertaken” because of the failure on the part of member states to fund and implement commitments made under the Paris climate accords.

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