

**Contribution of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the COP 30 Presidency Roadmap on the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels in a Just, Orderly and Equitable Manner**

**10 April 2026**

**A. What are the most critical barriers – whether physical, economic, financial, institutional, technological or social – preventing a transition away from fossil fuels?**

The transition away from fossil fuels is hindered by a set of deeply interrelated structural, economic, financial, institutional, political, technological, and social barriers. These barriers reinforce one another, creating a systemic architecture that prioritizes fossil-fuel-driven growth, entrenches inequalities, and reproduces global power asymmetries to the detriment of human rights, including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

**1. Economic and financial barriers**

Current economic models prioritize perpetual economic growth, as measured by gross domestic product (GDP), and too often privilege short-term profit over environmental integrity, long-term sustainability and human development.<sup>1</sup> GDP emerged from the crises of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a key metric in efforts to manage and reconstruct economies.<sup>2</sup> However, GDP alone is not enough to measure progress towards socially and economically inclusive, just, and sustainable development,<sup>3</sup> and relying on GDP as the primary measure of a country's progress is misguided.<sup>4</sup>

Many activities that expand GDP undermine social well-being and ecological integrity. Consumption, even when excessive or wasteful, and production, even when toxic or reliant on underpaid workers, grows GDP and thus incentivizes economic actions that have a negative impact on human rights, including the right to a healthy environment.<sup>5</sup> GDP records all market activity as positive, including fossil fuel extraction, pollution-intensive production, and environmentally harmful land use, thus advancing a structural bias in favour of fossil fuel-driven economic growth. Despite global commitments, fossil fuel reliance and dependency persists,<sup>6</sup> as investment and fiscal strategies remain tied to GDP driven growth models that reward carbon intensive activities while ignoring long-term ecological damage, social inequalities and human rights impacts. The Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights emphasized that as long as the economy is driven mainly by profit maximization, it will respond to the demand expressed by the richest groups of society, leading to extractive forms

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<sup>1</sup> [A/HRC/60/52](#), Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), para. 10.

<sup>2</sup> [United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, Valuing What Counts – United Nations System-wide Contribution on Progress Beyond Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#) (2022), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> [A/HRC/56/61](#), Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Eradicating poverty beyond growth (2024), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> [A/HRC/60/52](#), Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), para. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, para. 7.

of production that worsen social exclusion in the name of creating more wealth.<sup>7</sup> When economic systems ignore social and ecological “externalities”, they reproduce an architecture that locks societies into fossil fuels and obstructs transitioning away.

This problem is particularly acute in many fossil fuel exporting developing countries, where the dominance of GDP interacts with high levels of fossil-fuel dependence and severe debt burdens.<sup>8</sup> Some countries rely on fossil fuel exports to obtain fiscal revenue, foreign exchange, and employment.<sup>9</sup> In GDP terms, these sectors appear as markers of progress, but in reality, they often increase vulnerability to price shocks, deepen structural inequalities, and limit needed economic diversification.<sup>10</sup> GDP does not account for the long-term harms caused by commodity volatility, stranded assets, or environmental degradation – yet these harms directly undermine the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.<sup>11</sup>

Simultaneously, escalating debt burdens crowd out the public investment required for a just transition.<sup>12</sup> Because international financial institutions and credit rating agencies rely heavily on GDP-anchored indicators, States are pushed to maintain extractive growth strategies to preserve “creditworthiness”,<sup>13</sup> even when these strategies sacrifice environmental protection and long-term development prospects. This creates a structural trap in which the very activities that increase GDP weaken the material conditions necessary for people to enjoy their rights.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the increasing production of plastics and petrochemicals continues to embed fossil fuel dependence in our economies across sectors and supply chains, despite global commitments to decarbonize.<sup>15</sup> Primary plastic production currently accounts for 12.5 per cent of global oil demand and 8.5 per cent of global gas demand and is projected to account for 50 per cent of global oil demand by 2050.<sup>16</sup> Petrochemicals used in agriculture are projected to account for more than two thirds of global oil demand growth by 2026, and for more than half of all oil usage by 2050.<sup>17</sup> Synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, in particular, are driving fossil fuel expansion.<sup>18</sup>

