



Safe Climate

A Report of
the Special
Rapporteur
on
Human Rights
and the
Environment



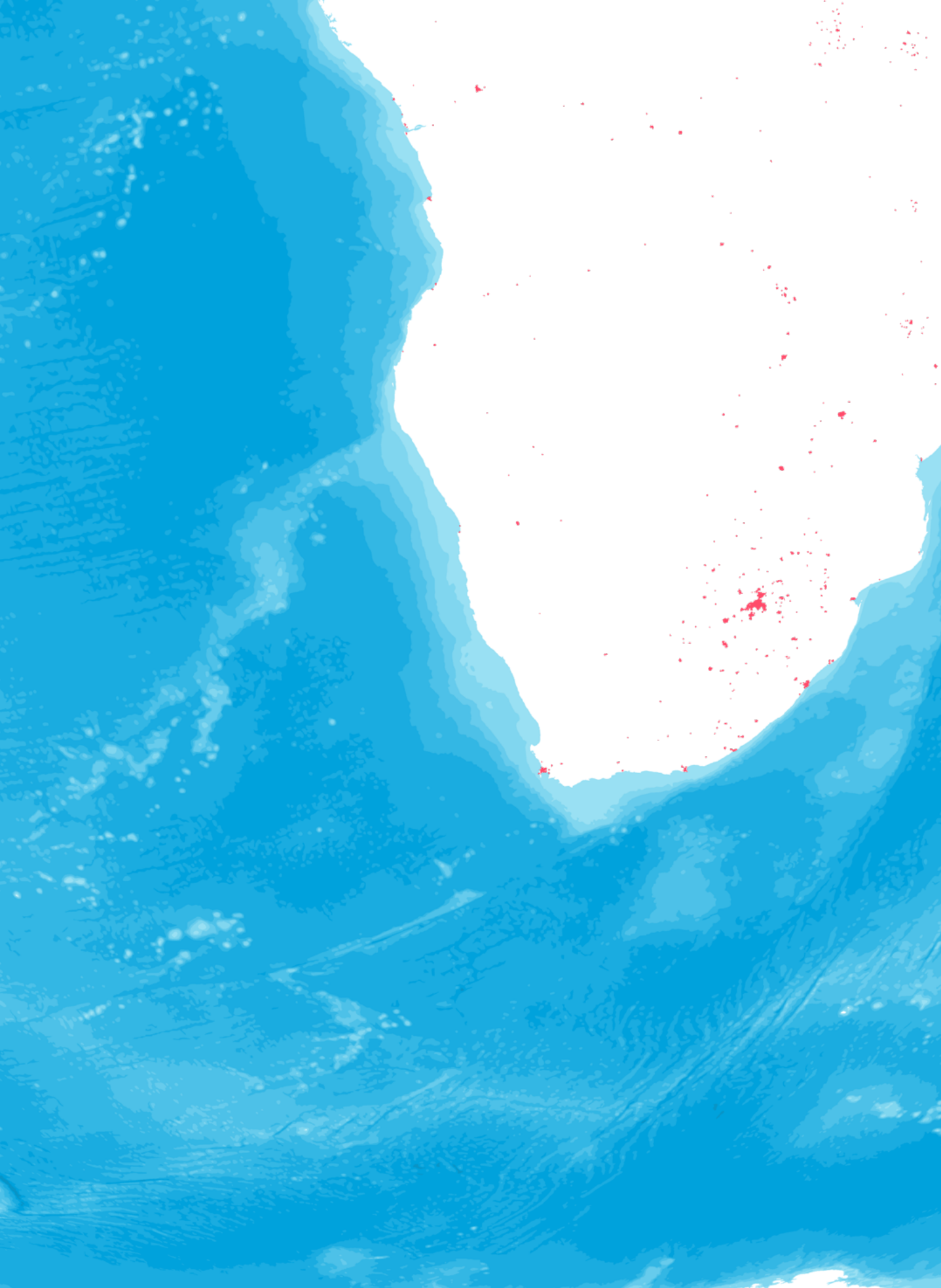
Acknowledgements

There is now global agreement that human rights norms apply to the full spectrum of environmental issues, including climate change. This report provides clarity regarding the substantive obligations relating to a range of elements that are essential to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. It was developed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, David R. Boyd. To prepare this report, the Special Rapporteur held consultations in Geneva with civil society on 6 March 2019, with Geneva Pledge States on 7 March 2019, with Small Island Development States on 8 March 2019, and with States, international organisations and other stakeholders on 21 June 2019. These consultations complemented a call for inputs on climate change and human rights circulated on 8 April 2019. The report is presented to the Third Committee on Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Issues of the UN General Assembly at its 74th session. The design of this version of the report was undertaken by Catalogtree with the sponsorship and guidance of the United Nations Environment Programme.

Summary

In the present report, the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment discusses the urgent need for action to ensure a safe climate for humanity. He illustrates the devastating effects of the current global climate emergency on the enjoyment of human rights, and the crucial role for human rights in catalysing action to address climate change. After clarifying the obligations of States and the responsibilities of businesses, the Special Rapporteur makes practical recommendations with respect to addressing society's addiction to fossil fuels; accelerating other mitigation actions; enhancing adaptation to protect vulnerable people; ramping up climate finance; financing loss and damage; and empowering United Nations institutions. The Special Rapporteur concludes that a safe climate is a vital element of the right to a healthy environment and is absolutely essential to human life and well-being.

