TRILATERAL RESEARCH Innovation & Research

The Alliance for Just Deliberation on Solar Geoengineering

Introduction to Human Rights and Solar Geoengineering

What are human rights?

Human rights are the **inherent** rights that every person has simply by being a human being. They are **universal**, which means they apply to everyone, everywhere in the world, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, race, religion, or other status. Human rights are also **inalienable**, meaning they can't be taken away, and **indivisible and interdependent** - violating one right often affects others.



Where do human rights come from?

Human rights are rooted in the philosophical idea that human beings have inherent dignity just by being a human. Our current understanding of human rights comes from the UN Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. This document has inspired human rights treaties and laws all around the world, many of which create legal obligations for governments to respect and protect human rights. The UDHR, alongside International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), are collectively known as the International Bill of Human Rights. The UN Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) is responsible for promoting and protecting human rights at the international level. There are also other international and regional organisations that support the promotion and protection of human rights, including the European Union, Council of Europe, African Union, and Organization of American States.

Human rights and SRM

Solar geoengineering (also known as solar radiation modification or SRM) has the potential to impact human rights in many ways, both positive and negative. On the one hand, the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation are devastating for the enjoyment of human rights (e.g., the right to life, food security, health) for people today and in future generations. Therefore, the use of solar geoengineering to mitigate harms associated with climate change could enhance enjoyment of human rights. On the other hand, manipulating Earth's climate through SRM may cause unforeseen and uncontrollable consequences that would further threaten human rights. In that sense, failure to take steps to address climate change, like solar geoengineering, could be seen as a failure to protect human rights.

Solar geoengineering is not explicitly referenced in international human rights law, nor is it the explicit topic of any guidance or reference documents from human rights bodies. Nevertheless, governments always have an obligation under human rights law to ensure that solar geoengineering activities respect and promote human rights. Furthermore, the Paris Agreement recognised that the actions to address climate change must be guided by human rights. Without upholding these values, SRM activities (research and deployment) would not have the legitimacy to be considered or to potentially move forward.

