

China's Progress with Respect to Recommendations Accepted on Human Rights, Climate Change, and Environmental Issues in the UN Universal Periodic Review

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CRI CLIMATE RIGHTS INTERNATIONAL

I. Introduction

Climate Rights International is an independent, non-governmental organization dedicated to protecting human rights and making progress on climate change. We do this through research and advocacy, often working with local partners, and press governments and corporations to take urgent action to end abuses. Our China work focuses on topics ranging from Beijing's deployment of renewable energy,[1] to the conduct of Chinese state-owned enterprises in other countries,[2] to the robustness of the government's commitments under the Paris Agreement.[3]

The fourth cycle of the United Nations (UN) Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of China took place in January 2024.[4] Climate Rights International offers these observations regarding recommendations accepted by China[5] and developments since that time. We focus on two areas: human rights and the environment, and human rights and climate change.

The Chinese government deserves credit for making world-leading investments in renewable energy,[6] adopting new laws,[7] and setting new targets for carbon-intensive sectors.[8] However, it remains heavily reliant on fossil fuels and is the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, including methane.[9] In addition, the

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[1] Climate Rights International. "EU-China Summit: Center Human Rights in Climate Discussions," July 23, 2025, https://cri.org/eu-china-summit-center-human-rights-in-climate-discussions/.
[2] Climate Rights International. "Brazil: Ensure Implementation of Forced Labor Settlement with BYD," January 9, 2026, https://cri.org/brazil-ensure-implementation-forced-labor-settlement-byd/.
[3] Richardson, Sophie. "Xi and Trump: Plenty of Hot Air, No Solution," The Climate Rights Brief, Climate Rights International, May 19, 2026, https://climaterightsinternational.substack.com/p/xi-and-trump-plenty-of-hot-air-no.
[4] United Nations Human Rights Council, "Universal Periodic Review: China," https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cn-index, accessed August 10, 2026.
[5] "Universal Periodic Review: China," https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/cn-index, see link to "matrix of recommendations."
[6] Ember, "China Energy Transition Review, 2025," September 9, 2025, https://ember-energy.org/latest-insights/china-energy-transition-review-2025/.
[7] NPC Observer, "Ecological and Environmental Code," https://npcobserver.com/legislation/ecological-and-environmental-code/, accessed August 10, 2026.
[8] Patel, Anika. "China Briefing 25 June 2026: Five-year plans passed," *Carbon Brief*, June 25, 2026, https://www.carbonbrief.org/china-briefing-25-june-2026-five-year-plans-passed-critical-mineral-tensions-industrial-decarbonisation-plan/.
[9] International Energy Agency, "World Energy Investment 2025: Executive Summary," https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-investment-2025/executive-summary, accessed August 10, 2026; Emissions Database for Global Atmospheric Research, "GHG emissions of all world countries: 2025 report," https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report_2025, accessed August 20, 2026; World Population Review, "Methane Emissions by Country 2026," https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/methane-emissions-by-country, accessed August 20, 2026.

government suppresses free speech,[10] significantly curtails independent civil society,[11] and uses the legal system to maintain political power.[12] While the state has the ability to dictate large-scale projects that may have positive climate outcomes, those efforts are almost always undertaken without public consultation or consent, and without thorough, publicly available scrutiny of the full environmental, social, or climate impacts. This fundamentally compromises the progress the Chinese government can make with respect to the climate crisis.

II. Recommendations Regarding Human Rights and the Environment

a. China accepted recommendation 22.299: Improve the scale of wind and photovoltaic energy production to combat environmental pollution (Burkina Faso).

China's rates of installation of wind and solar power since January 2024 are unprecedented. According to Ember, China added more than twice the solar capacity of the rest of the world combined in just the first half of 2025.[13] Chinese authorities assert that one driving factor in the shift to renewables is combating environmental pollution, though it is unclear what steps the government takes to mitigate environmental harms and human rights violations from activities such as mining for renewable energy in China or abroad.

