



**PROCEEDINGS**  
**Interactive Talk Session on**  
**New Frontiers of Human Rights:**  
**Climate Justice in perspective**

**Young Scholars' meet with**  
**H E Ms Michelle Bachelet**  
**United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**17 August 2022**

**Organised by**

**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)**



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**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)**

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Printed by

**Modina Printers & Publishers**

278/3, Elephant Road, Kataban, Dhaka-1205

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E-mail: [modinapublishers@gmail.com](mailto:modinapublishers@gmail.com)

# Proceedings

## Interactive Talk Session on

### New Frontiers of Human Rights: Climate Justice in perspective

### Young Scholars' meet with

### **H E Ms Michelle Bachelet**

### **United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised an Interactive Talk Session with **H E Ms Michelle Bachelet**, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, on 17 August from 1130 hours at BIISS Auditorium on “**New Frontiers of Human Rights: Climate Justice in Perspective**”. **Mr Md Shahriar Alam MP**, Hon’ble State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was present as the Special Guest. **Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman, OSP, BSP, psc**, Director General, BIISS, delivered the welcome address and Dr Sufia Khanom, Senior Research Fellow, BIISS, delivered introductory remarks at the event. Young scholars from various universities and youth-led organisations joined the programme.



# Welcome Address

**Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman, OSP, BSP, psc**  
Director General, BIISS



At the outset of his speech, Major General Mohammad Maksudur Rahman welcomed the Chief Guest of the Interactive Talk Session on New Frontiers of Human Rights: Climate Justice in Perspective, H E Ms Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. He expressed his gratitude to H E Mr Md Shahriar Alam MP, Hon'ble State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to grace the occasion as the Special Guest. According to General Rahman, climate change is becoming a major threat to human safety. Especially now, when reckless human activities are making weather and climate more extreme around the world, threatening food supplies and pushing millions from their homes. Both human action and consequent human inaction create triple planetary climate change crises, biodiversity loss and pollution. Those crises are endangering human rights by inhibiting access to adequate food, water, education, housing and overall livelihood. He opined that they help flare social inequality, violence and marginalisation. General Rahman further argued that, ironically, those crises have disproportional impacts on the planet. While developing and least developing countries are the least contributor to climate change, they are the most affected. As an example, he said, Bangladesh is considered one

of the most vulnerable countries due to climate change, though it contributes only a tiny fraction of 0.5 metric tons of greenhouse gas per person per year compared to developed countries. Moreover, due to climate change, disadvantaged and marginalised groups are hit the hardest with less ability to adapt to the consequences.

In this context, he shared his belief that the relative relation between climate change and human rights is in concern, therefore, the issue of climate justice is a crucial issue to discuss. As a result, a global movement has grown, powered mostly by young people and supported by science, urgently demanding action to address the climate emergency. General Rahman further mentioned that the 'Friday for Future' is a youth-led climate strike movement initiated by a young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg in August 2018. Their call for action sparked all over the world and united about 14,000,000 people from 7,500 cities. Hence, he argued that civic mobilisation and rising global awareness are creating a critical push for this cause, but still, global actors are falling short in their response. For example, he mentioned that the global community is showing inadequate response regarding the Climate Fund they pledged before. However, the United Nations is actively pursuing the cause of climate change and human rights. It has recognised the right of future generations to a safe and healthy planet as a human right, while the Human Rights Council declared the right to a clean environment as a human right. On the other hand, the United Nations is focusing on involving youth-led and youth-focused platforms worldwide to tackle climate change and share their understanding of the nature of human rights in the 21st Century and climate-resilient future.

In the concluding part of his address, General Rahman argued that Bangladesh, as one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, is actively pursuing the cause of environmental justice in international forums and playing a significant role in Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF). Nationally, it has adopted the national Climate Strategy and Action Plan and Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan. Besides, it has adopted a fiscal framework allocating more resources towards adaptation investments and formulated new environmental guidelines promoting green financing. However, to tackle climate change and accelerate the global advancement towards environmental justice, General Rahman emphasised the need for global acceleration of the environmental rule of law, strong national legal frameworks, enhanced social justice and equality, and accessible justice and human rights institutions.

# Introductory Remarks

**Dr Sufia Khanom**

Senior Research Fellow, BIISS



**Dr Sufia Khanom**, at the very onset, expressed her gratitude to all the guests, panellists, and attendees for joining the event. She began by sharing a story of Bhola Slum which she had gathered while conducting her doctoral research. Bhola slum is named after the place of origin. Most of the people who lived there were from Bhola - one of the climate-vulnerable zones of Bangladesh. The following story she argued, is the life story of millions of Bengalis living in the climate-vulnerable areas of Bangladesh:

*The river was coming towards our house. We [myself and my husband] came to Dhaka, leaving behind my mother-in-law and sister-in-law. The river took away our house six months after our arrival in Dhaka. Now we have no house – not in Bhola and not here [in Bhola settlement]. We have nothing in Bhola, not even the graves of my parents. People used to visit their homes in the countryside, but we are unlucky. We have no place to visit. All the houses here are built in a similar pattern. One house after another, along a narrow alley. We live here because we cannot afford any better place. No sunlight, no breeze, no place to dry our clothes. The people of the adjacent neighbourhood look down upon us, as they regard us*

*as people with no identity. They want us to go away from this place. They do not want any slum beside their homes. It is like living in a hell.*

Later, Dr Sufia referred to Mike Davis, who once said that the environmental refugees living in the urban areas are regarded as 'human dump' who have no place to settle but beside the sewerage lines and swamp lands. This is an example of the violation of human rights, she argued, where nature has snatched away her house, memories, networks, emotions and dignity and confined them in such a position where they are exposed to more vulnerable conditions. And no way out to go back.

