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Flood in Bangladesh. Foto: Bernhard Hertlein © Amnesty International

Widening impact of climate change on air pollution in South Asia requires urgent international cooperation and assistance

Global Responding to the new report naming three South Asian countries – Bangladesh, Pakistan and India – having the worst air quality globally at a time when the World Meteorological Organization has issued a ‘red alert’ for global warming indicators, Ann Harrison, Amnesty International’s Climate Adviser, said:

“The climate ‘red alert’ in addition to prolonged exposure to toxic air quality in many parts of the

South Asian region illustrates the risk of harms to life and health of more than a billion people from accelerating climate chaos. There has been little concerted action by both the affected countries as well as the high-income fossil fuel producers that are planning to expand, not reduce production, to tackle this problem which is largely driven by the burning of fossil fuels.

“We reiterate our calls to the affected South Asian countries to urgently create and implement cross border pollution action plan and to the international community, especially historical emitters with the greatest responsibility for climate change and others in a position to do so, including high income fossil fuel producing states, to deliver adequate finance to help countries adapt to climate change as well as to ensure the operationalization and capitalization of the Loss and Damage Fund this year.

“This is essential to help safeguard public health and human rights in countries already suffering climate change induced harms that are set to worsen. The need for **a full, fast, fair and funded fossil fuel phase out, accompanied** by a just, equitable and human rights compliant transition to renewable energy for all cannot be put off any further.

Background

Air quality in South Asia is of particular concern, with 29 of the 30 most polluted cities in India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. In 2023, the average air quality in Bangladesh exceeded WHO safety guidelines by nearly 16 times, making it the country with the worst air quality globally. Pakistan and India followed closely behind, with India occupying nine of the top 10 spots for the most polluted cities. Many cities from Nepal too figured prominently according to the report by IQAir, which tracks air quality worldwide. The report also highlighted a lack of air quality monitoring stations in countries in Africa, South America and the Middle East.

Climate change and air quality are inextricably linked, as the same pollutants that cause climate change also harm air quality – putting at risk people’s rights to life and to health, as well as the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The impacts of air pollution are also worsened by a hotter climate. The new ‘State of Global Climate’ report by the World Meteorological Organization issued a ‘red alert’ as it confirmed 2023 as the hottest year on record by clear margin.

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