However, the impressive rate of renewable installation is compromised by China's ongoing reliance on fossil fuels, which leads Climate Action Tracker to label the country's approach "highly insufficient."[14] In addition, analysts continue to express

[10] Wong, Tessa. "A dam ignited rare Tibetan protests. They ended in beatings and arrests, BBC finds." *BBC*, December 23, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1d37zg1549o.
[11] Leung, Kanis. "A Chinese dissident recounts his perilous dingy escape to South Korea and how he got to Canada," *Associated Press*, June 29, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/china-dissident-dong-guangping-south-korea-canada-8e50cfb73064865363322a37008cadc5.
[12] Ng, Margaret. "In full: Hong Kong barrister Margaret Ng's mitigation plea given before she was sentenced over a peaceful 2019 demo," Hong Kong Free Press, April 16, 2021, https://hongkongfp.com/2021/04/16/in-full-hong-kong-barrister-margaret-ngs-mitigation-plea-given-before-she-was-sentenced-over-a-peaceful-2019-demo/.
[13] Ember, "Global solar installations surge 64% in the first half of 2025," September 2, 2025, https://ember-energy.org/latest-updates/global-solar-installations-surge-64-in-first-half-of-2025/.
[14] Climate Action Tracker, "China," June 30, 2026, https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/china/.

concerns about forced labor[15] in the production of solar[16] and wind energy technology.[17]

b. China accepted recommendation 22.300: Continue to combat pollution in a legal, targeted, and scientific manner to guarantee people's right to a healthy environment (Cameroon).

China has taken some steps to combat pollution, particularly by targeting specific pollutants and by reducing carbon intensity, among other steps.[18] Yet there are significant geographic differences. On the east coast, air pollution in particular is significantly lower, but some areas are seeing gains reversed.[19] Western and southern regions are faring worse, mostly as a result of the relocation of heavy industries.[20] Air pollution in particular will worsen in the west as authorities increase investment in new coal-to-chemicals facilities.[21]

China abstained from voting on the landmark 2022 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution setting out a universal human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. In February 2025, China adopted a National Climate Change Health Adaptation Action Plan (2024–2030),[22] but this document does not

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[15]The Rights Practice, *When the State Makes You Work: The use of state-imposed forced labour in China*, July 2025, https://www.rights-practice.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=779879ab-95bc-428c-ba97-e4ee673fd6f8.

[16] Globalworks Lund AB, *Labour Rights Violations in the Solar Panel Sector in China: A Human Rights Due Diligence Analysis*, June 2026, https://www.globalworks.se/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/labour-rights-solar-june-2026.pdf

[17] Solomon, Matt and David E. Bond. "The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act—Potential impact on critical minerals supply for clean energy technologies," White and Case, December 5, 2022, https://www.whitecase.com/insight-alert/uygher-forced-labor-prevention-act-potential-impact-critical-minerals-supply-clean. See also Solomon, Matt, and David E. Bond. "Quest to bolster critical minerals supply will persist through economic downturn," White and Case, September 22, 2022, https://www.whitecase.com/insight-our-thinking/mining-metals-2022-quest-bolster-critical-mineral-supply.

[18] China's 15th Five-Year Framework Plan: Overview of Key Targets and Priorities for Mitigating Super Climate Pollutants, IGSD, March 18, 2026, https://www.igsd.org/chinas-15th-five-year-framework-plan-overview-of-key-targets-and-priorities-for-mitigating-super-climate-pollutants/.

[19] Wang, Shuo. "In Depth: North China Chokes as Air Pollution Rebounds in Early 2026," Caixin, April 15, 2026, https://www.caixinglobal.com/2026-04-15/in-depth-north-china-chokes-as-air-pollution-rebounds-in-early-2026-102434194.html.

[20] Qiu, Chengcheng. "Why is China's air pollution shifting west?" Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, July 17, 2025, https://energyandcleanair.org/why-is-chinas-air-pollution-shifting-west/.

[21] Yu, Aiqun, Christine Shearer, and Joe Hittinger. "China's coal-chemicals boom risks repeating the mistakes of the past," Climate Home News, June 22, 2026, https://www.climatechangenews.com/2026/06/22/chinas-coal-chemicals-boom-risks-repeating-the-mistakes-of-the-past/.

[22] Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "China National Climate Change Health Adaptation Action Plan (2024-2030)," February 24, 2025, https://en.chinacdc.cn/health_topics/environment_health/202502/t20250221_304471.html.

explicitly guarantee the right to a healthy environment. China did support the May 2026 UNGA resolution in support of the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on states' obligations in respect of climate change.[23] That resolution "recognize[es] the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right."[24]

c. China accepted recommendation 22.302: Pursue efforts to strengthen the protection of environmental rights and those of specific groups (Democratic Republic of the Congo).