Climate change, for her, is the most significant, most pervasive threat to the natural environment and human societies the world has ever experienced. It is not simply a political or economic issue. It's a human rights issue, perhaps the biggest one in human history.

Dr Sufia also referred to IPCC's most recent assessment report, which details how billions of people, along with the ecosystems, natural resources, and physical infrastructure they rely on, will be negatively impacted by observed and expected climate change. She stated that these negative effects include both sudden-onset catastrophes that threaten human lives and safety and more gradual types of environmental degradation that will weaken access to clean water, food, and other essential resources necessary for human survival.

Bangladesh, for her, is not an exceptional case instead it is identified as one of the most vulnerable countries in the world by various risk indexes due to its geographic position, people's overwhelming dependency on natural resources for their livelihoods and population density. Shedding light on the report entitled "Bangladesh Disaster-related Statistics 2021: Climate Change and Natural Disaster Perspectives" by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), she focused on the estimation that says household loss and damage due to natural disasters saw nearly tenfold increase in 2015-2020 compared to that in 2009-2014. She added that the results from this study indicate that natural disasters had a negative relationship with economic growth in the long run. Bangladesh suffered an estimated loss of approximately \$11.3 billion last year due to natural disasters such as tropical cyclones, floods and droughts.

To substantiate, she also referred to a study conducted by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre which shows that about 4.26 million people have been displaced from 2008-2021. Only Cyclones displace an average of 110 thousand people per year. Internal migration and dislocation of mass populations in a small country create enormous pressure on the existing resources and services of the destination areas within the country. Internal displacement increases competition and the risk of potential conflict over key resources such as land, housing, food, water and employment.

Referring to a study of the IPCC, she warned that Bangladesh is predicted to lose 10.9 per cent of its territory if the sea level rises 45 centimetres, potentially displacing about 5.5 million people (IPCC, 2001). She considered that prediction of losing territory is a threat to national sovereignty. In addition, internally displaced people will potentially pose serious problems for state legitimacy and the internal harmony of the country.

Regarding the continuation of spewing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, Dr Sufia stated that, it not only destroys ecosystems and drives species to extinction but is indirectly a violation of human rights. To level the playing field, she suggested recognising the double-edged sword of climate change, which violates human rights and disproportionately affects communities that are already most vulnerable. According to the UN, women and children are 14 times more likely to die in climate change disasters. More likely in the US, people of colour breathe 40 per cent more polluted air than white people as they live near oil and natural gas refineries for low-cost living standards.

As long as further action is concerned, she suggested one way to work toward a more just, equitable society for countries is to meet the commitments under the Paris Agreement and contribute to the Green Climate Fund. Recent climate strikes coordinated by organisations like Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion and Sunrise Movement make more optimism for the future, however they are only the beginning. Dr Khanom firmly stated that climate change is a global problem, and it needs global solutions. Everyone must be on board to make meaningful changes. In her conclusion, she stated that this is about the lives that are being lost today as well as the people that are being displaced today.

# Speech of the Chief Guest

**Her Excellency Ms Michelle Bachelet**

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights



**At the beginning of her speech, H E Ms Michelle Bachelet**, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, expressed her most profound gratification for undertaking the first-ever visit by a United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to Bangladesh. She also conveyed her satisfaction for having the opportunity to meet with young people and students whom she perceived as the new defenders of human rights. With acknowledging the fact that the young generation of today is experiencing dramatic changes, she stressed on the issues of growing economic inequalities, climate change, environmental degradation, increased movement of people, pandemic outbreak and its socio-economic consequences, and currently, the far-reaching political and economic impacts of the war in Ukraine. Along with highlighting the dynamics of change in the global perspective, she also pointed out Bangladesh's challenges in addressing the vulnerable groups' miseries such as women, informal workers, street vendors, minorities, persons with disabilities, children, and migrants. However, amidst all these challenges, she noted the young generation as a beacon of hope. She highly appreciated the power of youth and admitted

that she was moved by the youth movements and actions that confronted entrenched discrimination, climate emergency, persistent injustice, and widening inequality. For that reason, she said that she always valued her interactions with students and young people with a firm belief that young people pose the most significant interest in strong and fair societies and a healthy planet.

