

Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders





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Abbreviations

KMGBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
ILO	International Labour Organization
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNGP	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
UNDHRD	United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas

Table of Contents

- Acknowledgements ii
- Abbreviations..... iii
- Foreword v
- 1. Introduction 1
- 2. Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders..... 4
- 3. Stakeholder Insights..... 7
- 4. Supporters of the principles 28

Foreword



The international community is grappling with an unprecedented loss of biological diversity—a crisis that directly impacts both biodiversity and human rights. The degradation of biodiversity significantly impairs the ability of all people, particularly Indigenous Peoples and communities dependent on natural ecosystems, to enjoy their human rights.

States are the primary duty-bearers under international human rights law; however, private conservation organizations and funders are crucial in driving conservation efforts and promoting a human rights-based approach. Despite their significance, a common understanding of their human rights responsibilities has been largely lacking.

To bridge this gap, UNEP is introducing the ten Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders. These principles guide private actors toward a human rights-based approach to conservation, fostering more inclusive and equitable practices that protect and promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples and others in conservation.

The Principles also provide general guidance for all stakeholders on how to center human rights in conservation efforts and contribute to achieving the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) through a rights-based approach.

These Principles emerged from extensive consultations with a broad range of stakeholders. The development process included multi-stakeholder workshops, consultations, and calls for contributions, bringing together Indigenous communities, rights-based organizations, conservation organizations, experts, and funders. Their invaluable contributions have ensured that the Principles are firmly rooted in international law, norms and standards and grounded in reality for application.

We deeply appreciate the many individuals, organizations, and supporters who contributed to the development of these Principles. We extend special thanks to Professor John H. Knox, whose collaboration with UNEP has been instrumental in shaping them.

The Principles remind us that our efforts to protect the natural world must go hand in hand with our responsibility to uphold the rights and dignity of all people, especially those who have been stewards of the Earth for generations.

These Principles mark the beginning of a continuing journey.

As we advance toward making human rights central to all conservation efforts, the Principles will guide us through the complex and often challenging terrain ahead.

UNEP looks forward to partnering with all stakeholders on this path, with these Principles lighting the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "PKameri".

Patricia Kameri-Mbote
Director, Law Division
UNEP

01 Introduction

The international community is facing a global loss of biological diversity on a scale unprecedented in human history. The biodiversity crisis is also a crisis of human rights. The loss of biodiversity undermines the ability of everyone, everywhere, to enjoy their human rights, but it is especially disastrous for the Indigenous Peoples and others who depend most directly on natural ecosystems for their material, cultural, and spiritual well-being.



Amazon forest area in Pará State. Pará, Brazil. Photo credit: UN Photo/George Love.

To be successful, efforts to conserve nature must recognize the rights and contributions of those whose ways of life contribute to its protection. In particular, the rights and methods of managing and conserving nature of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant and other tribal communities, and peasants should be prioritized.

The international community has strongly emphasized the importance of respecting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples, in conservation efforts. Most recently, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF),¹ adopted by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity² in 2022, commits to a human rights-based approach in achieving its goals and targets, including the target to conserve at least 30 percent of the planet by 2030.³

Nevertheless, similar commitments in the past have not prevented continuing human rights violations and abuses caused by or linked with the creation and administration of protected areas and other conservation initiatives. Populations and communities in situations of vulnerability and marginalization, including Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant and other tribal communities, peasants, women, girls, persons with disabilities, children and youth have been particularly affected, as these human rights violations and abuses intersect with historical patterns of exclusion and discrimination.

One critical aspect of this crisis is the lack of a clear understanding of how relevant human rights norms and standards apply to private conservation organizations and

1. Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (19 December 2022). Decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity 15/4. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

2. United Nations (5 June 1992). Convention on Biological Diversity, 1760 U.N.T.S. 79.

3. The KMGBF affirms that its targets must be “understood, acted upon, implemented, reported, and evaluated” with acknowledgement of “the important roles and contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as custodians of biodiversity and as partners in its conservation, restoration and sustainable use.” See Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Supra note 1.

funders. Other factors that have contributed to the current crisis include insufficient implementation of internationally recognized human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant and other tribal communities, and peasants; a lack of political will on the part of some states and private conservation organizations and funders; and the inadequate allocation of resources for integrating human rights into conservation efforts.

There is a pressing need for enhanced capacity among various state actors and private conservation organizations and funders to fully comprehend their obligations and responsibilities in this regard and to effectively implement the relevant human rights norms and standards.

“Rather than creating new rights or duties, or superseding existing norms and standards, the Principles reflect and clarify the existing human rights norms and standards applicable to conservation.”

