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## UNITED NATIONS

# Tribes say feds' climate inaction violates human rights

Jennifer Hijazi, E&E News reporter • Published: Thursday, January 16, 2020



Sea-level rise is overtaking Isle de Jean Charles in Louisiana. Native Americans from the region are filing a human rights complaint with the United Nations, alleging that the U.S. government has failed to address climate change. Milbert O. Brown/KRT/Newscom

U.S. tribal leaders and a human rights nonprofit are the latest groups to target the federal government over climate change inaction under international human rights law.

Five tribal nations in Louisiana and Alaska and the Alaska Institute for Justice — with help from the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee — filed a [complaint](#) to the United Nations claiming the U.S. government violated the human rights of indigenous tribes by failing to address climate consequences.

"The government's inaction has gone beyond basic negligence where the government has failed to engage, consult, acknowledge and promote the self-determination of these Tribes as they identify and develop adaptation strategies, including resettlement," the complaint said.

"By failing to act, the U.S. government has placed these Tribes at existential risk," it said.

Rising sea levels, dwindling traditional food supplies, displacement and rampant exploitation of land by oil and gas companies are among the grievances brought forward by the tribes.

Recommendations to rectify the grievances include the implementation of federal relocation systems as well as funding for adaptation and restoration of sacred land.

Rosina Philippe of the Atakapa-Ishak/Chawasha Tribe in Louisiana said the very survival of the tribe is at risk from actions taken by the federal government.

"With [Hurricane] Katrina, the BP oil spill and rising waters, habitat loss is occurring rapidly and making it difficult for us to continue to live our traditional ways of working and feeding ourselves," Philippe said.

The complaint was filed yesterday in Geneva to Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, special rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons at the United Nations, and Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples.

Complaints like these highlight a growing trend of groups using international human rights to push governments into greater climate action. It follows on the heels of a similar plea filed by 16 young people around the world to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child ([Climatewire](#), Sept. 24, 2019).

Rachel Gore Freed, vice president of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, said this complaint has been a long time in the making but was partially inspired by youths' submission in September.

"That petition from more than a dozen young activists helped us recognize the critical timing of this complaint as part of a broader international advocacy push in the wake of other global events," she said.

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