These dynamics are further compounded by the continued flow of public and private subsidies to fossil fuel value chains. In 2024, explicit fossil fuel subsidies amounted to USD 725 billion and implicit fossil fuel subsidies to USD 6.7 trillion.<sup>19</sup> Financial systems remain locked into the *status quo* of fossil fuel investments, supported by State-backed loans, guarantees, and

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<sup>7</sup> A/HRC/56/61, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Eradicating poverty beyond growth (2024), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance [Steadman, S., Gençsü, I., Mustapha, S., Colenbrander, S., and Tyson, J. \(2023\). \*Indebted: how to support countries heavily reliant on oil and gas revenues to secure long-term prosperity\*. Report. London: ODI.](#)

<sup>9</sup> A/HRC/56/61, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Eradicating poverty beyond growth (2024), paras. 20-23.

<sup>10</sup> [Our Common Agenda - Report of the Secretary-General 2021](#).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). (2022). Valuing What Counts – United Nations System-wide Contribution on Progress Beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

<sup>12</sup> A/HRC/56/61, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Eradicating poverty beyond growth (2024), paras. 27-30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*; [OHCHR, Sovereign Debt and Human Rights](#).

<sup>14</sup> United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). (2022). Valuing What Counts – United Nations System-wide Contribution on Progress Beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

<sup>15</sup> [A/HRC/59/42](#), Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, The imperative of defossilizing our economies (2025), para. 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, para. 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, para. 28.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> International Monetary Fund, Underpriced and Overused: Fossil Fuel Subsidies Data 2025 Update, pp. 5-6.

fiscal incentives. However, fossil fuel subsidies result in artificially low prices, distort markets, and delay clean alternatives yet many economies rely on subsidies to stabilize energy costs.<sup>20</sup> States must conduct human rights and environmental impact assessments of their budgetary, investment, and energy policies, and urgently redirect fossil fuel subsidies toward renewable energy, sustainable food systems, and social protection.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. Institutional and legal barriers

Global trade rules, taxation regimes, technology governance, intellectual property protections, and investment treaties, enable corporations and wealthier States to extract value from lower-income countries while restricting domestic policy space,<sup>22</sup> making the fossil fuel phase-out exceedingly difficult.

One of the clearest examples is the global trade and investment protection system. The former Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment described Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) as a “secretive international arbitration system” that has become a major obstacle to the urgent measures required to confront environmental collapse and human rights violations.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the Special Rapporteur on the right to development noted that “[t]here is growing evidence that the investor-State dispute settlement mechanism under international investment agreements is constraining States when it comes to taking effective action to protect the environment or combat climate change.”<sup>24</sup> Fossil fuel-related ISDS has enabled companies to sue governments for millions, and sometimes billions, of dollars when public regulations threaten their profits. The system appears to systematically shields carbon-intensive actors at the expense of environmental and human rights protections, as illustrated by the cases documented by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change in which renewable energy projects were challenged, or fossil fuel investments were protected through ISDS.<sup>25</sup> The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change warned that ISDS can lock countries into fossil fuel dependence by increasing the financial risks associated with defossilization and regulatory change.<sup>26</sup>

## 3. Political and social barriers

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<sup>20</sup> [Secretary-General's remarks to Stockholm+50 international meeting](#) (2022).

<sup>21</sup> Türk V., [Human rights are a compass for a just transition](#) (2025).

