

THE ICRC'S CALL TO COP27 TO STRENGTHEN CLIMATE ACTION IN CONFLICT SETTINGS



Climate change and environmental degradation threaten the survival of humanity. Major and urgent political efforts to mitigate climate change are critical to avert the most devastating consequences of this crisis on people and their environment. Even if ambitious mitigation measures are implemented, climate disruption will continue to severely affect people's lives for several generations. Scaling up climate adaptation and the finance to support it are therefore equally essential to limit the humanitarian impacts of climate change.¹

Countries enduring armed conflict and other violence – the vast majority of which are among the world's least developed countries (LDCs) – are some of the most vulnerable to the climate crisis. Their capacity to adapt to a changing climate is drastically limited by the disruptive impact that wars have on societies.² Their acute vulnerability and severe capacity constraints should, in theory, ensure that they are prioritized for climate action. In practice, countries in conflict are among those most neglected when it comes to climate action and finance. Adapted climate action in these locations is critical to reduce humanitarian needs, preserve development gains and avoid systemic breakdown and lasting fragility.

Ahead of COP27, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) urges parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the governing bodies of the Conference of Parties (COP) to make three commitments to ensure that people living in conflict settings are not left behind:

- First, acknowledge the high vulnerability to climate risks of countries enduring conflict due to their limited adaptive capacity.
- Second, live up to international commitments to bolster climate action in countries that are particularly vulnerable to climate change, which entails strengthening climate action in countries enduring conflict and violence.
- Third, ensure that this action is adequately supported by fit-for-purpose and accessible climate finance.

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2022: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FullReport.pdf.

² For an in-depth overview of the humanitarian consequences of converging climate risks and armed conflict, see: ICRC, *When Rain Turns to Dust: Understanding and Responding to the Combined Impact of Armed Conflicts and the Climate and Environment Crisis on People's Lives*, ICRC, Geneva, 2020.

1 Acknowledge the high vulnerability to climate risks of countries enduring conflict due to their limited adaptive capacity.

The international community has made commitments to provide support to countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change. Most states enduring armed conflict and violence fit into this category. In fact, the vast majority of the states deemed most vulnerable and least ready to adapt to climate change are mired in conflict.³ This is not because climate change directly causes conflict. Rather, climate change amplifies the humanitarian needs triggered by conflict, while conflict increases the fragility of institutions, essential services, infrastructure and governance that are critical to help people cope with and adapt to a changing climate. A more conscious and explicit recognition of this unique vulnerability would allow greater focus on pathways to sustainably address their needs and ensure adequate and urgent climate action in these locations.

WE URGE PARTIES TO THE UNFCCC TO:

- Acknowledge and draw attention to the unique vulnerability to climate risks of countries and communities enduring conflict, as this is essential to ensure adequate climate action in these settings.**

2 Live up to international commitments to bolster climate action in countries that are particularly vulnerable to climate change, which entails strengthening climate action in countries enduring conflict and violence.

Support to help communities adapt to a changing climate is particularly weak in places enduring conflict because of the challenges associated with long-term programming in these environments. In the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, developed states have agreed to provide support in the form of finance and expertise to countries, including many of those affected by armed conflict and violence that are also vulnerable to the effects of climate change, notably the LDCs, Small Island Developing States and African countries.⁴ In parallel, the Sustainable Development Goals are built on a commitment to leave no one behind.⁵ Living up to these commitments requires tailored approaches to reach and support people in unstable settings, so they can cope with and adapt to a changing climate.

WE URGE PARTIES TO THE UNFCCC TO:

- Scale up efforts to reinforce climate action in countries affected by conflict, particularly by strengthening knowledge and practice to prepare for, respond to and build resilience against loss and damage associated with climate change in these locations.**
- Ensure that climate action not only reaches countries enduring conflict, but also the communities that are the most vulnerable, even if they live in**

³ The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Country Index summarizes a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges in combination with its readiness to improve resilience: <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/>.

⁴ The Paris Agreement reaffirms the obligation of developed countries to support developing countries in their climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. Most countries affected by both climate change and armed conflict fall into the categories recognized by the Paris Agreement as potential recipients of support. See the Paris Agreement to the UNFCCC, 12 December 2015: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf and the UNFCCC, Article 4.1, 1992: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/convention_text_with_annexes_english_for_posting.pdf.

⁵ "Leave no one behind" is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. It represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN member states to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and humanity as a whole: <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>.

unstable and hard-to-access areas. Locally driven climate-change adaptation and disaster risk reduction that complement centralized efforts are essential in this regard.

