



ICRC

THE ICRC'S CALL TO COP26 TO STRENGTHEN CLIMATE ACTION IN CONFLICT SETTINGS



Today's climate and environmental crises threaten the survival of humanity. Major and urgent political efforts to mitigate climate change are critical to avert the most disastrous consequences 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 is therefore equally essential to limit the humanitarian impacts of climate change.¹

Countries enduring armed conflict and other violence are among the most vulnerable to the climate crisis. Their capacity to adapt to a changing climate is drastically limited by the disruptive impact of wars that weaken institutions and essential services, and erode the economy, social cohesion and development.² Such acute vulnerability and severe capacity constraints should, in theory, ensure that countries affected by conflict – a vast majority of which are among the world's least developed countries (LDCs) – are prioritized by climate action.³ However, in practice, these countries are among those most neglected by 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 COP26, the 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 concrete commitments to ensure that people enduring conflict are not left behind:

- First, acknowledge that countries enduring conflict are highly vulnerable to climate risks due to their limited adaptive capacity
- Second, live up to the commitment to bolster climate action in countries identified by the UNFCCC as particularly vulnerable to climate change by scaling up support to countries enduring conflict
- Third, ensure that this action is adequately supported by fit-for-purpose climate finance.

1

Acknowledge that countries enduring conflict are highly vulnerable to climate risks due to their limited adaptive capacity – this recognition is critical to scale up climate action there.

Of the 25 states deemed most vulnerable and least ready to adapt to climate change by the ND-Gain Index, 14 are mired in conflict. 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 helping people cope and adapt to a changing climate. Due to political sensitivities, the COP has thus far not addressed the challenges resulting from situations of conflict and the specific needs that have to be met to scale up climate action in such locations, even though there is widespread understanding that communities enduring conflict are among the most vulnerable to climate change. In theory, a majority of conflict- or violence-affected countries are prioritized by climate action because they are among the world's LDCs. A more conscious and explicit recognition of their unique vulnerabilities would allow greater focus on the pathways to sustainably address their specific needs and ensure adequate and urgent climate action in these locations.

WE URGE PARTIES TO THE UNFCCC TO:

- **Acknowledge and draw attention to the particular 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 the commitment to bolster climate action in countries identified by parties to the UNFCCC as particularly vulnerable to climate change by scaling up support to countries enduring conflict.

Ambitious collective action is critical to avert the most disastrous consequences of climate change on people and their environment. The climate and environmental crises are already felt and are severely impacting people's lives. Many countries affected by conflict or violence need to urgently strengthen their populations' ability to adapt to growing climate risks and changes to the natural environment caused by climate change. Yet, they commonly have a limited capacity to do so on their own. Despite their clear vulnerability to climate risks, support for their climate adaptation is particularly weak because of the uncertainty attached to financing and programming in these locations. Within countries, there can be significant gaps in climate action between more stable and less stable locations, where insecurity and instability can complicate programmatic efforts. Greater and urgent adaptation efforts are essential to avoid millions more people being pushed into extreme poverty, particularly in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected countries.

WE URGE PARTIES TO THE UNFCCC TO:

- **Scale up efforts to reinforce climate action in countries enduring conflict, in particular 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 reaches the communities that are the most vulnerable, even if they live in unstable and hard to reach areas. Locally driven climate change adaptation and disaster-risk reduction that complement centralized efforts are essential in that regard.**
- **Provide guidance to its financial mechanisms on approach and scope to enable climate adaptation in fragile and conflict-affected settings.**

3 Ensure that climate action in countries affected by conflict is adequately supported by fit-for-purpose 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 2018 they only received some 14 per cent of the total climate funding accounted for by the OECD, with nearly 70 per cent of all climate finance provided to middle-income countries.⁴ Even within the group of LDCs, funding is not equally distributed and the most fragile countries with the weakest institutions tend to receive the least funding. Inside countries affected by conflict, when climate finance is provided, it often excludes conflict-affected locations, particularly when these territories are not under the control of the state. This leaves out millions of people. This reflects not only 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.⁵ Second, although states committed in the Paris Agreement to ensure a greater balance between finance for mitigation and adaptation, adaptation funding is still trailing behind.⁶

WE URGE PARTIES TO THE UNFCCC TO:

- **Make sure that risk aversity does not exclude millions of people from receiving much needed support and explore how to adequately channel climate finance to countries in crisis, and to the most vulnerable and remote communities within these countries. Countries could coordinate to ensure that the process to access funds is simplified, guided by a suitable set of criteria, with built-in flexibility to adapt to fluid situations. Financing mechanisms could be required to report on funding provided to countries in crisis.**
- **Harmonize funding and donor requirements to ease the burden and reduce transaction costs for all applicants, which would be particularly enabling for those in conflict or fragile settings.**



Does climate change cause conflict?

Scientists generally agree that climate change does not directly cause armed conflict, but that it may indirectly increase the risk of conflict by exacerbating factors that can, in a complex interplay of factors, 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. 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 violent conflicts. Such institutions are critical to climate-change adaptation. Countries affected by conflict, other violence, or 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 state may not be able to resolve tensions.

Responses to the risks created or exacerbated by climate change must go beyond hard security measures. Inclusive responses that meet the protection and assistance needs of the most vulnerable and contribute to strengthening the resilience of people and countries to a changing climate are key to our collective security. Greater respect for international humanitarian law can also limit environmental degradation, and thus reduce the harm and the risks that conflict-affected communities are exposed to, including because of climate change.⁷

ENDNOTES

- 1 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), *World Disasters Report 2020*, IFRC, Geneva, 2020.
- 2 For an in-depth overview of the humanitarian consequences of converging climate risks and armed conflict, see International Committee of the Red Cross (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.
- 3 Paris Agreement, 9.4: "The provision of scaled-up financial resources should aim to achieve a balance between adaptation and mitigation, taking into account country-driven strategies, and the priorities and needs of developing country Parties, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and have significant capacity constraints, such as the least developed countries and small island developing States, considering the need for public and grant-based resources for adaptation."
- 4 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Climate Finance Provided and Mobilized by Developed Countries in 2013–18*, OECD, Paris, 2020.
- 5 Cao, Y., Alcayna, T., Quevedo, A., and Jarvie, J., *Synthesis Report: Exploring the Conflict Blind Spots in Climate Adaptation Finance*, Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises, 2021; International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), *Access to Climate Finance: Workshop Report (Theme 2)*, IIED, London, 2021.
- 6 In 2018, 70% of climate finance tracked by the OECD was provided to mitigation, 21% to adaptation and the rest was cross-cutting (OECD, *op. cit.*, p.7).
- 7 See ICRC, *When Rain Turns to Dust*, 2020; and 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.

The ICRC's mandate and exclusively humanitarian mission is 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 vulnerability of the communities we work with. The ICRC is committed to helping strengthen people's resilience to converging climate risks and conflict or violence through its operational response, and through mobilizing others to ensure stronger climate action in places enduring conflict or violence. This work goes hand in hand with our ambition to reduce our own environmental footprint.

Under the [Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#), we have committed to factor climate and environmental risks into all our programmes by 2025. By 2030, we will reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 per cent compared to 2018 levels. We also commit to using our influence to mobilize urgent and more ambitious climate action and environmental protection, notably through promoting respect for the rules and recommendations relating to the protection of the natural environment under international humanitarian law.



ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross

19, avenue de la Paix
1202, Geneva, Switzerland
www.icrc.org
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