According to H E the UN High Commissioner, Young people are quite rightly influencing debates of national and international importance and prompting social change, including through their command of new digital technologies and insights into how a better future should look. In this regard, she stated that open civic space is a crucial ingredient for youth to play their role where they can voice their opinions, be heard, and demand and insist on real change. She also noted United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's perception on the importance of the participation of young people in shaping the future, which is fundamental for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Regarding the SDGs, she commended Bangladesh's progress in meeting the SDGs on poverty and education and emphasised the need for more efforts to meet SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 10 on reducing inequality. Furthermore, she also stressed on more efforts so that Bangladesh could achieve SDG 16 by promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. This includes strengthening the national human rights commission, the elections commission, and the judiciary, expanding civic space for public debate (both on and offline) and ensuring civil society participation in the design and implementation of economic and social development plans. She also highlighted fast-tracking equality, which means ensuring an economy that works for all, including the hardest hit: the excluded and discriminated, and those with little voice or bargaining power. It means providing access to basic levels of health care, social protection and education for all.

On the importance of human rights, she said development is only possible if it is integrated with human rights, including the protection and enjoyment of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, into development policies and plans, along with the participation of those affected. In this regard, H E the UN High Commissioner stated that the deepening impacts of climate change and environmental degradation are the most significant risk to human rights. She also informed that climate change is not the only topic of discussion at the UN. Along with climate change, UN officials also discuss the triple planetary crisis. In the triple planetary crisis, climate change is one element, pollution is the second, and the third one is the loss of biodiversity. She also talked about the zoonosis with which many pandemics are very much linked. She informed the audience that an estimated one in six premature deaths are caused by pollution. Climate

change directly contributes to harmful effects impacting human rights across the globe, such as droughts, floods, sea-level rises, heatwaves and extreme weather events. She then brought up the example of the latest heat wave in Europe, is known as the “canicule” heat wave that caused many deaths across Europe.

H E Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, then referred to the latest reports of the IPCC and commented that without strong and ambitious action, the world is supposed to face a catastrophe. However, the tools are there to steer towards a better future. It is known by all that what is needed to be done to avoid such catastrophe. Emphasis also came from the IPCC reports that rights-based approaches, participation and inclusion can reduce those structural vulnerabilities to climate change – such as exposure to floods and cyclones, desertification, drought and riverbank erosion. Such approaches contribute to development which is more resilient to climate change. In the case of Bangladesh, H E Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, acknowledged that Bangladesh is very much at the frontline of this issue, both in terms of the effects of climate change on the country but also due to its vital role as an actor for change. With a population largely dependent on land and natural resources for livelihood and survival, Bangladesh is one of the countries most affected by environmental damage and climate change. Up to two-thirds of Bangladeshis are involved in farming activities in some way, with women accounting for half of those working in the agricultural sector. She highlighted that three quarters of the population in Bangladesh reside in environmentally vulnerable rural areas, with many either living in poverty or not owning land. Moreover, growing migration to already densely populated urban areas in low-lying coastal zones leads to the expansion of informal settlement areas in urban areas and the informal economy.

Highlighting the World Bank’s estimation, H E Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, informed that Bangladesh might have almost 20 million internal climate migrants by 2050 – corresponding to roughly 12 per cent of the entire population of Bangladesh or the whole population of Chile. Specifically, with a projected 50 cm rise in sea level, Bangladesh might lose approximately 11 per cent of its land by then, and that would mean up to 18 million people might have to migrate because of sea-level rise alone. She, then brought up the example of Khulna, where increased salinity, siltation, flooding, and worsening cyclones have devastated the agriculture sector, affected living and working conditions and pushed many workers into other precarious sectors.

H E Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, stated that climate change is not an issue of the future. Instead, it is something happening today. However, many people who are not suffering consider it a concern for future generations. Hence, it is crucial to discuss the issue worldwide. She added that rising sea levels are pushing fishermen into the

countryside to make an income in agriculture, which they are not used to. Moreover, they do not have the capacity or the tools. As a result, it causes severe consequences, including leaving their home. Besides, rising temperatures and heat stress are already affecting access to food by hampering rice production.

She then highlighted the impacts of development on the environment. Economic growth and development – including in already fragile contexts - have come at the cost of environmental protection and traditional livelihoods. For instance, rapid deforestation to facilitate tourism development and economic growth, such as in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, increasingly undermines not only the fragile ecosystems that populations depend on to survive, but also the rights of indigenous populations in terms of access to their land and right to preserve, practise and revitalise their cultural traditions and customs. Likewise, significant infrastructure development can also have adverse environmental impacts. Thus, it is vital to incorporate consultation with communities and thorough and transparent environmental and human rights impact assessments as part of the planning and financing process. She also emphasised the disproportionate impacts of climate change on those already in vulnerable situations, such as women, children and youth, minorities, persons with disabilities and landless farmers in rural areas. Gradual environmental degradation is already affecting their adaptive capacity. In this regard, she added that protecting the environment goes hand-in-hand with protecting the rights of those who defend it. Many environmental human rights defenders belong to indigenous and tribal peoples or are members of affected local communities. Hence, their voices must be heard and protected.

