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13 May 2016 – The signatories to the 2015 Paris Agreement face the first test of their commitment when they meet in Bonn, Germany to negotiate a new mechanism to fund climate adaptation projects, which often displaced indigenous and other communities, a United Nations human rights expert said.

“The first test of States' commitment to the principles of the Paris Agreement will be next week,” said John H. Knox, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and environment. “This is no time for complacency,” he said, adding: “The fact that 177 States have signed the Paris Agreement in less than a month is very welcome news, but the hard work of safeguarding the environment and human rights is just now beginning.”

Mr. Knox recalled that the Paris Agreement is the first environmental treaty to include a strong commitment to protect human rights in addressing climate change. “The Paris Agreement recognizes that States do not check their human rights obligations at the door when they enter a climate negotiation,” he said. However in the agreement, States committed to safeguard human rights in taking actions to address climate change, he added.

In the Bonn meeting, convened by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 16-26 May, government representatives will negotiate the terms of a new international climate mechanism to transfer funds from developed to developing countries for projects that contribute to the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and support sustainable development.

The new fund is expected to be the successor to the Clean Development Mechanism, which was highly criticized for contributing to some hydroelectric and other projects that were linked to human rights abuses, including displacement of indigenous and other communities without transparency or adequate consultation.



Ahead of the meeting, Mr. Knox had made a number of recommendations to the Paris Convention's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA). He called for the adoption of specific safeguards, such as prior assessments, provisions for public participation, and effective grievance procedures that would help to ensure that proposed projects do not run rough-shod over the human rights of indigenous peoples and other communities that are most directly affected by them.

“The main problem with the Clean Development Mechanism has always been that it lacks effective safeguards to ensure that human rights are taken into account,” he said. “The urgency of addressing climate change does not justify violating the rights of those who live and work near the projects.” “If the Clean Development Mechanism was too often a human rights scofflaw, this is the moment for the new Sustainable Development Mechanism to become a human rights champion,” the Special Rapporteur concluded.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

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