

# THE CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT CHARTER FOR HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

Today's climate and environmental crises threaten the survival of humanity. All dimensions of our lives are affected, from our physical and mental health to our food, water and economic security. While the crises are impacting everyone, those who have contributed least to the problem are hit hardest – and it is only getting worse.

Our ability to protect the lives and the rights of present and future generations depends on whether we make the right choices now - to cut greenhouse gas emissions, halt biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, adapt to rising risks, and address loss and damage associated with the impacts of the crises. Radical transformation is urgently needed to prevent further death and suffering.

As local, national and international humanitarian organizations, we are deeply worried about the scale of the crises and our capacity to respond to rising needs. We are determined to act. We have a responsibility to work together to reduce the impacts of the crises by accelerating our own action and mobilising others to do the same.

## PURPOSE

This Charter is intended to galvanize and steer collective action in response to the climate and environmental crises, in particular for those who will feel their impacts the most. Its commitments should be implemented through organization-specific targets and action plans, informed by the need for urgent action and the individual capacity and mandates of organizations.

This Charter is guided by the latest scientific evidence and the objectives of the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as other relevant international law and standards, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international environmental law. It complements key humanitarian standards, such as the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, the Professional Standards for Protection Work and the Sphere Handbook.



Standing together as local, national and international humanitarian organizations, we commit to:

## **1 Step up our response to growing humanitarian needs and help people adapt to the impacts of the climate and environmental crises**

We will reduce risks and vulnerability to shocks, stresses and longer-term changes through an increased focus on climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and anticipatory action. Across all of our work, including preparedness, response and recovery, we will consider and address changing climate and environmental risks in rural and urban settings. Our programmes and operations will be based on sound risk analyses, informed by the best available short, medium and longer-term climate and environmental science and data, and by local and indigenous knowledge.

We will support those who are the most at risk, taking into account the influence that individual characteristics, such as gender, age and disability, structural inequity, legal status, and situations such as poverty, marginalization, displacement, migration, public health emergencies or armed conflict, have on people's capacities and vulnerabilities.

## **2 Maximize the environmental sustainability of our work and rapidly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions**

In line with the principle of “do no harm”, we will avoid, minimize and manage the damage we cause to the environment and the climate, while maintaining our ability to provide timely and principled humanitarian assistance. We will implement sound environmental policies and systematically assess the immediate and longer-term environmental impact of all our work, including our programmes, procurement, logistics and premises.

We will measure and significantly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, in line with global goals. Supporting high-quality emission reduction projects to offset unavoidable emissions, including through conservation and restoration of forests and land, will complement reduction efforts, but will not be considered a substitute for such efforts. We will responsibly manage and use natural resources, including water, and reduce and properly manage the waste generated in our premises and by our programmes.

### **3 Embrace the leadership of local actors and communities**

Our action will be guided by the leadership and experience of local actors and communities. We will support them to better prepare for changing climate and environmental risks, and will learn from local, traditional and indigenous knowledge on mitigation and adaptation measures, including nature-based solutions. We will invest in locally-led durable responses. We will work together to ensure a meaningful and inclusive participation and leadership of local actors and people we serve in the design, management, implementation and evaluation of our programmes.

### **4 Increase our capacity to understand climate and environmental risks and develop evidence-based solutions**

To strengthen our collective capacity to reduce risks, anticipate crises, act early and ensure the sustainability of our activities, we will enhance our understanding of evolving short- and long-term climate and environmental risks and opportunities. When feasible, we will produce and share relevant and accessible data and analysis, to help address data scarcity. We will improve our use of science, evidence, technology and communications to address these risks in all our activities.

### **5 Work collaboratively across the humanitarian sector and beyond to strengthen climate and environmental action**

We will enhance cooperation across the humanitarian system, in particular between local, national and international actors. We will also work with local and national authorities, environmental, development and human rights actors, international financial institutions, the private sector, researchers, suppliers and donors to ensure a continuum of efforts to manage risks and to develop sustainable interventions. We will notably share our knowledge and insights to help shape people-centred, climate resilient and inclusive development.

## **6 Use our influence to mobilise urgent and more ambitious climate action and environmental protection**

We call for ambitious action at all levels, by governments, organizations, the private sector and individuals to reduce risks and address the causes and consequences of the climate and environmental crises. We commit to inform and influence decision-making, including relating to laws, policies, investments and practices, with evidence of people's experience and the current and future humanitarian consequences of the climate and environmental crises. We will also step up our efforts to promote improved implementation of relevant international and national laws, standards, policies and plans for stronger climate action and environmental protection.

## **7 Develop targets and measure our progress as we implement our commitments**

We will rigorously measure and transparently report on the impact of our work on the climate and environment, and seek feedback from the people we serve. Following our adoption of this Charter, we will translate our commitments into time-bound targets and action plans within a year (if not already in place), using relevant standards and guidance. Targets may need to be reviewed on a regular basis, as our ambitions increase, and our knowledge and capacity develop. Shifting our ways of working will entail changes in mindsets and approaches, as well as significant transition and maintenance costs. We will invest the necessary resources to achieve our commitments and support each other in the process of implementation. The support of our donors will be essential.

# ANNEX: TERMINOLOGY

**Adaptation (to climate change):** What we do to adjust to the changing climate – that is the actual or expected climate and its effects. In human systems, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In some natural systems, human intervention may aid adjustment to expected climate change and its effects (IPCC, 2018).

**Anticipatory action:** A set of actions taken to prevent or mitigate potential disaster impacts before a shock or before acute impacts are felt. The actions are carried out in anticipation of a hazard impact and based on a prediction of how the event will unfold. Anticipatory actions should not be a substitute for longer-term investment in risk reduction and should aim to strengthen people's capacity to manage risks (Anticipation Hub, 2020).

**Biodiversity loss:** The reduction of any aspect of biological diversity (i.e. diversity at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels is lost) in a particular area through death (including extinction), destruction or manual removal; it can refer to many scales, from global extinctions to population extinctions, resulting in decreased total diversity at the same scale (IPBES Core Glossary, 2021).

**Climate action:** Urgent action to combat climate change and its impact, as well as steps taken to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries. Climate action is the subject of Goal 13 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (ECOSOC, 2019).

Climate and environmental crises include extreme climate and weather events, biodiversity loss, air pollution, land degradation, unsustainable production and consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, marine plastic litter, overexploited natural resources, antibiotic resistant infections and the harmful use of hazardous substances and pesticides (UNEP: GEO-6, 2019).

**Environmental sustainability:** A state in which the demands placed on the environment can be met without reducing its capacity to allow all people to live well, now and in the future (GEMET, 2020). While environmental sustainability is broader than climate action, limiting climate and environmental impacts can both contribute to mitigating climate change, for instance by reducing emissions and greening practices, and to strengthening people's resilience to climate change (IUCN, no date; IUCN, 2015; GEMET, 2020).

**Mitigation (of climate change):** Action that limits or prevents greenhouse gas emissions and enhances activities that remove these gases from the atmosphere (IPCC, 2018).

**Nature-based solutions:** Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits (IUCN, 2016).