<sup>22</sup> A/HRC/56/61, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Eradicating poverty beyond growth (2024), paras. 5-7, 20-27, and 60-63. See also <https://www.neep-poverty.org/>

<sup>23</sup> [A/78/168](#), Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, Paying polluters: the catastrophic consequences of investor-State dispute settlement for climate and environment action and human rights (2023), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> [A/80/206](#), Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to development on financing for inclusive, sustainable and participatory development (2025), para. 18. Also see [A/HRC/54/82](#), Thematic study of the Expert Mechanism on the right to development focusing on the right to development in international investment law (2023), in which the Mechanism notes that international investment treaties are frequently misaligned with the environmental and climate-related obligations undertaken by States and emphasizes the importance of achieving an appropriate balance in investor-State dispute settlement systems, one that enables States to adapt and amend their legal frameworks in response to the climate crisis and ecological transitions.

<sup>25</sup> See [Annex III on Fossil Fuel Cases in the context of Investor-State Dispute Settlements \(ISDS\)](#) to A/HRC/59/42, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, The imperative of defossilizing our economies (2025).

<sup>26</sup> A/HRC/59/42, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, The imperative of defossilizing our economies (2025), paras 35-36, 77.

A recent report by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change describes how the transition away from fossil fuels has been actively obstructed by political, communication, and legal strategies designed to undermine science, weaken democratic processes, and manipulate public opinion, with the overriding goal of protecting fossil fuel interests.<sup>27</sup> Fossil fuel companies have obstructed climate science for decades by funding alternative research and lobbying and casting doubt upon and intimidating independent scientists,<sup>28</sup> perpetuating misinformation and disinformation and peddling false solutions and greenwashing that distract from continued damage.<sup>29</sup> These activities prevent informed decision-making and facilitate continued fossil fuel extraction at the expense of planetary stability.

Conflict and militarization are also deeply intertwined with fossil fuel economies. According to the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, militarization is structurally embedded in fossil-fuel-based economic systems, responsible for approximately 5.5 per cent of global emissions, as well as severe biodiversity loss, toxic pollution, and strained local economies.<sup>30</sup>

Existing inequalities and discrimination also impede a just transition, while marginalized population groups are at heightened risk of being adversely affected by transitions.<sup>31</sup> Women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants, racialized communities and people living in poverty face disproportionate exposure to climate harms and are often excluded from decision-making, and access to financial resources, technological tools, and green jobs.<sup>32</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that the gender gap in sustainable and technological sectors is widening, with women representing less than one-third of the renewable energy workforce,<sup>33</sup> limiting their capacity to influence or benefit from the transition. In addition, unpaid care work, largely carried out by women, reduces time and mobility to access education, training, and green jobs.<sup>34</sup> Social inequalities further restrict people's capacity to adapt to climate impacts or to engage meaningfully in climate governance. If they fail to address these inequalities, transition policies risk deepening marginalization and reinforcing the very power asymmetries that fossil-fuel-based economies depend upon.

## **B. What potential levers, whether economic, financial, institutional, social or technological, exist for accelerating the implementation of the transitioning away commitment?**

### **1. Economic levers: a human rights economy and Beyond GDP**

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, paras. 37-41.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Türk V., Human rights are a compass for a just transition (2025).

<sup>30</sup> A/HRC/59/42, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, The imperative of defossilizing our economies (2025), para. 24.

<sup>31</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), para. 12.

<sup>32</sup> [A/HRC/50/57](#), Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the impacts of climate change on the human rights of people in vulnerable situations (2022), para 4.

<sup>33</sup> Türk V., Human rights are a compass for a just transition (2025).

<sup>34</sup> [UN Women, Gender-responsive synergies across the Rio Conventions: Multi-stakeholder perspectives \(2025\)](#).