Regarding Bangladesh's role, H E Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, noted that it has rightly been commended for some of its adaptation and mitigation strategies. In 2018, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights welcomed the establishment of the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust and the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund while recommending that strategies and action plans on climate change and disaster response and risk reduction be formulated and implemented based on human rights and with the meaningful participation of affected communities and civil society. She also noted that with the leadership and advocacy of Bangladesh, the General Assembly of the United Nations – where all member states are represented and have a voice - just weeks ago recognised that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a universal human right. This is a milestone development. She reminded that the air, food, and water people use for their health, well-being and survival depend on a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. She then focused on rights-based environmental action complemented by

action in the Human Rights Council addressing links between human rights and climate change in its recent resolution 50/9, as well as the adoption of special procedures mandate on human rights and climate change. She informed that the first country visit undertaken by the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and Human Rights would be to Bangladesh next month.

Stressing on the legal issues, she illustrated the significance of international and national legal and policy frameworks. She stated that global-level commitments lead to the adoption and implementation of stronger legal and policy frameworks at the national level. She noted that over 150 countries recognised the right to a healthy environment within their legal systems in some form or another. International human rights law provides a valuable framework to guide national policies and ensure remedies and accountability of state and non-state actors in protecting the environment and protecting against climate change. National courts also play a crucial role in domestic implementation. For instance, the landmark decision of the Bangladesh Supreme Court in 2019 to grant legal identity to the Turag River and all other rivers in the country shows the potential for public interest litigation and action by the courts to protect the environment. This decision goes beyond just recognising rivers as legal entities but provides detailed guidance to several government agencies to take steps to protect rivers, which are central to the national life and identity of the country. Thus, it is essential for the legislative and executive branches of the government to move promptly to implement the Court's directives fully. Moreover, Bangladesh courts have for over 30 years given repeated protective orders for climate refugees. Besides, an inclusive housing policy has been developed. While some municipalities have laudable schemes, it is essential to be scaled up nationally, particularly in the cities.

Highlighting the importance of taking action, she commented that much had been talked in the past and now it is time for walk the talk. The international community must heed the voice of specially affected countries like Bangladesh and act with single-minded purpose and solidarity to deploy every possible resource to make the human right to a healthy environment a reality for all. However, the main challenge is moving the political leaders at the international level to the point where they realise that the costs of inaction are far higher than those of doing the right thing. During her presidency in Chile, she noticed that most countries calculated the expenses needed to take measures to protect, mitigate, or adapt to climate change. It is true that in the short term, investment is high. However, she semphasised on counting the cost of mid and long-term, which is rarely calculated.

According to her, it is much higher in all senses – in the economy, the people's health, the country's survival and so on.



H E Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, hoped that in the following steps and at the international level, including at the end of the year in the discussion of the post-2020 biodiversity framework, the international community will take steps to walk the talk and not just discuss in the closed rooms. She further stressed the importance of a political will to move forward in this respect. Besides amplifying the voices of rights holders, and young people, working with states, academia and civil society and encouraging constructive engagement is key to reaching that goal. In this regard, she mentioned that her Office is committed to playing its part in fostering that. Addressing the youth, she added that the contributions of the youth are crucial. Thus, youth's intelligence, research, creativity and determination are very much critical. Youth participation is not just to tackle the challenges the world is facing today but – at this critical time in history - to draw out a new way of working.

Referring to COVID-19, she added that the perspective of going back to normality is no longer work because the so-called normality is responsible for what the world is facing today. The pre-Covid normality with the economic system was unequal. It was not COVID-19 that was responsible for the inequalities. It just laid bare the lack of preparation

in the world at this point. She also noted the inadequate capacity of developing countries to respond and the less preparedness of developed countries for something like this. Both developing and developed countries thought that investing in health was a cost, not an investment. As a consequence, their public system was not prepared for this. For this reason, OHCHR in the UN emphasised on not bringing back the pre-Covid normality. Instead of pre-Covid normality, it wanted new normalcy. This new normality is about building forward better, not building back. In conclusion, she highlighted the need to draw a new way of living, working and reaching individual and collective potential in peace with each other and with the planet.

# Open Discussion Session



**Ms Jarin Musarat Orin**, a Masters student at the Department of Development Studies, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), described Bangladesh as a country affected by climate change. She asked whether climate should be part of the greater discourse on human rights.

**Ms Nazmoon Nahar Sumaiya**, Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, University of Dhaka, argued that due to the Rohingya crisis, Bangladesh has to sacrifice a significant proportion of reserve forest in the Southeastern part and compromise its environmental sustainability. Therefore, the local community's rights in that area have been compromised, and they are facing adverse impacts of climate change. In this context, she inquired regarding the plan of repatriation of the Rohingya community in order to lessen the threat of climate vulnerabilities to the local population.





**Ms Sumaiya Farzana Shefa**, Student, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, said that climate refugees are putting pressure on big cities after any significant natural disaster. As the metropolitans are not ready to receive the huge number of climate refugees every year, it is creating tremendous pressure on the urban governance system. This situation is also affecting the human rights protection capacities. In this regard, she wanted to know the pathways to tackle such challenges for a developing country like Bangladesh.

