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Opening Statement for the Studiosus Talk “Climate Protection – A Human Right?” at ITB 2023

As the talk was held in German, we were allowed to translate the statement to English.

First thought: Climate change is becoming the biggest and most important cause of human rights violations - both in all spontaneous events (sudden onset events) like cyclones or floods as well as with the long-term trends (slow onset). Concerning the sudden onset events and catastrophes, think for example of the big cyclone that hit the Philippines in 2013, 8 million people left homeless, often without a house afterwards. Victims of such events have to be resettled - if they are not protected at home, don't have a land title...where do they go? That is a big question. Think of the floods in Pakistan last summer, 31 million people affected, 2017 was the last one with "only" 18 million affected. Many land plots where they earned their income from are gone, houses are gone, where will they be resettled, by whom? When they do have not land titles, who will get support? That are examples of the key challenges..

But also, with long-term issues (slow onset), think of high temperatures or heat waves in our country, we had several thousands of heat deaths last year, in Germany alone. We have the problems of drought, think of Italy and France, Lake Garda is drying out at the moment, we always notice that. But you can also look at the north-east of Kenya, which is now completely dry. In Somalia, half of the country can no longer be settled or used, and so on. I could go on listing the countries and regions, which makes it clear that it is not just Brandenburg that is affected, but the impacts of climate change are really visible on a large scale.

And of course, this affects an incredible number of people in many countries around the world. That is why it is becoming the most important challenge to implement the right to water, the right to food, the right to housing, the right to work, the right to health...all human rights. That is also why climate change mitigation (avoiding CO2 emissions) is becoming the key human rights challenge.

Adaptation to climate change is increasingly becoming the second major task alongside mitigation, where action is urgently needed. If we don't know in what region or location and when floods are possible, which people might be affected, we cannot prevent harm or help those affected, as the Ahr valley (Germany) shows. What is left is to help the people to repair behind the flood. The government is compensating the losses of this single event with 30 billion euros. we can't afford to do that again and again after every flood or drought. We have to know where the damage will hit, how we try can help that catastrophes might be avoided and to be prepared to help people potentially affected, that's very important. And the second point with adaptation: states must have a policy for disaster preparedness, they should know how and where they can resettle people, for example. We remember this from the Tsunami follow-up in India - at that time the coast was flooded. Afterwards all the fishing villages were moved inland and while hotels were built on the coast. The fishermen suffered. They are not farmers in the hinterland, but actually want to fish. These problems have to be managed and human rights based.

The third thing I want to say is that many climate policy measures themselves have effects on human rights. If you build a dam (renewable energy) and you have to resettle people, without proper alternative land, you have a problem. The same can happen with wind farms, some of which are built for example on indigenous land in Mexico. Such projects have to be developed in a way that respects human rights. That is very important. Another example, is the issue of "nature-based solutions". That is a measure that should reduce emissions. Practically it means that companies start CO2 offsetting on a large scale, by planting trees or forests. Several oil companies have particular promised to be CO2-neutral by 2050. *Shell* alone wants to reforest millions of hectares, to compensate CO2 emissions of other parts of their business. Where is this supposed to take place? Such land does not exist where

people do not live. This means that it leads to human rights conflicts through evictions of those using the land at the moment. We have to learn that climate protection policy itself must take human rights seriously. The human rights protection system, a fair message, is beginning to look more and more into this, to define and describe what the obligation of states is. The Committee on the Rights of the Child is currently formulating a legal commentary on this, and we as the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are doing the same a year later. That means in the human rights system we are starting to describe what states are obliged to do, to prevent, how best to adapt to climate change. That is very important. The climate protection regime needs to take the human rights of people serious and be based on respect for them. Currently the compensation for developing countries is only going to states not to affected persons, but if Bangladesh now receives many millions and uses them to build dams for the golf courses and not for the fishing villages, then we will not have gained anything. This means that too, it is important that human rights and those affected are taken seriously and compensated in the climate protection regime.

Last thought: Tourism is a contributor to climate change, but of course it is also called upon to take preventive action. When you rent a hotel somewhere, you have to look at where it was built, where people were resettled, and all these aspects, which many providers have been taking into account for a long time, are enormously important. Tourism can think about both, i.e., what is our contribution to mitigation and how we should contribute to deal with prevention.