With increasing environmental crises, the world needs new metrics of growth grounded in human rights and sustainable development within planetary boundaries.<sup>35</sup> In that sense, a key lever for accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels is restructuring economic models to incorporate measures of progress beyond GDP, valuing human development and aligned with human rights, addressing inequalities, recognizing the many values of nature and the commons and investing in public goods and services.<sup>36</sup> The concept of a human rights economy offers an alternative approach to the current economic paradigm,<sup>37</sup> protecting human rights and the health of the planet by centering people and the environment in economic, social, and environmental laws, policies, plans and programmes and ensuring that development, economic, industrial and trade laws and policies, investment decisions, consumer choices, business models and business operations are firmly guided by human rights.<sup>38</sup>

A human rights economy should inform just transitions, as well as the work of the High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP<sup>39</sup> and the forthcoming UN intergovernmental process to develop universally applicable indicators, as mandated in the Pact for the Future.<sup>40</sup> Replacing GDP with human rights-aligned metrics could help realign policy incentives and provide governments with better tools for decision-making. It could also help States mobilize Maximum Available Resources (MAR) for the progressive realization of economic, social, and cultural rights<sup>41</sup>.

## **2. Financial levers: reforming the financial system, redirecting economic flows**

A decisive lever for advancing the phase-out of fossil fuels lies in reforming the global financial architecture, including how public and private finance is mobilized, allocated and regulated. Existing financial and economic systems continue to reproduce inequality, constrain fiscal space and undermine the enjoyment of human rights in the context of intersecting crises, including climate change and public debt.<sup>42</sup> OHCHR has underscored that financing for development and climate action must be firmly anchored in States' human rights obligations, including the duties to mobilize the maximum available resources and to cooperate internationally.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, OHCHR has articulated complementary guidance in the context of negotiations on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on Climate Finance, stressing that international human rights obligations apply fully to the design and delivery of climate finance.<sup>44</sup> In that regard, it emphasized that the NCQG must combine quantitative ambition with qualitative requirements, including accessibility, predictability, transparency, participation and accountability, and should prioritize non-debt-creating instruments, notably grant-based and concessional finance, to avoid exacerbating debt burdens that weaken States' capacity to fulfil economic and social rights.

Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change has highlighted that continued public financing of fossil fuels through subsidies and public investment frameworks is incompatible with rights-compliant

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<sup>35</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), para. 36.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> [OHCHR, Human rights economy – Seeding change for an economy that enhances human rights.](#)

<sup>39</sup> [UN High-level Expert Group on Beyond GDP.](#)

<sup>40</sup> [UN Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations 2024.](#)

<sup>41</sup> [General Assembly resolution 2200 A International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1996.](#)

<sup>42</sup> [OHCHR Impact Exchange: Reimagining economies through human rights 2026](#)

<sup>43</sup> [OHCHR Key Messages for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development.](#)

<sup>44</sup> [OHCHR guidance on integrating human rights in the New Collective Quantified Goal \(NCQG\) on climate finance.](#)

climate action and just transitions.<sup>45</sup> As such, redirecting resources from activities that undermine rights, including the right to a healthy environment, such as fossil fuel subsidies, toward human rights-based climate action and social protection is critical.<sup>46</sup> The report of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General on just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people also emphasized that progressive taxation, fossil fuel subsidy reform and strengthened international tax cooperation are essential to climate and tax justice, highlighting the proposed United Nations Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation as an opportunity to reduce inequality, address global fiscal imbalances and enable just transition policies.<sup>47</sup>

### 3. Legal levers

One of the most powerful levers for accelerating the implementation of commitments to transition away from fossil fuels lies in the progressive development and enforcement of legal obligations for a just transition under international human rights law, international environmental law, international labour standards, and domestic constitutional law. The International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change affirmed that States have binding obligations to protect the climate system and that failures to do so may give rise to internationally wrongful acts attributable to the State.<sup>48</sup> The Court clarified that responsibility may arise from both acts, such as granting new fossil fuel concessions or providing subsidies for fossil fuel activities, and omissions, including failures to regulate greenhouse gas emissions or to adopt and implement effective fossil fuel phase-out measures.<sup>49</sup> By affirming that climate obligations are legally binding, enforceable, and applicable to all States, the Advisory Opinion unified existing principles and reinforced the authority of regional and national jurisprudence, strengthening law as an accelerator of just, orderly and equitable transition away from fossil fuels.<sup>50</sup>

