



**Response to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women
Call for Inputs on violence against women and girls in the context of the climate crisis,
including environmental degradation and related disaster risk mitigation and response**

Submitted by The Advocates for Human Rights,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1996

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The Advocates for Human Rights (The Advocates) is a volunteer-based non-governmental organization committed to the impartial promotion and protection of international human rights standards and the rule of law. Established in 1983, The Advocates conducts a range of programs to promote human rights in the United States and around the world, including monitoring and fact finding, direct legal representation, education and training, and publications. The Advocates is committed to ensuring human rights protection for women around the world. The Advocates has published more than 25 reports on violence against women as a human rights issue, provided consultation and commentary of draft laws on domestic violence, and trained lawyers, police, prosecutors, judges, and other law enforcement personnel to effectively implement new and existing laws on domestic violence. In December 2021, The Advocates published [A Rollback for Human Rights: The Istanbul Convention Under Attack](#) which details the backlash to human rights and undermining of women's human rights in Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

The Advocates is the primary provider of legal services to low-income asylum seekers in the Upper Midwest region of the United States, each year providing legal assistance to more than 1,000 migrants who are survivors of human rights abuses. Since 2017, The Advocates has provided pro bono legal services to low-income victims of trafficking, as well as outreach and training on trafficking to raise awareness and help identify and support victims. The Advocates has also worked with the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to develop a labor trafficking protocol for law enforcement investigation. In addition, The Advocates works to reform the legal system itself by documenting and reporting on human rights abuses and advocating for better immigration laws.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Advocates for Human Rights (The Advocates) welcomes this opportunity to inform the Special Rapporteur's report on violence against women and girls in the context of the climate crisis, including environmental degradation and related disaster risk mitigation and response. The Advocates concurs with UN Secretary-General António Guterres that the recently released report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is nothing less than a "code red for humanity."¹
2. Despite the world's attention to the escalating climate change crisis, there remains inadequate attention on the most vulnerable – the women and girls among the 3.3 billion people living in countries with high human vulnerability to climate change² whose sex creates yet a further vulnerability: the elevated risk of climate-associated gender violence.
3. The catalytical effect of climate change on gender-based violence against women and girls (VAWG) is known but inadequately understood and appreciated. Climate change is a VAWG accelerant. Even the recent IPCC report, which for the first time identified the mental health consequences of climate change as a health impact of climate change,³ failed, as did earlier IPCC reports, to identify gender-based VAWG as a material and catastrophic health consequence of climate change. Climate change ignites new levels of violence and suffering for women and girls solely because they are women and girls.
4. Initiatives like the Special Rapporteur's report, the IUCN's research on gender-based violence and environmental linkages,⁴ the CSW66 theme of climate change and gender and

¹ "Secretary-General's statement on the IPCC Working Group 1 Report on the Physical Science Basis of the Sixth Assessment," news release, August 9, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/secretary-generals-statement-the-ipcc-working-group-1-report-the-physical-science-basis-of-the-sixth-assessment>.

² H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, H. Adams, I. Adelekan, C. Adler, R. Adrian, P. Aldunce, E. Ali, R. Ara Begum, B. Bednar-Friedl, R. Bezner Kerr, R. Biesbroek, J. Birkmann, K. Bowen, M.A. Caretta, J. Carnicer, E. Castellanos, T.S. Cheong, W. Chow, G. Cissé, S. Clayton, A. Constable, S. Cooley, M.J. Costello, M. Craig, W. Cramer, R. Dawson, D. Dodman, J. Efitre, M. Garschagen, E.A. Gilmore, B. Glavovic, D. Gutzler, M. Haasnoot, S. Harper, T. Hasegawa, B. Hayward, J.A. Hicke, Y. Hirabayashi, C. Huang, K. Kalaba, W. Kiessling, A. Kitoh, R. Lasco, J. Lawrence, M.F. Lemos, R. Lempert, C. Lennard, D. Ley, T. Lissner, Q. Liu, E. Liwenga, S. Lluch-Cota, S. Löschke, S. Lucatello, Y. Luo, B. Mackey, K. Mintenbeck, A. Mirzabaev, V. Möller, M. Moncassim Vale, M.D. Morecroft, L. Mortsch, A. Mukherji, T. Mustonen, M. Mycoo, J. Nalau, M. New, A. Okem (South Africa), J.P. Ometto, B. O'Neill, R. Pandey, C. Parmesan, M. Pelling, P.F. Pinho, J. Pinnegar, E.S. Poloczanska, A. Prakash, B. Preston, M.-F. Racault, D. Reckien, A. Revi, S.K. Rose, E.L.F. Schipper, D.N. Schmidt, D. Schoeman, R. Shaw, N.P. Simpson, C. Singh, W. Solecki, L. Stringer, E. Totin, C.H. Trisos, Y. Trisurat, M. van Aalst, D. Viner, M. Wairu, R. Warren, P. Wester, D. Wrathall, and Z. Zaiton Ibrahim, *Technical Summary*, ed. D.C. Roberts H.-O. Pörtner, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem ed. D.C. Roberts H.-O. Pörtner, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, (In Press: Cambridge University Press, 2022). <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>.