**Md Toslim Bhuiyan Prantik**, Student, Department of Law, North South University, highlighted the disparity in climate justice as he said Bangladesh, despite being one of the least carbon emitters, has been the sufferer of climate change and one of the most climate-vulnerable countries. In this regard, he asked the ways to ensure climate justice for Bangladesh without compromising its rights to development.



**Ms Lamia Mohsin, Consultant**, Global Center on Adaptation, raised two questions. In her first question, she wanted to know about the efficiency of the existing mechanism within the Human Rights Council to tackle climate change as an intergenerational injustice. Secondly, she informed the audience about the 47th session of the Human Rights Council, from 21 June to 15 July 2021, that provided a key opportunity for the Human Rights Council to establish a new UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change. in this regard, she wanted to know the update on that matter.



**Ms Mahmuda Akhter**, Senior Research Officer, Department of Climate Change and Disaster Management Unit, Sajida Foundation stated that she has been working for the past four years to find local climate champions who can play a vital role in ensuring climate equality in the climate-vulnerable communities of Bangladesh. She informed that they are developing lessons and plans to educate other youth about climate resilience and providing training for women and the younger generation to access green jobs. She also informed that she got the opportunity to attend COP-25 and COP-26 and hopefully would attend COP-27. She wanted to

know what role the UN Human Right Council will play in the upcoming COP-27 to support vulnerable communities in climate change negotiations? Is there any new area of focus?

**Mr Sohanur Rahman**, Student at Barisal Polytechnic Institute and Vice-Chair, Partnership and Engagement at Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network, stated that his first-hand experience with the climate crisis was in 2007 when Bangladesh was devastated by cyclone Sidr. Since then, he and his community have been bearing the trauma and nightmare. Though they are not consuming meat and not using air conditioning and refrigerators, they are paying the highest price. Hence, it's not justice for them. The loss and damage of climate change cannot be ignored. Though the global north emphasises adaptation, the global south cannot adapt to everything, e.g., floods, salinity and climate breakdown. According to the latest IPCC report, people over 50 will not witness any extreme climatic events, but the younger generation will face these events in the future. Hence, the younger generation is moving towards a dangerous future. In this respect, he asked the Human Rights Commissioner if they empathise with youth? Are they feeling any solidarity for youth? He also pointed out that the global north is not giving adaptation financing. They are not ensuring space for young people. Here he gave an example of the last COP, where youth were the outsider and 500 fossil fuel lobbyists were the insiders. However, he is optimistic about COP-27. He hoped it would be an inclusive COP, including diverse communities and youth at the frontline. As a final comment, he brought the issue of patriarchy. He brought the experts' opinion on the importance of a better understanding of how harmful ideas of masculinity



are. It includes the need to have power over others – ‘others’ being understood as women, other men, children and nature-perpetuate environmental degradation. Concerning this issue, he wanted to know how patriarchy or masculinity is connected with climate justice?



**Ms Zarifa Islam Khan**, Student, Environmental Science and Management, North South University and Intern, The Earth Society, raised two questions. First, climate change makes women more likely than men to be impacted locally and globally. People who experience gender-based discrimination in society are less likely to be able to cope with or recover from the effects of climate change. Because they often have less money and opportunity, women are not given priority by policymakers, who are primarily men. In this regard, she wanted to know how women can adapt to these situations when forced to migrate due to

climate change and these added inequalities. Second, one of the most significant risks to economic stability is climate change, which negatively impacts the environment and humans. Countries are dealing with the economic effects of climate change and the depletion of natural resources. Many industries suffer losses, forcing people to leave their jobs and move to survive. In this respect, she asked how we can combat climate change while maintaining economic stability.

**Ms Jubaida Auhana Faruque**, Student, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Dhaka, said that in the last three years, Western countries are taking climate-related decisions which have impacted the infrastructure development plans of third-world countries. Though these decisions are very timely and extremely necessary for the present climate situation, they need to understand the technological capacity to implement the ideas. Collaboration among different UN organisations, e.g., UNFCCC, UNHCR, and UNDP, is essential to focus on the very specific issue of climate diplomacy. In this regard, she wanted to know if the UN organisations are taking initiatives to balance these decisions.



# Response by the Chief Guest



**H E Ms Michelle Bachelet** agreed with the points raised from the floor. Despite developing and small countries being the least carbon emitter, they have been the greatest victim of carbon emission and climate change. Developed countries did not use clean energy when they got developed. Now when it comes to the developing countries being developed, they have the dilemma of whether to follow the same path or not. Although some countries are much more responsible than others, all the countries have the responsibility to act, she added. To do that, the countries have been using all the climate change resolutions available to them in accordance with their capacity. Another way the countries can work together is by most responsible countries helping out the least responsible countries in making action plans to support mitigation and adaptation. The plan of action for such a venture will differ from country to country as every country has different geographic conditions and are affected at different levels. Therefore, it is essential to have a collective agreement which was the primary purpose of the Paris agreement. Furthermore, these agreements need to be implemented, and these agreements need to include mechanisms that can help developing countries. She stated that it is not only about contributing less or more; the way of measuring the impact is also essential. As an example, she said if the impact is measured in terms of emissions, then it will give one picture, which will be very different if it gets measured in terms of per capita emission.