In March 2026, China adopted a new Ecological and Environmental Code.[25] This document establishes relatively little new law, instead combining existing regulations into a single document to eliminate contradictory provisions and to imbue the issue with greater political significance. Broadly the Code does not address the rights of specific groups in need of particular human rights and environmental protections, such as older people and pregnant women suffering from extreme heat or minoritized or otherwise marginalized communities.

China has pursued rhetorical initiatives, such as the 2021-2025[26] and 2026-2030 National Human Rights Action Plans, and the "Beautiful China" initiatives. These documents are not the result of public input or collaboration and set out no new legally enforceable protections for specific at-risk groups.

d. China accepted recommendation 22.303: Continue to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (2030) and the policy of prioritizing conservation protection and natural restoration (Kenya).

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[23] Climate Rights International. "UN: Flawed Resolution Affirms Landmark ICJ Opinion," May 20, 2026, https://cri.org/un-flawed-resolution-affirms-landmark-icj-climate-opinion/.

[24] "UNGA RESOLUTION on the 'Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change,'" undated, accessed August 11, 2026, https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Final-UNGA-Resolution-ICJ-AO-CC-30.4.26.pdf. See also "General Assembly backs historic World Court climate crisis ruling," UN News, May 20, 2026, https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/05/1167561.

[25] "China adopts landmark legislation to propel green modernization," Xinhua, March 12, 2026, https://english.news.cn/20260312/0fdb37d5d3154846beefc91515ef0074/c.html. 中华人民共和国生态环境法典, 第十四届全国人民代表大会第四次会议通过, 2026年3月12日, https://climate-laws.org/documents/ecological-and-environmental-code_1b58.

[26] "Human Rights Action Plan of China (2021-2025)," The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, September 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/business/workinggroupbusiness/2022-11-28/Human-Rights-Action-Plan-of-China-2021-2025.pdf.

While the Chinese government and people across the country have made progress on some Sustainable Development Goals, including mitigating poverty, increasing education, pursuing afforestation, and installing renewable energy, China's increasing use of fossil fuels at home and abroad greatly undermines these gains domestically and globally. China's emissions have increased dramatically over the past two decades,[27] largely as a result of industrialization and construction. Despite a 2021 public pledge, it has not ended support for new coal-fired power outside China.[28] Through massive state-owned enterprises, China continues to extract fossil fuels around the world, such as in Iraq,[29] Niger,[30] and Uganda.[31]

e. China accepted recommendation 22.312: Continue to ensure public participation in the protection of the environment (Timor-Leste).

The Chinese government claims it enjoys widespread public support for and participation in environmental protection activities. Yet authorities remain hostile towards independent environmental advocates, cracking down on protests,[32] denying consultation around major infrastructure and extractive projects,[33] and limiting citizen participation in environmental public interest litigation.[34]

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[27] Rapier, Robert. "China's Coal Habit is Outpacing Its Clean Energy Boom," June 29, 2026, *Oil Price*, https://oilprice.com/Energy/Coal/Chinas-Coal-Habit-Is-Outpacing-Its-Clean-Energy-Boom.html.
[28] "Nickel Unearthed: The Human and Climate Costs of Indonesia's Nickel Industry," Climate Rights International, January 2024, https://cri.org/reports/nickel-unearthed/; "Ongoing Harms, Limited Accountability: Climate, Environmental, and Human Rights Violations in the Indonesian Nickel Industry," Climate Rights International, June 2025, https://cri.org/reports/ongoing-harms-limited-accountability/; McCartney, Micah. "Green Powerhouse China Is Still Addicted to Coal," *Newsweek*, November 6, 2025, https://www.newsweek.com/green-powerhouse-china-coal-energy-11001104.
[29] Azhar Al-Rubaie, Sara Manisera and Daniela Sala, "'It's destruction disguised as progress': how the oil industry is sucking Iraq's ancient wetlands dry," *The Guardian*, August 13, 2025.
[29] Alexandre Queru, "China's $4.5 Billion Headache: The Niger-Benin Pipeline and the Limits of Non-Interference," *The Diplomat*, April 15, 2026, https://thediplomat.com/2026/04/chinas-4-5-billion-headache-the-niger-benin-pipeline-and-the-limits-of-non-interference/.
[30] Alexandre Queru, "China's $4.5 Billion Headache: The Niger-Benin Pipeline and the Limits of Non-Interference," *The Diplomat*, April 15, 2026, https://thediplomat.com/2026/04/chinas-4-5-billion-headache-the-niger-benin-pipeline-and-the-limits-of-non-interference/.
[31] Climate Rights International, "'They Don't Want People to Stay Here': How CNOOC's Kingfisher Oil Project in Uganda Is Causing Human Rights, Environmental, and Climate Harms," September 2, 2024, https://cri.org/uganda-oil-project-fuels-rights-climate-and-environmental-harms/.
[32] Wong, Tessa. "A dam ignited rare Tibetan protests."
[33] Richardson, Sophie. "Damming the Climate for Rights in Tibet," *The Diplomat*, August 9, 2025, https://thediplomat.com/2025/08/damming-the-climate-for-rights-in-tibet/.
[34] Yang, Zekun. "Administrative public interest litigation boosts eco-governance," China Daily, July 30, 2026, https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/637226.