At the substantive level, the legal case for transitioning away from fossil fuels rests on a set of well-established legal obligations. First, States have a duty to prevent foreseeable environmental and human rights harm. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), human rights treaty bodies and Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council have repeatedly affirmed that climate change and fossil fuel-related pollution pose predictable, severe and cumulative risks to the enjoyment of rights such as the rights to life, health, food, water, housing, culture and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.<sup>51</sup> Where States have knowledge of these risks and the capacity to act, continued authorization, financing, or support for fossil fuel activities engages due-diligence obligations to prevent harm.<sup>52</sup> Second, States have an obligation to regulate conduct within their jurisdiction and control, including the activities of private actors. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has clarified that this requires aligning energy policy, licensing regimes, public

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<sup>45</sup> A/HRC/59/42, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, *The imperative of defossilizing our economies* (2025).

<sup>46</sup> See submission from OHCHR on the Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T (2025), p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025).

<sup>48</sup> [International Court of Justice, Advisory Opinion on Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change \(2025\)](#).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> [UN experts welcome recognition from International Court of Justice that all States must protect the climate system \(2025\)](#).

<sup>51</sup> See the work of [OHCHR and Special Rapporteurs on the issue of climate change and the environment](#). See also [UNEP, Global Environmental Outlook reports on legal obligations](#).

<sup>52</sup> [UN Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992](#).

finance, subsidies, trade and investment frameworks with human rights and environmental standards and avoiding carbon-intensive lock-in that would make future rights violations inevitable.<sup>53</sup> Regulation of business conduct, including through environmental and human-rights due-diligence requirements, is therefore a central legal lever for accelerating transition.<sup>54</sup>

Regional human rights courts have also interpreted these obligations. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in its Advisory Opinion OC-23/17, established that States have obligations to prevent significant environmental damage that impairs the enjoyment of human rights, including through regulation of activities under their jurisdiction that cause transboundary harm.<sup>55</sup> The European Court of Human Rights, in *Verein Klimasenioren Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland*, affirmed that inadequate climate action can violate procedural and substantive rights under the European Convention on Human Rights, including through failures to adopt timely and effective mitigation pathways.<sup>56</sup> These bodies have made clear that delay, inaction, and insufficient ambition may themselves constitute violations where States possess knowledge of risk and capacity to act.

National courts and constitutional bodies have further accelerated implementation by applying human rights and constitutional guarantees directly to fossil fuel policies. In cases such as *Urgenda Foundation v. State of the Netherlands*,<sup>57</sup> *Neubauer et al. v. Germany*,<sup>58</sup> and climate litigation in Latin America and South Asia, courts have required governments to enhance mitigation efforts, revise climate legislation, and account for intergenerational equity. These decisions consistently rely on the principles of precaution, prevention, proportionality, and rights-based governance, reinforcing the legal imperative to transition away from fossil fuels.

### **C. What country, regional and sectoral roadmap experiences, best practices and lessons learned can be shared?**

The UN Secretary-General's synthesis report on just transition and the full realization of human rights highlights promising practices and identifies five interconnected actionable pathways for advancing a human rights-based transition:<sup>59</sup>

#### *1. Anchoring just transition in relevant legal and policy frameworks*

This pathway emphasizes that just transition requires a coherent and principled approach, grounded in international human rights law, environmental law and labour law,<sup>60</sup> and guided by core principles such as equity<sup>61</sup> and the polluter-pays principle<sup>62</sup>. These principles require that the burdens and benefits of transition be distributed fairly, taking into account differentiated responsibilities and capacities, and ensuring that those most responsible for environmental harm bear a proportionate share of transition costs.<sup>63</sup> The report underscores

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<sup>53</sup> [Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comments No. 3, 14, 15 and 24.](#)