For example, some big developing countries like China and India will figure very low in emissions if it is calculated on the principle of per capita. On the other hand, New Zealand, a small country in terms of population, will rank high in per capita emissions. Hence, H E Bachelet argued it is not so simple or black and white to conceive the biggest responsible countries in terms of emissions. Therefore, it is essential to see how every country can feel responsible and contribute to solving the problem of pollution and emission. On the other hand, it is crucial to provide funds to the least contributor countries that are still developing. She shared her feeling regarding the fund that it is not properly happening and countries need to walk the talk.

She emphasised the active functions of the alliances where decisions are made at the international levels regarding funding, COP and other essential things. According to her, a government's responsibility is to ensure the development of the country, maintain a sustainable economy and guarantee a sustainable natural resource for the environment. It is crucial to develop an economy but for that to happen, one cannot undermine the rights of indigenous people, she stated. Because many countries in the world have rich natural resources and those areas are inhabited by local indigenous people. While it is understandable that developing nations would benefit from exploiting their natural resources, she stated that it is crucial that the rights of the locals and indigenous people who reside in resource-rich areas be protected simultaneously. Energy is another important thing which is also essential for environment. Using natural resources to produce energy is deemed sensitive to different parts of the world as this issue is related to the local people and environment. Thus, sometimes it becomes difficult for the government to decide on this matter. Concerning this issue, she focused on using renewable energy sources since this option will not affect the indigenous community.

In response to climate degradation due to the Rohingya crisis, Ms Bachelet admitted that lots of trees needed to be cut to make makeshift camps for sheltering the Rohingyas. It disturbed the country's forest ecosystem. In this case, she suggested to create a holistic plan of afforestation. To compensate for the loss of trees caused by the influx of Rohingya people, she proposed planting three new trees for everyone that had to be felled. Due to the constant Rohingya influx, the affected area requires ongoing intervention to restore afforestation and vegetation. Regarding the repatriation process of the Rohingyas, she responded that Rohingyas want to go back to their ancestral home in Myanmar. Still, at first, it must be assured that the situation in Myanmar is safe for them. Myanmar's internal political situation is very complicated. There are lots of instabilities and conflicts going on in different parts of Myanmar. Livelihood becomes totally destroyed. Concerning these, H E Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, emphasised taking the unstable situation in

Myanmar into account for making safe repatriation for Rohingyas.



In response to the question on the effectiveness of the existing mechanism within the Human Rights Council to tackle climate change as an intergenerational injustice, H E Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, informed that the Human Rights Council is trying to strengthen the existing mechanism by developing a practice of advancing the human rights approach to climate change. According to her, this mechanism includes the necessary apparatus to address intergenerational inequalities. Regarding establishing a new UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change, Ms. Bachelet said that currently UN has two rapporteurs, one is Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Environment and the second one is Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change. The creation of a new UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change was advocated by the working group members on human rights and climate change in June 2021. As a result of that recommendation, the first Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of human rights in the context of climate change had been appointed by the Human Rights Council at its 49th session in March 2022.

As a response to the query about her role in mitigating climate change, she stated that she is not the president of the Human Rights Council. She is a UN functionary. Human Rights Council comprises member states. Bangladesh has been a member of the Human Rights Council for many years. Hence, she requested the participants not to ask her

questions about what members are doing because she does not represent member states. Instead, she works with them, talks with them and tries to insist them so that they can move forward regarding human rights in different areas, not only in climate change. She added that member states must take the right actions and decisions when they meet at the General Assembly, Security Council and Human Rights Council.



Climate change has a security dimension which is very important. HE Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, clarified that she is with the vulnerable countries. They are trying to push the member states to take the right decisions that can be good for the most vulnerable countries and people. They are not on the side of some groups who are responsible for this. On the contrary, they have supported navigation in some countries vulnerable to climate change. UNHCR has been supporting individual countries working for climate mitigation. She said their role is to do advocacy, publish report, and provide suggestions. However, again it is up to the member states to take action. The governments have to negotiate and build alliances with other states that have the same situations to push those who do not want to hear and understand. She repeated that she is on the side of the vulnerable countries. She also mentioned that when she was a President of a member state, she worked on climate change and signed Paris Agreement immediately. Besides, she made national policies regarding protecting the ocean and formulated a national action plan for climate mitigation and adaptation. Moreover, the states' Parliaments play an essential role as it

passes the budget to support the initiatives. Civil society also plays a significant role. They care and speak about the effects on vulnerable communities, populations, children, and their human rights. The push for a healthy environment as a human right came years ago. Before, it was not natural for countries to feel that. Finally, Human Rights Commission agreed that a healthy environment is a human right. It advocated very strongly, resulting in its acceptance in the General Assembly by the majority of countries.