³ Pörtner, *Technical Summary*, 33.

⁴ Laura Sabater Itzá Castañeda Camey, Cate Owren, A. Emmett Boyer,., *Gender-based violence and environment linkages*, ed. Jamie Wen (Gland, Switzerland: IUCN). https://web.archive.org/web/20200211015201id_/https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2020-002-En.pdf.

CEDAW's general recommendation 37 (both call out climate-associated VAWG),⁵ and the valuable work of the certain Member States, are vitally important. But greater focus, and research, on VAWG in the context of the climate crisis is needed and long overdue.

II. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

5. VAWG in the context of the climate crisis is multi-faceted, complex, and permeates every aspect of climate's existential crisis for humanity. In this submission, we limit our input to (1) intimate partner violence (IPV), (2) disaster-driven migration, and (3) violence against women environmental human rights defenders, many of whom are part of the indigenous community.

IPV Tied to Climate Events

6. IPV increased by an estimated 40% in rural areas after the 2011 Christchurch earthquake in New Zealand.⁶ Following two 2011 tropical cyclones in Vanuatu, new domestic violence cases increased 300%.⁷ In Spain, "heat waves between 2008 and 2016 were associated with increased IPV risk... and intimate partner femicide..., one to three days after the extreme heat event. In the USA, exposure to Hurricane Ike in 2008 was significantly associated with increasing the odds of boys physically... or sexually assaulting dating partners, while exposure to Hurricane Katrina increased the risk of women experiencing violent acts by intimate partners by 5-8 times."⁸ After the Deepwater Horizon 2010 oil spill, rates of physical and emotional abuse of women by intimate partners doubled.⁹ In India, "the odds of IPV was much higher among women living in states severely ... or moderately... affected by tsunamis compared with those living in an unaffected state."¹⁰

⁵UN Women, "Commission on the Status of Women, CSW66 (2022) Climate Change, Environment Disaster Risk Reduction", <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw66-2022>. UN. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change*, vol. CEDAW/C/GC/37, (New York UN, March 13, 2018). <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1626306?ln=en>.

⁶ Alyssa Mari Thurston, Heidi Stöckl, and Meghna Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review," *BMJ Global Health* 6, no. 4 (2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-004377>, <http://gh.bmj.com/content/6/4/e004377.abstract>.

⁷ Itzá Castañeda Camey, *Gender-based violence and environment linkages*, 139; Cate Owren, *Understanding and addressing gender-based violence as part of the climate emergency* ed. Expert Group Meeting, vol. EGM/ENV/EP.8., Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes 11-14 October 2021, (UN Women, September 2021), 3 (both citing a 2014 UN Study).

⁸ Thurston, Stöckl, and Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review," 2 (citing studies).

⁹ Annie Gebhardt, *Sexual Violence in Disasters* (Harrisburg, Pa.: National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2021), 26 (citing study). <https://www.nsvrc.org/resource/2500/sexual-violence-disasters>.

¹⁰ Thurston, Stöckl, and Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review," 4 (citing to studies).