<sup>54</sup> See Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, [Information Note on Climate Change and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.](#)

<sup>55</sup> [Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Advisory Opinion OC-23/17, Environment and Human Rights.](#)

<sup>56</sup> [VEREIN KLIMASENIORINNEN SCHWEIZ AND OTHERS v. SWITZERLAND.](#)

<sup>57</sup> [ECLI:NL:HR:2019:2007.](#)

<sup>58</sup> [1 BvR 2656/18.](#)

<sup>59</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 28.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, para 31

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* para 32

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 31-32.

that a just transition offers opportunities to advance the principles of environmental justice, including climate justice, for example through the realization of the rights to remedy, equality and non-discrimination.<sup>64</sup>

Experiences referenced in the report illustrate that fossil fuel phase-out measures are more effective and socially sustainable where decarbonization objectives are embedded within coherent legal and policy frameworks that integrate labour protections, social protection systems and environmental governance, rather than treated as isolated climate measures.

## *2. Advancing sustainable human rights economies and societies*

The second pathway focuses on advancing sustainable human rights economies and societies, emphasizing that just transitions necessitate, inter alia, restructuring economic models to incorporate measures of progress beyond GDP, valuing human development and rights, addressing inequalities, recognizing the true worth of nature and the commons and investing in public goods and services.<sup>65</sup> The report also underscores that just transition requires substantial decarbonization and defossilization across all sectors, from farming, forestry and financial services to transport, construction and maritime shipping.<sup>66</sup> The report also emphasizes the importance of business accountability, noting that aligning corporate conduct with human rights and environmental standards is essential to preventing harm and avoiding the externalization of transition costs onto workers and communities.<sup>67</sup>

Experiences referenced in the report illustrate the importance of integrating redistribution and inclusive development alongside climate action, and of aligning economic, fiscal, trade and industrial policies with human rights standards to support long-term resilience and social cohesion. The report also makes reference to corporate accountability initiatives, which demonstrate growing momentum for the establishment of binding measures critical to preventing rights abuses when expanding transition-related value chains.<sup>68</sup>

## *3. Ensuring dignified decent work, social security and social rights throughout transitions*

The third pathway focuses on ensuring dignified decent work, social security, and the protection of social rights throughout all just transition processes.<sup>69</sup> The report emphasizes that just transitions must advance workers' rights in the formal and the informal sectors, including safe and healthy working conditions, fair wages and the recognition of unpaid care work while advancing equality and eliminating discrimination against persons with disabilities, migrant workers and women.<sup>70</sup>

It further underscores the central role of universal social security and public services in enabling rights-based transitions.<sup>71</sup> Income protection, healthcare, pensions and access to public services, including to realize the right to education, are presented as critical to cushioning transition-related impacts, preventing energy and economic poverty, and ensuring that affected workers and communities are not left behind. This pathway highlights that labour

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, para 33-34.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, para. 36.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, para. 39.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, paras. 40-43.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, para. 40.

<sup>69</sup> See also [OHCHR-ILO Key messages on a just transition and human rights](#), pp 3-4.

<sup>70</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), paras. 44-51.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, paras 52-54.

rights and social protection are foundational elements of effective and socially sustainable fossil fuel phase-out.

#### *4. Strengthening rights-based governance and participatory democracy for just transition*

The fourth pathway underscores the importance of rights-based governance and participatory democracy in just transition processes.<sup>72</sup> All transition-related laws, policies, strategies, plans, programmes and budgeting processes must comply with international human rights law, international environmental law and international labour law, and be designed to address structural inequalities through gender-responsive, child-responsive and intersectional approaches.<sup>73</sup>