The 2026 Environmental and Ecological Code imposes new restrictions on public interest litigation.[35] The Chinese government asserts that hundreds of thousands of environmental lawsuits have been "concluded" since 2024, but this does not provide any way of knowing whether the decisions resulted in improvement or harm for the environment, climate mitigation, or local communities.[36] Most cases appear to have been related to government compliance with regulations rather than allowing citizens an opportunity to argue their cases in court.[37] It appears that public participation is only guaranteed when the public in question shares or otherwise supports the government's view, and challenging official actions can result in reprisals.[38]

f. China accepted recommendation 22.314: Strengthen efforts in protecting the ecological environment in the light of its interdependence with human rights (Zambia).

In 2024, the population of a village in Zangri County, Shannan, Tibet was relocated; authorities asserted that such a move was necessary for ecological protection and poverty alleviation.[39] Independent researchers are not allowed access to the area or communities. National media coverage of this move—one of many across the Qinghai-Tibet plateau over the past decades and the past two years—provided no evidence to suggest that those relocated were consulted, given compensation, or allowed to object. These rights-violating policies, undertaken in the name of ecological protection, can harm populations and fail to deliver the intended preservation of the environment.

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[35] Richardson, Sophie. "China's New Ecological Code: A Step Backwards for Environmental Lawsuits," The Climate Rights Brief, Climate Rights International, April 14, 2026, https://climaterightsinternational.substack.com/p/chinas-new-ecological-code-a-step.

[36] "China intensifies legal protection for the environment," *Xinhua*, June 6, 2025, https://english.court.gov.cn/2025-06/06/c_1099406.htm.

[37] Hao, Shen. "Guardians of the green? A critical examination of procuratorial public interest litigation in China's environmental governance," *Environmental Policy and Planning*, February 5, 2025, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1523908X.2026.2625845?af=R.

[38] "Anya Sengdra released: Environmental protection, anti-corruption and the price of activism in Tibet," International Campaign for Tibet, February 11, 2026, https://savetibet.org/anya-sengdra-released/.

[39] Feng, Ji. "**从愚公移山到整体搬迁**," **西藏日**报, December 3, 2025, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/YdB7zCrYjOJjxRgbMs9Q3w. See also Sangri Rongmei. "**山南**这个村同时上人民日报和西藏日报了," December 10, 2025, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/h_3XLbr-hNKKz5FuguLldQ.

g. China accepted recommendation 22.317: Incorporate into law the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, preferably at the constitutional level (Costa Rica).

While Articles 21, guaranteeing the right to health, and 26, protecting "living environments" and "the ecological environment" of the 1982 Constitution remain unchanged, there is no new law since 2024 incorporating the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.[40]

III. Theme: Human Rights and Climate Change

h. China accepted recommendation 22.298: Continue making progress in its efforts to combat deforestation and degradation of arable land (Plurinational State of Bolivia).

In September 2024, a senior Chinese Communist Party body adopted guiding opinions to promote the increase and protection of arable land within China.[41] According to independent research group Climate Action Tracker, the Three-North Shelterbelt Program helped "reduce the share of desertified land from 27.2% a decade ago to 26.8%."[42]

Yet in other countries, including Brazil,[43] Indonesia,[44] and the Philippines,[45] Chinese companies—some private, some state-owned—are contributing to significant deforestation and degradation of land essential for farming and livelihoods, either directly or through their supply chains. These violations have been brought to the attention of those countries and Chinese authorities since January 2024, yet little has changed, particularly for the harmed communities and environments.