- **Address the structural divisions and silos within organizations that prevent informed, conflict-sensitive climate action.**

3 Ensure that climate action is adequately supported by fit-for-purpose and accessible climate finance.

Two critical imbalances characterize climate finance and severely limit the potential for adequate climate action in fragile and conflict-affected countries. First, there is a significant disparity between the provision of funding to stable middle-income countries and the world's LDCs, a category in which conflict- or violence-affected countries are over-represented. Despite the Paris Agreement's commitment to increase support for LDCs, between 2016 and 2020, they only received some 17 per cent of the total climate funding accounted for by the Organisation for Economic and Co operation and Development (OECD), with 70 per cent of all climate finance provided to middle-income countries (and only 22 per cent going to the 57 states defined as fragile by the OECD).⁶

Among the group of LDCs, funding is not equally distributed and the most fragile countries tend to receive the least funding. Within countries, climate finance often does not reach conflict-affected areas, particularly when these territories are not under state control, which excludes millions of people. This not only reflects the fact that conflict-affected zones in a country are often excluded to mitigate risks, but also that just a fraction of international climate finance is committed to local action.⁷ In addition, although states committed in the Paris Agreement to ensuring a greater balance between finance for climate-change adaptation and finance for climate-change mitigation, adaptation financing still lags far behind. To close the gaps in climate financing, there need to be sustained efforts to revisit the current criteria for accessing climate finance and the methodologies for assessing risk, and specialized ways of working in places affected by conflict need to be developed. When discussing loss and damage, it is important to ensure that similar gaps in financing are not inadvertently created.

WE URGE PARTIES TO THE UNFCCC TO:

- **Review how the financing mechanisms are governed to ensure that risk aversity does not exclude millions of people from receiving much-needed support and consider introducing specialized funding windows that allow for differentiated programming that reaches the most vulnerable and remote communities.**
- **Provide the financing mechanisms with guidance on policies and regulations that allow reasonable flexibility to enable action in fragile and conflict-affected settings.**
- **Enable the provision of climate adaptation finance at multiple scales to encourage both large- and small-scale projects that address context-specific needs. In conflict settings, enable delivery by diverse partners by simplifying the processes for receiving funds and by providing support to actors with the access, mandate and expertise to operate in conflict-affected settings to navigate existing opportunities to access finance.**

⁶ OECD, *Aggregate trends of Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by Developed Countries in 2013–2020*, OECD, Paris, 2022.

⁷ Cao, Y., Alcayna, T., Quevedo, A. and Jarvie, J., *Exploring the Conflict Blind Spots in Climate Adaptation Finance: Synthesis report*, Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC), 2021; International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), *Access to climate finance; workshop report (theme 2)*, London, IIED, 2021.

Does climate change cause conflict?

Climate change does not directly cause armed conflict, but it can indirectly increase the risk of it by exacerbating factors that may, in a complex interplay, ultimately lead to conflict. Such factors include social exclusion, a history of conflict and grievances, economic risks, environmental degradation and tensions over the management of resources.⁸ In peaceful environments with solid institutions that provide social protection, resolve tensions, manage the use and allocation of resources in a sustainable and equitable manner, and ensure inclusive development, climate change does not cause armed conflict. Such institutions are critical to climate-change adaptation.

Countries affected by conflict, other violence and fragility tend to suffer from the absence of strong governance and inclusive institutions. In such places, climate change may contribute to exacerbating and prolonging conflict and instability by further weakening institutions, systems and people's coping mechanisms. It may also aggravate communal violence, particularly in communities where resources are already overstretched and where the authorities may not be able to resolve tensions.

The role of the ICRC

The ICRC's mandate and exclusively humanitarian mission are grounded in international law, the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and resolutions of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Climate risks matter to us because they severely exacerbate the needs and vulnerability of the communities we work with.

In line with the [ICRC's plan of action for implementing the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#), we aim to help strengthen people's resilience to the risks that arise when climate change and armed conflict or other violence converge, working closely with other components of the [International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement](#), communities, states, academics and the private sector. By 2025, we will factor climate and environmental risks into all our programmes. This work goes hand in hand with our goal to maximize our environmental sustainability and reduce our greenhouse-gas emissions by at least 50 per cent, compared with 2018 levels, by 2030. We will also continue to use our influence to mobilize urgent and more ambitious climate action and environmental protection in places experiencing armed conflict or violence, notably – in terms of the former – by promoting respect for the rules and recommendations relating to the protection of the natural environment under IHL. This can limit environmental degradation and thus reduce the harm and the risks that conflict-affected communities are exposed to, including those resulting from climate change.⁹

⁸ IPCC, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2022.

⁹ ICRC, *When Rain Turns to Dust: Understanding and Responding to the Combined Impact of Armed Conflicts and the Climate and Environment Crisis on People's Lives*, ICRC, Geneva, 2020; ICRC, *Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict: Rules and Recommendations Relating to the Protection of the Natural Environment under International Humanitarian Law, with Commentary*, ICRC, Geneva, 2020.



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