

Is it time for universal recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment?

INVITATION



6 February 2020, 9:30am to 1pm
Nations Business Center - Rue du Pré-de-la-Bichette 1

Building on earlier work by the Commission on Human Rights, the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms have been actively engaged on the topic of human rights and the environment. They have made enormous progress in clarifying and setting down the human rights normative framework as it relates to the environment and to environmental protection. In particular, they have demonstrated that environmental harm (including that caused by climate change) has enormous negative implications for the enjoyment of human rights, especially for the most vulnerable in society, and that, conversely, human rights obligations and principles can help guide better environmental policymaking at international- and national-level. In parallel, the Council and its mechanisms have also drawn increasing attention to individuals working at the interface of human rights and environmental protection: environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs).

This progress led the first Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, John Knox, to use his last speech to the Council as mandate-holder to urge the international community to consider the next logical step in this process: formal UN recognition of the universal right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. In doing so, the UN would be reflecting the growing practice of States – well over a hundred countries have now recognised the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (in different formulations) in law; as well as the reality in various regional human rights systems (e.g. Africa, Latin America). The current UN Special Rapporteur, David Boyd, has made this drive for recognition of ‘the right to environment’ one of his key priorities.

To kick-start discussions at the UN about the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the Council core group on human rights and the environment (made up of Costa Rica, Maldives, Morocco, Slovenia and Switzerland), with the support of the Universal Rights Group (URG), the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva, the Geneva Academy, UNICEF, UNEP, and OHCHR, will convene an expert seminar to consider the growing recognition of the ‘right to environment’ around the world, to understand the value of this right for individual rights-holders and for the environment, and to answer the question: is it time for universal recognition of this right at UN-level?

Draft agenda

09h30 - Arrival of participants, coffee and croissants

10h00 - Welcome remarks

- Welcome by the H.E. Ms Sabina Stadler Repnik, Chair, Permanent Representative of Slovenia

10h10 - Keynote speeches

- Video message from H.E Ms Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Video message from Ms Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP
- Message from Ms Henriette Ahrens, Deputy Director of Programmes, UNICEF
- Video message from young climate change activist (UNICEF)

10h30 - Panel debate: ‘Is there a universal right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment: where are we today, and does it really matter (for the environment and for human rights)?

Introductory statement:

- Video message from Prof David Boyd, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and environment

Panel:

‘Human rights and environment at the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms’
- *Mr Marc Limon, Universal Rights Group*

‘The right to environment in the European and Inter-American human rights systems’
- *Prof Laurence Boisson de Chazournes, Professor of International Law, University of Geneva*

‘The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment around the world: where are we today and what would be the value-added of universal recognition for people and communities?’
- *Ms Soo-Young Hwang, OHCHR*

‘The normative content of a universal right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment’
- *Prof Daniel Magraw, Professor of International Law, John Hopkins University; Honorary President, Centre of International Environmental Law (CIEL)*

Moderator: Mr Felix Kirchmeier, Geneva Academy

11h45 - Strategy brainstorm: ‘Universal recognition of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment: prospects for success and what next?’

‘Does the relationship between human rights and the environment matter at local level: the experience of environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs)’

- *Video message from EHRDs (organised by UNEP)*

‘Fishbowl’ format discussion

The aim of this session will be to brainstorm around next steps, strategy, key messages, and desired outcomes: where should we be by the end of 2020, and how do we get there?

Introduction: Prof John Knox, Professor of International Law, Wake Forest, and former UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and environment (video message)

Discussants:

- Dr Vasilka Sancin, Member of the UN Human Rights Committee
- H.E. Mr Harald Aspelund, Permanent Representative of Iceland
- Mr Benjamin Schachter, OHCHR
- Mr Sebastien Duyk, CIEL
- Ms Lucy McKernan, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Moderator: Mr Marc Limon, URG

12h50 - Concluding remarks

- H.E. Ms Hala Hameed, Permanent Representative of Maldives
- Mr Marc Limon, Executive Director, Universal Rights Group



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