She mentioned her team worked very strongly, so, in the UN general assembly, it was accepted by a significant majority. And now, it is expected that all the solutions which have been implemented will soon to become a reality, not just a mere speech. She emphasised the importance of the young movement and the involvement of the civic society in order to make it a reality. The world still has a challenge that the excellent speeches need to become a reality. In this regard, she entrusted the young and CSOs with the responsibility of holding the promise makers accountable for ensuring that their promises are carried out.

Sometimes countries can not simply do this. Especially after covid-19, many countries do not have that much fiscal space to do many things. She demanded for having better arguments to convince the rich countries that they must look after and argued that rich countries need to look after because they are the most vulnerable people and are the most affected everywhere.

It is like they are inherently more affected, not that they are born with the condition. They are affected because they are still marginalised and discriminated. She added women and children are the ones who die- because they are less protected and they are at home in insecure and vulnerable conditions. Thus, she urged to secure where people live and stay because she considered this as human rights issue.

Human Rights Council is, however, unable to participate in the COPs since they are not part of it. Sometimes persons of the human rights council are interested; they go there and participate. In this regard, she said she herself also participated in many panels in the past. Despite this, the Human Rights Council can't participate in the negotiation since it is not a member state. However, the human rights council has participated voluntarily and tried to discuss the impact on health, the impact on human rights, and how they should consider it. Therefore, she believed that it must also work with institutions that can show member states that the cost of undoing is much higher than the cost of doing. She considered that countries without many resources can still do something impactful. Because, as a country, Chili has done lots of things- in the case of renewable energy, in the case of the ocean despite not being a rich country. Hence, she argued that if governments have the political will, they can do more.

She also prescribed making alliances for all those countries that are not the biggest carbon emitters- to push stronger in a common position. Here the problem she identified is the world is divided. The developing countries are divided as well, she added. She considered building an alliance for one common goal as one of the pivotal tasks the governments should do. According to her, general people can help bring all together in this common possibility.

She shared her thinking that the climate change impacts men, women, and non-binary persons differently. Because in today's world, women are the majority of the total poor. Notably, poor people have more children than less poor people. That's why she noted that women and children are usually more affected by climate change. So, they typically suffer more due to environmental degradation. However, along with seeing women as victims, she also considers them as agents of change. They can be part of the solution because they are strong, brave, and sensible. For example, she mentioned that 55 per cent of the improvements in food security in developing countries came from programs promoting women empowerment.

Neither women nor girls may face a specific risk of human rights if the existing problems of gender stereotypes are checked. For her, what is most harmful is gender stereotypes. In addition, uneven gender roles, discriminatory laws, sexual and gender-based violence, and lack of financial income or access to skilled labour markets are also causing problems in ensuring women's rights in this regard. Apart from that, the formality of women's work also creates a bad situation because usually, they do not have access, social skills, or protection skills. They do not have access to social capital, which frequently restricts women from migrating safely and accessing rights in the destination countries.

As such, she considered ensuring the participation of women with diverse backgrounds in relevant decision-making and processes. This is basic if people want to follow a human rights and gender-based approach in solving many crises, including climate change. She noted that this inclusive approach is a legal, ethical, and moral integration and facilitates climate change action more effectively. To her, including women in decision-making is not merely the right thing to do; instead, it is a smart thing to do since this gives better decisions & outcomes.

About combatting climate change by maintaining economic stability, she pointed out that all the global and national economies must be decarbonised by investing in a sustainable livelihood. Technological development is a foundation of international economic and social development. Technological intervention can promote healthier, cleaner, and greener energy. These technologies are central to achieving the right development in a world where climate change is a reality. Here, she urged for reaping the benefit of science

and its application to counter the problem the globe is facing now. She suggested that countries should be economically developed by looking at innovation and technology and discovering how these innovations and technologies can be utilised in mitigation and adaptation plans. Earlier, business companies were found to dislike these changes, but afterward, it is found that it can also be a good business for both climate change and economic gain. Tax reform for the inclusion of environment-friendly technologies and climate education for everyone in the universities are also crucial for achieving this target. Incorporating environment-friendly technological interventions is often assumed to be bad for the economy, but it is not. She quoted a case of the famous brand Coca-Cola where they were afraid of economic loss, but three years later, the company discovered that it was profiting. Likewise, she said, there are many issues for the green economy, the blue economy that is presumed loss-occurring, but these are opportunities for new economic horizons.

Then again, though it is possible, not so easy. Because, in a transitional situation like this, ensuring justice for the workforce that could be affected is a must and, obviously, challenging. She, to address this challenge, asked to adopt duality. Here she quoted another example related to health issues. In her country's supermarkets, food containing high fat and sugar which was responsible for the high death toll. She forced the food-producing companies to produce healthier products by reducing these harmful components. The companies were equally afraid and angry because they thought it would incur a loss, but the reality was different. People started buying healthy products even more. It was both health friendly for the citizens and economically beneficial for the companies. Citing this example along with Coca-Cola's one, she strongly advised following duality for countering climate change by maintaining economic development. She asked to work with the business companies by making them understand the aspects of climate change and the prospects of innovation and technological advancement for attaining duality.