The Special Rapporteur is submitting the present report together with an annex on good practices related to ensuring a safe climate, available on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The good practices demonstrate that effective actions are available to simultaneously address climate change and protect human rights. Drawn from every continent and featuring more than 60 States and a wide range of actors, the good practices are intended to inspire ambitious action to address the global climate emergency.



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I. The global

climate emergency

Global CO₂ emissions
2012 (tons / year / gridcell)



1

We are in the midst of an unprecedented environmental crisis. Human activities are causing pollution, extinction and climate change. Air pollution causes millions of premature deaths annually, including hundreds of thousands of children aged five and under. Wildlife populations are in free fall and one million species are at risk of extinction. The most pressing environmental risk is climate change, which not only exacerbates air pollution and biodiversity loss, but multiplies a broad range of risks, detailed below, leading to negative impacts on billions of people. A growing number of States, including Canada, France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, have declared a global climate emergency.

Fig. 1 Growth in atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ since the Industrial Revolution.

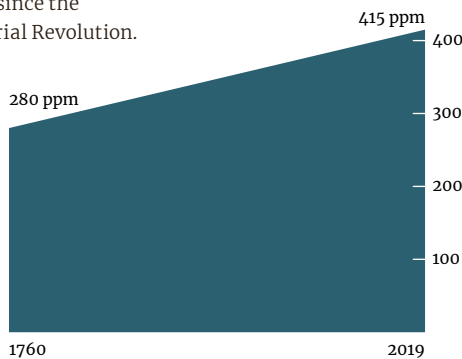
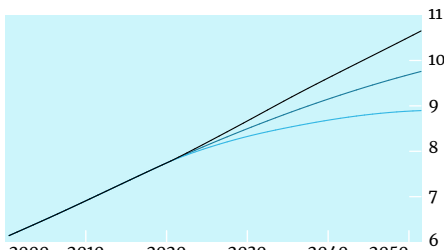


Fig. 2 The world population is expected to exceed 9 billion by 2050.



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Human society developed during the Holocene, an 11,500-year-long interglacial period characterized by a relatively stable climate. The Holocene epoch enabled the emergence of agriculture, cities and civilization. However, human activities – burning fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas), deforestation and industrial agriculture – are changing the Earth's climate, destabilizing the climate system. Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide have risen by 50 per cent since the Industrial Revolution, from 280 parts per million to more than 415 parts per million see Fig. 1. The last time carbon dioxide levels were this high was during the Pliocene epoch 3 million years ago, meaning that our species, homo sapiens, has never experienced this situation.¹ To make matters worse, there is a risk that natural

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