7. The Advocates' 2019 report on impacts of the extractives industry on women documents how domestic violence can "flourish" after extractive industries come into a community.¹¹ The increased risk of violence exists in communities surrounding both industrial and artisanal and small-scale mining operations. Researchers have found that as men earn more

IPCC WGII Sixth Assessment
Report, Technical Report p.19

There is increased evidence that climate hazards associated with extreme events and variability act as direct drivers of involuntary migration and displacement and as indirect drivers through deteriorating climate-sensitive livelihoods....**Since 2008, an annual average of over 20 million people have been internally displaced annually by weather-related extreme events (emphasis added)....**The most common drivers for migration and displacement are drought, tropical storms and hurricanes and floods.

money, they change their spending habits, spending more money on vices or disposable goods that do not aid women and their children. This serves to make women more vulnerable and increase the risk of domestic violence. Researchers have also observed an increase in harassment, violence against women, and exposure to HIV.¹² Where extractive industries are located in a region facing resource-based conflicts, women are disproportionately put at risk.¹³

Forced Migration

8. Most climate-related displacement occurs within national borders, with international movements taking place primarily between countries with contiguous borders.¹⁴ Annually, more than 20 million people are displaced internally (IDPs) by climate-driven events,¹⁵ and approximately 80% of IDPs are women.¹⁶ Climate-induced drivers of drought, tropical storms and hurricanes, heavy rains and floods,¹⁷ which also are drivers of conditions that activate VAWG,¹⁸ bring about this forced displacement.

9. VAWG surges in the wake of natural disasters. A recent study¹⁹ undertaking a systematic review of the quantitative and qualitative studies exploring the relationship between natural disasters and VAWG found

¹¹ The Advocates for Human Rights, "Promoting Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the Oil, Gas and Mining Extractive Industries " (2019), https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/promoting_gender_diversity_and_inclusion_in_the_oil_gas_and_mining_extractive_industries.pdf.

¹² The Advocates for Human Rights, "Promoting Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the Oil, Gas and Mining Extractive Industries " 50 (citations omitted).

¹³ The Advocates for Human Rights, "Promoting Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the Oil, Gas and Mining Extractive Industries " 51 (citations omitted).

¹⁴ Pörtner, *Technical Summary*, 19.

¹⁵ Pörtner, *Technical Summary*, 19.

¹⁶ Senay Habtezion, *Overview of linkages between gender and climate change* (New York United Nations Development Program 2016), 5. <https://www.undp.org/publications/gender-and-climate-change>.

¹⁷ Pörtner, *Technical Summary*, 19.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Thurston, Stöckl, and Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review."; Itzá Castañeda Camey, *Gender-based violence and environment linkages*, 135-60.

¹⁹ Thurston, Stöckl, and Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review." The study explains its rigorous methodology that eliminated reviews and studies that did not fulfill its inclusion criteria

growing evidence of “VAWG during and after disasters, including violence by a non-partner, of intimate partner, rape, sexual assault, as well as female genital mutilation, honor killings and the trafficking of women.”²⁰ Driven by economic necessity, women and girls also engage in survival sex for basics like food.²¹ Economic desperation in response to disasters and resource scarcity is linked to increases in child marriages where girls are bartered for material resources, as confirmed by studies across South Asia and Iran.²²

Displacement camps and shelters

10. VAWG can flourish at displacement camps and shelters. Lack of adequate measures to protect the physical security of women and girls, including doors, walls, locks, and segregated water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, particularly when coupled with inadequate lighting and policing, constantly expose women and girls to the risk of violence. Inadequate and/or indifferent policing fosters impunity for VAWG, with those charged with security at times becoming perpetrators.²³ When women must go outside camps to collect water, firewood, and food, they run the risk of rape, sexual abuse, and harassment. Camp and shelter conditions can lead to survival sex²⁴ and serve as drivers for sex and labor trafficking (below).
11. After the 2010 Haiti earthquake, there were widespread reports of rape, where perpetrators used broken marbles or rubber bands to rape and severely injure women. An interviewee described the Haitian displacement camp: “When the earthquake just happened, all the time they are raping somebody or commit a violent act. Because there is no security in the tents. You may be in a tent, and they set it on fire.”²⁵

Sex and labor trafficking

²⁰ Thurston, Stöckl, and Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review," 2.

²¹ Owren, *Understanding and addressing gender-based violence as part of the climate emergency* EGM/ENV/EP.8., 4; Thurston, Stöckl, and Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review," 16.

²² Thurston, Stöckl, and Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review," 16 (citing various studies).

²³ Itzá Castañeda Camey, *Gender-based violence and environment linkages*. See also, Thurston, Stöckl, and Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review," 19. For example, a 2019 UN-sponsored study of 14 Nigerian IDP camps found sexual violence mostly perpetrated by security officials for the camps. *Assessment of Trafficking Risks in Internally Displaced Persons Camps in North-East Nigeria for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020), 11. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/75273>.