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[40] Constitution of the People's Republic of China, The State Council, the People's Republic of China, updated November 19, 2025, accessed August 11, 2026, https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/lawsregulations/201911/20/content_WS5ed8856ec6d0b3f0e9499913.html.
[41] 中共中央办公厅 国务院办公厅关于加强耕地保护提升耕地质量完善占补平衡的意见, *Xinhua*, September 24, 2024, https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/202409/content_6976192.htm.
[42] "China," Climate Action Tracker, https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/china/.
[43] "Before It's Too Late: Curbing Cattle-Driven Deforestation and Rights Abuses in Brazil," Climate Rights International, October 2025, https://cri.org/reports/before-its-too-late/.
[44] "Nickel Unearthed," Climate Rights International.
[45] "'Broken Promises': Philippines Nickel Mining Causes Rights Abuses and Increases Climate Vulnerability," Climate Rights International, November 2025, https://cri.org/reports/broken-promises/.

i. China accepted recommendation 22.304: Promote the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Paris Agreement and actively carry out South-South cooperation on climate change (Maldives).

According to the Climate Action Tracker, China's most recent Nationally Determined Contributions are insufficient and "China's climate policies and commitments are not consistent with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature limit," rating those "highly insufficient."[46] China's 2024 Energy Law and the Fifteenth Five-Year Plan, published in October 2025,[47] only make vague aspirational statements about reducing emissions. Recent assessments of China's energy plans conclude that those targets "are insufficient for China to meet its existing climate commitments," and still leave room for emissions increases.[48]

China has pursued cooperation with global majority countries in the provision of renewable energy technology, including launching a new UN facility.[49] But it remains unclear whether and on what terms loans for this equipment will have to be repaid, whether these interactions increase ecological, environmental, or other human rights harms,[50] and whether this cooperation is pursued free of Beijing's expectations of political support.[51]

j. China accepted recommendation 22.315: Build on plans outlined in the national report to reduce CO2 emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon

[46] "China," Climate Action Tracker.
[47] Richardson, Sophie. "A Rights-Free Climate Plan Won't Make China 'Beautiful,'" The Climate Rights Brief, Climate Rights International, November 5, 2025, https://climaterightsinternational.substack.com/p/a-rights-free-climate-plan-wont-make.
[48] Qi, Qin, Belinda Schape, and Lauri Myllyvirta. "China's new energy plan leaves emissions loose," Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, June 29, 2026, https://energyandcleanair.org/chinas-new-energy-plan-leaves-emissions-loose/.
[49] "China Announces New 'China-UN Global South-South Development Facility' in Partnership with UN Office for South-South Cooperation," UN Office for South-South Cooperation, September 29, 2025, https://unsouthsouth.org/2025/09/29/china-announces-the-new-china-un-global-south-south-development-facility-in-partnership-with-the-un-office-for-south-south-cooperation/.
[50] "Unpacking clean energy: Human rights impacts of Chinese overseas investment in transition minerals," Business and Human Rights Centre, July 6, 2023, https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/from-us/briefings/unpacking-clean-energy-human-rights-impacts-of-chinese-overseas-investment-in-transition-minerals/.
[51] Tachev, Viktor. "China's Green Manufacturing Industry Brings Massive Investment to 54 Countries," Energy Tracker Asia, September 23, 2025, https://energytracker.asia/chinas-booming-green-manufacturing-industry/.

neutrality before 2060 in the collective fight against climate change (Bahamas).

It is indisputable that China has decreased emissions as a result of its shift towards renewable energy, and its efforts to make that technology available around the world.

Yet its vague commitments regarding when and how emissions will peak,[52] its increasing energy use,[53] its ongoing reliance on fossil fuels, and its unreliable emissions data,[54] mean that China's role in the collective fight against climate change—and for human rights—is far from clear.

[52] Gosens, Jorrit. "China's new climate targets show progress but lack ambition," East Asia Forum, November 12, 2025, https://eastasiaforum.org/2025/11/11/chinas-new-climate-targets-show-progress-but-lack-ambition/.
[53] Qi, Qin. "China Energy and Emissions Trends – April 2026 snapshot," Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, May 19, 2026, https://energyandcleanair.org/china-energy-and-emissions-trends-april-2026-snapshot/.
[54] Myllyvirta, Lauri. "Analysis: China's new carbon metric leaves Germany-sized gap in its emissions," Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air, May 26, 2026, https://energyandcleanair.org/analysis-chinas-new-carbon-metric-leaves-germany-sized-gap-in-its-emissions/.

Human Rights Council meeting room. Photo: Siavosh Hosseini/Unsplash.