Human rights norms and standards that apply to private conservation organizations and funders include those found in the International Bill of Rights,⁴ the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,⁵ the International Labor Organization Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169),⁶ the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,⁷ the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,⁸ and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.⁹

States are the primary duty-bearers under international human rights law, but private conservation organizations and funders also have the responsibility to respect human rights. From 2022 to 2024, the United Nations Environment Programme oversaw a multi-stakeholder process to clarify how existing human rights norms and standards apply to private conservation organizations and funders. The process resulted in these Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders. The principles were the subject of extensive consultations with rights-holders, including Indigenous Peoples, rights-based organizations, experts, private conservation organizations, and funders.

Rather than creating new rights or duties, or superseding existing norms and standards, the principles reflect and clarify the existing human rights norms and standards applicable to conservation. In addition to the human rights instruments referred to above, the principles also take into account other relevant international instruments, including the Durban Action Plan adopted by the World Parks Congress,¹⁰ decisions by the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity,¹¹ and grassroots-led efforts, such as the Land Rights Standard.¹²

While primarily addressed to private conservation organizations and funders, these principles also offer guidance for other actors to enhance their respect for human rights and adherence to international human rights norms and standards in conservation endeavors. Overall, adherence to these principles fosters a more responsible, rights-based and gender-inclusive approach to conservation, which ultimately benefits all of us who share this beautiful planet.

4. Consisting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

5. United Nations General Assembly (2 October 2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), A/RES/61/295.

6. International Labour Organization Convention (1989). Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, No. 169 (ILO 169), art. 1(2).

7. United Nations, Human Rights Council, (6 July 2011). Resolution 17/4, Human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, A/HRC/RES/17/4, endorsing United Nations (16 June 2011). Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP), HR/PUB/11/4. The UNGPs are the global standard for preventing and addressing adverse impacts on human rights from business activity.

8. United Nations (8 March 1999). General Assembly, Resolution 53/144, Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (UNDHRD), A/RES/53/144.

9. United Nations General Assembly (17 December 2018). Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDRIP), A/RES/73/165.

10. World Parks Congress (17-25 September 2003). Durban Action Plan, adopted by the IUCN World Parks Congress.

11. Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (19 December 2022). Decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity 15/4. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

12. Rights and Resources Institute, Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) and the Indigenous Peoples Major Group for Sustainable Development (2024). The Land Rights Standard. Retrieved from: <https://rightsandresources.org/land-rights-standard/>



CULTURE CRITICAL CONSENT YOUTH WATER PEACE HEALTH CRISIS
 INSEPARABLE INDIGENOUS INCLUSIVITY BIODIVERSITY TOGETHER INTEGRAL GUARDIANS
 SHARED GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVE REMEDY IMPLEMENTATION GENDER JUSTICE
 HELP PRESERVE NATURE
 HUMANITY TOWARDS NATURE RESILIENCY LIVELIHOOD NATURE
 TENURE SECURITY LIFE - LIVE WELL INDIGENOUS LAND
 ENHANCE THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE RESOURCES EQUITY PEOPLE
 ACCOUNTABILITY RESPONSIBILITY ESSENTIAL FOOD
 FREE, PRIOR, AND INFORMED CONSENT TERRITORIES OF LIFE
 RIGHT TO CLEAN AIR DEPENDS ON THE PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT
JUSTICE - FAIRNESS
 COMMITMENT
 WELL-BEING
 CONSULTATION PARTICIPATION
RESPECT
 SELF-DETERMINATION SUSTAINABILITY
 INSPIRATION RECONCILIATION COMMUNITIES COLLABORATION
DIGNITY CONSERVATION OF HUMANITY INDIGENOUS~PEOPLES
 TRANSPARENCY WONDERS OF NATURE LOCAL COMMUNITIES
 OBLIGATIONS PASTORALIST PERMANENCE PROTECTION EFFECTIVENESS OWNERSHIP
 EQUALITY SURVIVAL COMMONS DIVERSITY EFFICIENCY EVERYONE FUTURE

This word cloud represents key terms submitted by supporters of the Principles in response to the question: "Please share three words that come to mind when you think of human rights and conservation."

Rhacophorus lateralis is an endangered and endemic tree frog of the Western Ghats. Western Ghats, India.
 Photo credit: Flickr /Siddarth Machado.

02 Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders

Every private organization and funder that engages directly in conservation activities or that provides financial or other support for such activities has a responsibility to respect internationally recognized human rights, including those in the International Bill of Rights;¹³ the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;¹⁴ the International Labor Organization Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169);¹⁵ the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;¹⁶ the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;¹⁷ the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas,¹⁸ and other relevant human rights instruments. To comply with its responsibility to respect human rights, every private conservation organization and funder should, at a minimum, comply with the ten following principles.

1 Principle One: Respect Human Rights

Every conservation organization and funder should adopt a high-level policy commitment to meet its responsibility to respect human rights. It should embed that commitment in its operational activities and take effective measures to implement it in accordance with the following principles.