²⁴ See, e.g., Gebhardt, *Sexual Violence in Disasters*, 30. e.g., a young girl in a Red Cross Haitian project explained: “girls may be having sex to get help...or even protection. When there’s no money or good jobs after a disaster, women and girls sometimes need to turn to transactional sex. They don’t always have a choice.” Philip Obaji Jr., "In north-eastern Nigeria, traffickers are preying on vulnerable children in IDP camps," *Equal Times* (July 9, 2018), <https://www.equaltimes.org/in-north-eastern-nigeria?lang=en#.YjyGH-fMK3A>.

²⁵ Thurston, Stöckl, and Ranganathan, "Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review," 16 (citing Haiti study).

12. Sex and labor trafficking's prevalence in cross-border migration is undisputed,²⁶ with women and girls its main victims. Seven of every ten (70%) detected trafficked victims are female (5 being women, 2 being girls).²⁷ More attention, however, must be given to trafficking of IDPs because of the alarming annual growth of climate-driven IDPs (approximately 80% of whom are women). The 2019 study of 14 IDP camps in North-East Nigeria shows how normalized and widespread trafficking had become in these IDP camps,²⁸ with most trafficking approaches taking place when women and girls must leave the camps for water, firewood, and food.²⁹ In the U.S., crises like Hurricane Katrina forced recognition of trafficking in the wake of climate events that displace people and force them into shelters. Since then, the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention provides guidance to shelter operators on how to identify trafficking in the wake of natural disasters and national resources to deal with it.³⁰

According to an Indigenous Guatemalan woman defender of the environment:

When they threaten me, they say that they will kill me, but before they kill me, they will rape me. They don't say that to my male colleagues. These threats are very specific to indigenous women. There is also a very strong racism against us. They refer to us as those rebel Indian women that have nothing to do, and they consider us less human." Barcia, p.12

Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders

13. Defending the environment against the climate crisis, where opportunity to profit may propel rapid, unsustainable, and illegal exploitation of land and natural resources, is dangerous. Recently, Global Witness reported that more than four defenders died per week, with a third of all fatal attacks targeting indigenous people, even though they make up only 5% of the world's population.³¹ The Business & Human Rights Resource Centre reports that in 2021, 70% of the 122 reported attacks on human rights defenders were attacks on *women* environmental human rights defenders (WEHRDs).³²

²⁶ UNODC, "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020," (United Nations publications, Sales No. E.20.IV.30), : 31, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf. The UNDOC Report takes a broad brushstroke approach identifying socio-economic needs and inequalities, highlighting gender inequalities, which make individuals vulnerable to trafficking. They cite irregular migration status in the context of cross-border migration as a key vulnerability making a person more susceptible to trafficking. See, e.g., 19, 111.

²⁷ UNODC, "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020," 31.

²⁸ *Assessment of Trafficking Risks in Internally Displaced Persons Camps in North-East Nigeria for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.*

²⁹ *Assessment of Trafficking Risks in Internally Displaced Persons Camps in North-East Nigeria for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.* See, e.g., 11, 12.

³⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Human Trafficking in the Wake of a Disaster Information and Resources for Shelter Operators," (August 2020), https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/human_trafficking_info_for_shelters.html.

³¹ Global Witness, "LAST LINE OF DEFENCE: The industries causing the climate crisis and attacks against land and environmental defenders," *Global Witness* (September, 2021): 12, file:///C:/Users/Peggy%20Grieve/Downloads/Last_line_of_defence_-_high_res_-_September_2021.pdf.

³² Business & Human Rights Centre, "International Women's Day 2022: Recognising the role of women in advancing human rights & defending the planet," *Business & Human Rights Centre* (February 28, 2022),

14. WEHRDs face special gender-based challenges, including the violence against them because of their work to safeguard the earth for future generations.
15. Rape, sexual harassment, and abuse are used to exercise power over women³³ as are threats of rape and sexual abuse, alone or in conjunction with death threats and threats to their children.³⁴ WEHRDs also are “more likely to be slandered, discredited and exposed to stigmatization, exclusion and public repudiation by state actors and corporations, as well as members of their own communities.”³⁵ Women struggle to defend their right to speak within their communities and families,³⁶ while ICUN points to enormous contributions of WEHRDs, especially indigenous women, against increasing and relentless violence against WEHRDs, especially indigenous women.³⁷
16. The Advocates has received direct information from a WEHRD in Turkey, who reports that police attend and record their every meeting and demonstration, false accusations are levied to discredit her, she has had to defend herself legally against charges that she was a German spy.³⁸ With murders of fellow environmentalists, she worries “we are really in danger.”³⁹

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

17. States and international organizations, as a priority, must assure women’s effective participation in climate change-related decision making, and climate change mitigation and adaption at all levels (including disaster risk reduction), starting by fully integrating SDG 5.⁴⁰ States must consult with and include women and those organizations serving women victims of violence in the development and execution of climate change and environmental disaster policies and responses. It is crucial to ensure women’s full participation in political and public policy decision making processes.