The report stresses that meaningful, inclusive and safe participation, including through social dialogue with workers and trade unions, and broader participatory mechanisms involving Indigenous Peoples, affected communities and groups in vulnerable situations, is foundational to democratic and effective transition governance.<sup>74</sup> Access to information, human rights and environmental impact assessments, and transparency mechanisms are identified as key safeguards to ensure that transition decisions respect rights, build public trust and prevent exclusion.<sup>75</sup> The report mentions examples where with regard to consultations with Indigenous Peoples, the duty to guarantee self-determination and free, prior and informed consent and to eliminate historical exclusion in transitions was underlined.<sup>76</sup>

#### *5. Scaling up international cooperation and enabling conditions for just transition for all*

The fifth pathway emphasizes that international cooperation and enabling global conditions are essential to ensure just transitions.<sup>77</sup> The report highlights that the global planetary crises require a global just transition underpinned by international obligations, solidarity and the universality of human rights.<sup>78</sup> Just transition pathways of developing countries require support through international cooperation, including financing, capacity-building and technology transfer, in line with the principles of equity, “polluter pays”, and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.<sup>79</sup> This may include scaled-up grant-based, concessional finance, debt relief and cancellation, capacity-building and technology transfer, particularly for developing countries and communities most affected by transition impacts.<sup>80</sup>

The report highlights examples of technology co-development and transfer as well as efforts to strengthen international regulation of transition-related supply chains, particularly to prevent resource plunder and human rights abuses linked to critical minerals extraction.

### **D. How can a just, orderly and equitable transition best reflect diverse realities of countries at different stages of development and with different degrees of dependence on fossil fuels?**

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<sup>72</sup> See also OHCHR-ILO Key messages on a just transition and human rights, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), para 55.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, para 57.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid para. 59.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, para. 57.

<sup>77</sup> See also OHCHR-ILO Key messages on a just transition and human rights, pp 2-3.

<sup>78</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), para. 61.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, paras 62- 65.

Climate change and fossil fuel dependency are inherently transboundary challenges, and no country can address them in isolation. A just transition must begin from the recognition that all States have an obligation to pursue the transition away from fossil fuels, as part of their duties under international human rights law, international environmental and climate law. In its Advisory Opinion on Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change,<sup>81</sup> the International Court of Justice clarified that States have legally binding obligations to prevent significant harm to the climate system and to protect human rights threatened by climate change, including through international cooperation. A just transition is therefore important for all economic sectors – the formal and the informal economy – and for countries at all levels of development.<sup>82</sup>

While these obligations apply universally, there is no “one-size-fits-all”, as countries that do not have the fiscal and political space to diversify their economy may face challenges in moving away from polluting sectors.<sup>83</sup> How the transition is pursued must therefore be guided by well-established human rights principles, including equality and non-discrimination, as well as by the obligation to mobilize the maximum available resources, individually and collectively, including through international cooperation, for the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights and the advancement of all human rights including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment<sup>84</sup>. The principles of equity and accountability also require countries and entities that have contributed to and benefited most from high emissions and natural resource exploitation to provide remedy, including by taking the lead on transitioning.<sup>85</sup> Fairly and equitably distributing benefits and costs related to necessary environmental action requires major polluters to transition more quickly and help pay for mitigation, adaptation and remediation.<sup>86</sup> The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)<sup>87</sup> captures this logic by linking universal obligations with differentiated responsibility and capacity. In line with this principle, States with greater historical emissions, financial resources and technological capacity are required to take the lead in rapidly phasing out fossil fuels, while providing predictable, grant-based finance, technology transfer and capacity-building to support other countries. The costs of transition and environmental degradation, including scaled-up investment in renewable energy, energy storage and energy efficiency, should be borne by polluters and benefits equitably distributed.<sup>88</sup>

International human rights law, in particular obligations relating to economic, social and cultural rights, provides a critical normative framework to guide a just and equitable transition.<sup>89</sup> It requires that climate and energy policies be designed and implemented in a manner that prevents retrogression in the enjoyment of rights such as the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to work, social protection, education and health. In this regard,

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<sup>81</sup>International Court of Justice, Advisory Opinion on Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change (2025).