# Speech by the Special Guest

**Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP**

State Minister

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh



Mr. Md. Shahriar Alam, MP, Hon'ble State Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bangladesh, at the very outset of his speech, greeted the Chief Guest, other guests and audience. He thanked the Director General of BIISS, Major General Md. Maksudur Rahman, OSP, BSP, psc for organising this meet. He then paid his deepest respect and homage to the greatest Bangali of all time, the founding father of this nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and all the other martyrs who lost their lives on 15 August in 1975.

Hence, he admitted that this kind of effort will bring ample opportunities for people to think and work on the issue. It is of course, he mentioned, a very significant time to discuss about these issues about a very historic city i.e., Dhaka when it is graduating from LDC status. Mentioning Bangladesh as one of the most vulnerable countries in the globe, he stated that, it is not realised that true risk and the damages the mother nature has done for decades. To substantiate his argument, he referred to the Bhola Cyclone of 1970 and that has seen the highest number of deaths in one night. The death toll, in Bangladesh's

records, is nearly a million but the UN recorded 700,000. After this example that has occurred five decades ago, he shed light on the recent flash flood of Sylhet. He stated, the Sylhet city never experienced such a flooding for a century. He then referred Kurigram, a district of northern region of Bangladesh, which within two weeks, has experienced the worst flooding & drought. Within a span of two weeks the worst flooding and worst drought has hit the same locality.

Referring to his constituency, he shared his firsthand experience that farmer there plead of a special prayer to Almighty ALLAH for rain so that they can process the jute that they had produced. Because the jute must be left under deep water in order to ferment the jute and take out the actual part of it from the stick. Recently, the harvest is fantastic, but the lack of rain is going to bring the harvest to 50 per cent.

He, then, informed the audience about a latest legal step that has been taken in Bangladesh. It is about a verdict that a lower court issued to preserve the 952 ponds that city historically used to hold in the Rajshahi city. This example of the verdict clearly shows that Bangladesh as a whole is working in favor of the environment, not just the parliament. The citizens, the politicians, the government, and the judiciary is doing whatever necessary and making the right intervention. About the climate change trust fund, it is not something that the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina went on to set up yesterday or last year or when the Paris agreement was about to fall apart. Rather, he mentioned, way back in 2010, a year after she became Prime Minister for a second term after 2001, she went on to set up a climate change trust fund of 400 million USD & that time, the size of the GDP was much smaller than what it is today. With this example, he reminded the audience and young researchers that it is the level of commitment of the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He, then, informed the audience about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's suggestion through which she insisted every citizen to plant minimum three trees. Of the three trees, one can be therapeutic, the other one for fruit and the third one can be for used for wood collection.

He also mentioned that Bangladesh is doing right at this moment. He expressed his satisfaction on the issue that, UNHRC has tasked upon two very pertinent technical area where Bangladesh struggled to negotiate with global superpowers. The first one is 'loss and damage' which is a human right issue. He assured that Bangladesh will keep on pursuing that in upcoming COP. The other one is Bangladesh's belief on climate change as a security issue. He stated that this issue must be discussed on a regular interval at the security council. He concluded his speech by making urge to all the permanent and non-permanent members of the UN security council that climate change is an issue that UNSC should discuss.

# Vote of Thanks

**Ms Shanjida Shahab Uddin**

Research Fellow

BIISS



**Ms Shanjida Shahab Uddin**, Research Fellow, BIISS delivered the vote of thanks. She expressed her deep appreciation to the Chief Guest of the event, H. E. Ms. Michelle Bachelet for attending the event despite her busy schedule. She acknowledged the importance of the link between climate change and human rights and thanked Ms. Bachelet for her inspiring and uplifting speech on the subject. On the importance of the connection between climate change and human rights, she thanked H E Ms Bachelet, UN High Commissioner, for her efforts to address climate change. She stated that Ms. Bachelet's inspiring ideas and experiences would undoubtedly help enlighten the young generation's minds. Furthermore, she also thanked the UN High Commission for Human Rights to declare the right to clean environment as a human right.

She conveyed her gratitude to the Director General of BIISS for stressing Bangladesh's leadership role in the cause of climate change in various international forums, including the Climate Vulnerable Forum, and mentioning some of its newly adopted initiatives, such

as the national climate action plan and Mujib climate prosperity plan to ensure the right to clean environment. She also expressed her gratitude to the Special Guest of the event, Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP, Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, for highlighting Bangladesh government's manifold efforts for ensuring the right to live in a clean environment. With profound gratitude, she expressed her thankfulness to the distinguished participants for their presence and praised the young students for their fascinating and thought-provoking interventions throughout the talk session. She concluded her remarks by saying how much she valued the event for contributing to the fight for ensuring the right to a clean environment as a human right.

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The editorial team is thankful to Research Officer **Syeda Tanzia Sultana** for her contribution in preparing the proceedings.

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