<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/international-womens-day-2022-recognising-the-role-of-women-in-advancing-human-rights-defending-the-planet/>.

³³ Inmaculada Barcia, *Women Human Rights Defenders Confronting Extractive Industries An Overview of Critical Risks and Human Rights Obligations* (The Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC) 2017).

https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/whrds-confronting_extractive_industries_report-eng.pdf.

³⁴ Barcia, *Women Human Rights Defenders Confronting Extractive Industries An Overview of Critical Risks and Human Rights Obligations*; Global Witness, “LAST LINE OF DEFENCE: The industries causing the climate crisis and attacks against land and environmental defenders.”

³⁵ Barcia, *Women Human Rights Defenders Confronting Extractive Industries An Overview of Critical Risks and Human Rights Obligations*.

³⁶ Global Witness, “LAST LINE OF DEFENCE: The industries causing the climate crisis and attacks against land and environmental defenders,” 12.

³⁷ Itzá Castañeda Camey, *Gender-based violence and environment linkages*, 162-76.

³⁸ “The Advocates for Human Rights Interview with Turkish Woman Environmental Human Rights Defender,” *Turkish Environmental Defender* (February 22, 2022).

³⁹ Id.

⁴⁰ Mary Picard, *Empowering Women in Climate, Environment and Disaster Risk Governance: from National Policy to Local Action* vol. EGM/ENV/BP.1, Expert Group Meeting Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes 11-14 October 2021, (UN Women September 2021).

https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/66/EGM/Background%20Papers/Mary%20PICARD_CS66%20Background%20Paper.pdf.

18. *Recommendations to States:*

Consultations and Studies

- In the wake of climate events, carry out participatory consultations with women, girls, and communities to identify emerging risks, changing contexts, and impacts on daily behaviors. Such consultations should also aim toward improving the understanding of how climate events affect gender inequalities and change how women and men use or interact with natural resources.
- In addition to women's involvement and participation in the creation of measures to address violence against women, also promote the engagement of men, children, and vulnerable groups in the planning and development of such measures.
- Undertake studies of VAWG in climate crisis disasters, climate-driven internal and cross-border migration, particularly on specific issues such as trafficking of IDPs, with a view to understanding the unique challenges and risk factors for women and girls, as well as their needs. Such studies should also understand how climate change can aggravate unequal power dynamics between women and men.

Services and Infrastructure

- Build and adapt services for women survivors of violence and trafficking that are accessible and flexible to remain accessible during climate-driven events and migration.
- Ensure that displacement camps and shelters follow best practice standards on women and girls' safety and their specific needs, in each instance through consultation.

Protection of WEHRDs

- Ensure the protection of WEHRDs in legislation and practice, as well as through effective investigation, prosecution, and punishment of violations against them and provision of judicial remedies and reparation.

National Laws and Policies

- Provide resources and enact statutes, rules, and procedures to implement the guiding principles contained in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration.
- Assure integration of VAWG considerations within national environmental mechanisms and processes (e.g., Nationally Determined Contributions, Climate Change Gender Actions Plans, National Strategies and Action Plans) as well as reporting instruments (e.g., national reports to multilateral environmental agreement processes, Universal Periodic Reviews, CEDAW, and other human rights mechanisms)

19. *Recommendations to UN Mechanisms*

- Mainstream and prioritize the discourse on VAWG and climate change in all UN mechanisms.

- Encourage the IPCC to consider the health consequences of climate-driven VAWG in their work;
- Coordinate work of Special Procedures mandate holders, including those for Climate Change, Water and Sanitation, Human Rights Defenders, Indigenous Women, to highlight the specific aspects of climate-driven events and VAWG and WEHRDs and maximize actions to protect the human rights of women and girls and WEHRDs in climate contexts.

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