<sup>82</sup> See [OHCHR brief on Just transition and climate change: just transition work programme at COP30](#) (2025), p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> See OHCHR brief on Just transition and climate change: just transition work programme at COP30 (2025), p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), art. 2.1. See also art. 11.1, 11.2, 15.4, 23.

<sup>85</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), paras 31 and 34.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> UN Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992.

<sup>88</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), para. 32.

<sup>89</sup> [Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 3 \(1990\) and General Comment No. 19 \(2007\)](#).

States must ensure that transition measures, such as subsidy reforms and carbon pricing, do not disproportionately affect vulnerable and marginalized groups.<sup>90</sup> Policies and programmes must therefore be designed in line with the specific conditions of countries, including their stage of development, economic sectors and types and sizes of enterprises, based on robust social dialogue with workers and their unions, good faith consultations to ensure the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples, and public participation with all stakeholders.<sup>91</sup> This also implies the need for *ex ante* and ongoing human rights impact assessments to identify potential adverse effects of transition policies on the enjoyment of these rights.<sup>92</sup> Without such assessments, transition measures risk exacerbating poverty, increasing inequality, undermining access to essential services, and weakening social protection systems, particularly in contexts of limited fiscal space.<sup>93</sup>

Integrating economic, social and cultural rights obligations into climate policy-making therefore helps ensure that the transition is not only environmentally sustainable, but also socially just and inclusive. A central component of such an approach is the establishment and expansion of universal social protection systems.<sup>94</sup> Universal, rights-based social protection is essential to cushion individuals and communities affected by job losses, rising energy prices or structural economic shifts associated with the transition.<sup>95</sup>

A just and equitable transition also requires coordinated action across the entire fossil fuel value chain, including both production and consumption.<sup>96</sup> While some countries, particularly major producers, must prioritize the phase-out of fossil fuel extraction, others, especially high-income and high-consumption economies, must address demand-side drivers, such as overconsumption,<sup>97</sup> fossil fuel subsidies, and the continued financing of new fossil fuel projects. As highlighted above, equity demands that responsibilities reflect countries' historical emissions, economic capacity, and structural roles in the global energy system, with wealthier countries moving faster and providing support to those with greater dependence on fossil fuels.<sup>98</sup> Only through such coordinated and differentiated action can emissions be reduced at the necessary scale while safeguarding livelihoods, development prospects, and human rights.

Finally, clear policy frameworks can also guide differentiated transition pathways, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,<sup>99</sup> and the outcomes of Financing for Development negotiations, including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda<sup>100</sup> and the Sevilla Commitment.<sup>101</sup> These frameworks require that development and climate action be pursued in

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<sup>90</sup> [OHCHR, Key Messages for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development \(FFD4\)](#).

<sup>91</sup> See OHCHR brief on Just transition and climate change: just transition work programme at COP30 (2025), p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> [E/C.12/GC/24 General comment No. 24 \(2017\) on State obligations in the context of business activities](#).

<sup>93</sup> [UN General Assembly, Doha Declaration on Financing for Development \(2008\)](#).

<sup>94</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), paras 52-54. See also A/HRC/56/61, Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Eradicating poverty beyond growth (2024).

<sup>95</sup> A/HRC/60/52, Synthesis report of the United Nations Secretary-General on opportunities, best practices, actionable solutions, challenges and barriers relevant to just transition and the full realization of human rights for all people (2025), para 52.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, para. 37.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, para. 34.

<sup>99</sup> A/RES/70/1, [UN General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(2015\)](#).

<sup>100</sup> A/RES/69/313, [Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development \(2015\)](#).

<sup>101</sup> A/RES/79/323, [Sevilla Commitment \(2025\)](#).

a manner that is participatory, equitable and rights-based, ensuring that all people can meaningfully benefit from economic transformation and that no group or country is left behind. Implementing these commitments in practice, particularly through inclusive national development strategies and international financial reform, is central to reflecting diverse development realities.