



Side event: Geoengineering and Human Rights

Human Rights Council, 51th session

Tuesday 13 September, 12-13 PM (CET) | Palais des Nations, Room XXV, Geneva, Switzerland

“Geoengineering” refers to a set of large-scale technological interventions in the Earth's natural systems to counteract some of the effects of climate change. Proposed approaches usually fall under the category of solar radiation management (SRM) or carbon dioxide removal (CDR), targeting land-based, marine and atmospheric ecosystems. Many CDR approaches rely on carbon capture and storage (CCS) as an enabling technology. Such technologies are largely hypothetical for now, but some CDR approaches are being implemented at small scale and SRM proponents are rapidly moving into real world experiments.

All geoengineering technologies have the potential to undermine fundamental human rights. The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment [warned](#) that geoengineering technologies “*could have massive impacts on human rights, severely disrupting ocean and terrestrial ecosystems, interfering with food production and harming biodiversity*”. Both CDR and SRM assume that climate mitigation - and its primary pathway of reducing emissions by rapidly phasing out fossil fuels - will fail. But [according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#), even temporary overshoot of 1.5°C is exceptionally dangerous and would result in adverse impacts irreversible on time-scales from centuries to millennia. Reliance on hypothetical and uncertain geoengineering is delaying the implementation of proven, near-term mitigation measures that are more likely to avoid catastrophic levels of warming. The IPCC has also consistently warned of [geoengineering's risks to people and ecosystems](#), which remain poorly understood. The risks around researching SRM for potential deployment are so high that over 250 scientists are calling for a “[solar geoengineering non-use agreement](#)”.

Geoengineering also threatens procedural rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. While some geoengineering projects and experiments are planned or currently underway in Indigenous territories, they fail to integrate community consultation and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), which are essential to guarantee that the rights of the communities involved are protected.

In 2021, the Human Rights Council [mandated the Advisory Committee](#) to conduct a study on the impact of new technologies for climate protection on the enjoyment of human rights. The report will be submitted to the Council at its 54th session, in 2023, and will address geoengineering - including CDR and SRM.

This side event will look at the human rights implications and risks of geoengineering interventions, highlighting the importance of human rights-based climate action, interpreted in line with international law obligations under the Paris agreement and the precautionary principle. Speakers will discuss the role of the Human Rights Council, the Advisory Committee, and other human rights processes in the geoengineering discussion.

Moderator: Kevin Whelan, UN Representative, Amnesty International

Speakers:

- Yves Lador, Representative to the UN in Geneva, Earthjustice
- Lili Fuhr, Deputy Director - Climate & Energy Program, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)
- Ana Maria Suarez Franco, Permanent Representative at the UN, FIAN International
- Video statement: Margaretha Wewerinke Singh, Assistant Professor of Public International Law (Leiden University, the Netherlands), Senior Lecturer in Environmental Law (University of the South Pacific, Fiji)