



## THE ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE

Advancing the relationship between human rights and the environment

UN Environment has been undertaking work on human rights and the environment for almost two decades. In a series of resolutions, the former UN Commission on Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Council have drawn attention to the relationship between a safe and healthy environment and the enjoyment of human rights, and invited UN Environment and other agencies and organizations, to coordinate activities relating to human rights and the environment.<sup>1</sup>

UN Environment's work on environmental rights includes the following:

### **Providing Policy and Legal Advice to Implement and Strengthen Environmental Rights**

UN Environment's cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment and the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to enhance the capacity of states and citizens to understand and operationalise the linkages between human rights and the environment.

- **For example:** Since 2012, UN Environment has supported the Special Rapporteur's consultations and expert seminars on human rights and the environment. This work has included the identification of good practices on human rights and the environment; clarification of the linkages between human rights and climate change, biodiversity and the rights of the child; and producing best practices on human rights and the environment.
- **For example:** Since 2016, UN Environment has led a joint global effort with the Special Rapporteur and other partners to sensitize the judiciary on constitutional environmental rights and to evaluate the impact of these rights on environmental protection. Three colloquia have been convened thus far in South Africa (Africa, April 2016), Brazil (Latin America and Caribbean, May 2017), and Pakistan (Asia Pacific, Feb 2018).
- **For example:** UN Environment supported regional negotiations on a Latin American and Caribbean Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental matters instrument until its adopted in San Jose, Costa Rica on 4 March 2018.
- **For example:** In 2015, UN Environment held the first Africa Colloquium on Environmental Rule of Law bringing together judges, prosecutors, auditors, government representatives and other related authorities of the environmental, legal and enforcement community and others to help develop and implement environmental rule of law and to define a new future for environmental justice, governance and law in the African Region and beyond.

### **Promoting Inter-agency Cooperation on Environmental Rights**

---

<sup>1</sup> UN HRC Resolution 2005/60, Paragraph 8

- **For example:** In 2016, UN Environment convened a system-wide Frontier Dialogue on Human Rights and the Environment: the dialogue was jointly organized with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights as part of the UN Development Group's Human Rights Working Group series of dialogues.
- **For example:** In 2017, UN Environment and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights jointly organised a webinar on Environmental Human Rights Defenders, and a side event on Human Rights and Pollution during the third session of the UN Environment Assembly.

### **Building the Knowledge-base on Environmental Rights**

- UN Environment has partnered to produce publications, e-courses, and other informational material with findings and recommendations for state and non-state actors on, among others,
  - Legal instruments and judicial decisions related to human rights and the environment,
  - A report on climate change and human rights for UNFCCC COP21,
  - A compendium of good practices on human rights and the environment,
  - Support to an online resource portal for environmental human rights defenders – a project led by the Special Rapporteur and
  - A book and judicial companion on constitutional environmental rights around the world.

### **Looking Ahead:**

#### **THE ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE**

**Objective:** To bring environmental protection nearer to the people

The Environmental Rights Initiative represents the next phase of UN Environment's work on human rights and the environment. It will build on the outcomes of its past projects and as well as key UN Environment Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions.

#### **The Initiative will:**

- Strengthen awareness of environmental rights and access to information to people at the frontline of environmental protection, and develop resources that they and others can use;
- Promote the realization of rights and the fulfillment of obligations relating to the environment, including through broader complementary partnerships; and,
- Enable UN Environment to make tangible contributions to the three interlinked and mutually reinforcing pillars of the UN system, while creating stronger partnerships.

#### **More specifically:**

- UN Environment will enhance its legal support to all actors to understand implementing environmental rights obligations by producing legal and policy guidance on environmental rights.
- UN Environment will produce needed informational, and training materials and opportunities at the global, regional, and sub-regional levels to contribute to increased awareness of all actors on emerging issues related to environmental rights.
- UN Environment will create and coordinate a broad coalition of partners<sup>2</sup> to share information, pool resources and knowledge, and collaborate to advance environmental rights;

<sup>2</sup> Partnership of states, other UN bodies, relevant Secretariats of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, inter-governmental organisations, civil society, judiciaries, environmental activists, national human rights institutions, media, academia, and the private sector.

- UN Environment will house and manage the collation of online resources on environmental rights . The resource portal will include an environmental rights database, information distribution including on where and how to access legal support (including pro bono legal services), and training to collate and make available environmental legal information and tools, particularly on environmental rights.

**The Environmental Rights Initiative will:**

- **Engage** governments to strengthen institutional capacities to develop and implement policy and legal frameworks that protect environmental rights effectively and inclusively;
- **Work** with businesses to respect environmental rights: UN Environment will assist businesses to better understand what their environmental rights obligations are and provide guidance on how to move from a compliance culture to championing environmental rights;
- **Work** with media to promote environmental rights: UN Environment is developing an environmental rights media training course to be implemented with partners at local and national levels.
- **Support** the dissemination of information on environmental rights to the public and particularly to vulnerable populations and peoples; and
- **Support** the establishment of networks through which environmental defenders will connect, share experiences and information, develop and implement even better strategies to promote environmental protection.

The following resources have been developed to promote this work:

- Environmental Rights Initiative video
- Environmental Rights Video for the third session of the UN Environment Assembly
- Mini-Course on Environmental Defenders (<https://e-learning.informea.org/course/view.php?id=44>)
- UN Environment’s Policy on Environmental Defenders (link not available yet) available in all six languages of the United Nations

**PROMOTE, SECURE THE FULFILMENT OF, RESPECT AND PROTECT ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS**

**Contact**

Ms. Angela Kariuki [angela.kariuki@un.org](mailto:angela.kariuki@un.org) for rights initiative queries

Ms. Niamh Brannigan: [niamh.brannigan@un.org](mailto:niamh.brannigan@un.org) for media and communications queries