

GENEVA (29 September 2020) - As States introduce economic stimulus packages to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, a UN human rights expert has called on authorities to remain mindful of the climate crisis and to exclude support for new coal projects.

“Not one dollar of government support should be directed towards new thermal coal infrastructure, including coal mines and coal-fired power plants,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, David R. Boyd.

“We are in the midst of an unprecedented climate emergency and socio-economic crisis of great magnitude with substantial impacts on human rights happening today and catastrophic impacts inevitable in the future unless rapid, systemic and transformative changes are made to our energy systems. Coal must be phased out as quickly as possible.”

Coal is one of the major causes of two of the world’s worst environmental problems — climate change and air pollution. The coal industry produces roughly one-third of global carbon dioxide emissions and is also a massive contributor to [air pollution](#), which causes millions of premature deaths annually, jeopardizing the rights to life, health, and a healthy environment with disproportionate impacts of climate disruption and polluted air for indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and other marginalized communities

Coal mining has in many countries resulted in forced evictions, the displacement of entire communities and other violations of the right to adequate housing.

The share of coal in the global electricity supply is finally dropping, as falling costs for renewable electricity and concerns about climate change affect the industry, Boyd said. Renewables are now cheaper than coal in most States, even without counting the terrible health and environmental damage inflicted by the coal industry, he added.

Prior to the pandemic, coal supplied more than one-third of total global electricity. The [International Energy Agency](#) expects coal use to decline eight percent in 2020, the largest drop since World War Two. However, coal use may bounce back unless public policies are put in place to reduce reliance on dirty energy, Boyd said.

“States need to be closing down coal mines and coal-fired power plants, in conjunction with just transition strategies for affected workers and communities,” the UN expert said. “More than 30 States have joined the [Powering Past Coal alliance](#), committing to replace coal with clean electricity. All States should consider joining this alliance. Leading businesses, including financial institutions and even companies with major investments in coal are divesting from this dirty industry.”

In order to protect human rights from the adverse impacts of climate change and air pollution, all high-income States should end the use of coal by 2030 at the latest, middle-income States by 2040, and low-income States by 2050, Boyd said.

This statement was endorsed by **Francisco Cali Tzay**, [Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples](#); **Marcos A. Orellana**, [Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes](#), **Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal**, [Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context](#); **Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary**, [Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#) and **Ms. Anita Ramasastry (Chair)**, **Mr. Dante Pesce (Vice-Chair)**, **Mr. Surya Deva**, **Ms. Elżbieta Karska**, and **Mr. Githu Muigai**, [Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises](#).

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David R. Boyd (Canada) was appointed as the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment for a three-year term commencing 1 August 2018. He is an associate professor of law, policy, and sustainability at the University of British Columbia.

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