Principle Two: Respect the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

2

Every conservation organization and funder should ensure that it respects the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including their right to self-determination, their right to the lands, territories, and resources that they have traditionally owned, occupied, or otherwise used or acquired, and their right to their Indigenous knowledge, in accordance with international human rights norms and standards, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Conservation organizations and funders should never undertake or support actions that adversely affect the rights of Indigenous Peoples without first consulting and cooperating with them in good faith, obtaining and maintaining their free, prior, and informed consent, and ensuring that they fairly and equitably share in the benefits from activities relating to their lands, territories, or resources. Conservation organizations and funders should accept the outcomes of free, prior, and informed consent processes. Conservation organizations and funders should support Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous women, girls, children, and youth, in exercising their rights and advancing the realization of their rights, including where possible by providing direct funding to better support Indigenous Peoples' own initiatives for conservation.

13. Consisting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

14. United Nations General Assembly (2 October 2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), A/RES/61/295.

15. International Labour Organization (1989). Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, No. 169 (ILO 169).

16. United Nations Human Rights Council (6 July 2011). Resolution 17/4, Human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, A/HRC/RES/17/4, endorsing United Nations (16 June 2011). Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP), HR/PUB/11/4.

17. United Nations General Assembly (8 March 1999). Resolution 53/144, Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (UNDHRD), A/RES/53/144.

18. United Nations General Assembly (17 December 2018). Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), A/RES/73/165.



Restoring traditional taro beds and original water systems in Pu'uhonua Village, Oahu, Hawaii, United States. Photo credit: International Indian Treaty Council (IITC)/ Sovereign Indigenous Nation of Hawaii.

3 Principle Three: Respect the Rights of All Communities, Groups, and Individuals

Every conservation organization and funder should ensure that it respects the rights of all communities, groups, and individuals, in particular those who may be at heightened risk of vulnerability or marginalization, including human rights defenders, Afro-descendant and other tribal communities, peasants, women, girls, children, youth, older persons, and persons with disabilities, taking into account their needs, risks, and capacities, in accordance with international human rights norms and standards. Where possible, conservation organizations and funders should directly support them in exercising their rights and advancing the realization of their rights.

Principle Four: Undertake Human Rights Due Diligence

Every conservation organization and funder should establish and implement a human rights due diligence process that identifies, assesses, monitors, and addresses any potential or actual adverse human rights impacts of its activities and relationships, so that it may prevent, mitigate, and remedy the impacts. When the conservation organization or funder provides financial or other support for conservation activities, it should employ the human rights due diligence process to ensure that it provides such support only to recipients that have the capacity to meet their own responsibility to respect human rights and are effectively taking steps to fulfil that responsibility.

4

5 Principle Five: Engage in Good Faith Consultation

As part of its due diligence process, every conservation organization and funder should engage in meaningful and inclusive consultation with those who may be adversely affected by its activities or relationships from the earliest stages.

6

Principle Six: Prevent Human Rights Abuses

Every conservation organization and funder should prevent potential adverse human rights impacts that it may cause or to which it may contribute and immediately cease any actual adverse impacts that it causes or to which it contributes.

Principle Seven: Provide for Effective Remedies

Every conservation organization and funder should provide for the effective remediation of adverse human rights impacts that it causes or to which it contributes. To this end, every conservation organization and funder should establish, participate in, or facilitate access to an effective and independent grievance mechanism that can receive complaints and concerns from communities, groups, and individuals that may be affected by the human rights impacts that it causes or to which it contributes, in order to ensure justice and accountability.

7

8

Principle Eight: Protect Against Human Rights Violations and Abuses in Its Relationships

Every conservation organization and funder should protect against the adverse human rights impacts that result from or are directly linked to its relationships with governments, business enterprises, intermediaries and other entities. It should exercise any leverage it has to prevent and mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to its operations, services, or products by its relationships, even if it has not contributed to those impacts. It should use its best efforts to ensure that recipients of its financial or other support respect human rights and that they effectively prevent and remediate any human rights violations or abuses that they cause or to which they contribute. If a recipient of its support fails to effectively address such violations or abuses, the conservation organization or funder should restrict or terminate its support.

Principle Nine: Protect Against Human Rights Violations in Law Enforcement

Every conservation organization and funder should condition its support for anti-poaching and other law enforcement activities—including those conducted by law enforcement agencies, rangers, eco-guards, private and public militias, armed forces, and non-state actors—on compliance by those activities with international human rights norms and standards. If the activities fail to comply with such human rights norms and standards, the conservation organization or funder should restrict or terminate the support.

9

10

Principle Ten: Report Regularly on Human Rights

Every conservation organization and funder should report regularly and publicly on how it identifies, assesses, monitors, and addresses its potential and actual human rights impacts, including on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

03 Stakeholder Insights

This section presents insights and perspectives on human rights and conservation from a diverse group of stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples, rights organizations, experts, private funders, and conservation organizations. It underscores the collaborative and inclusive dialogue that shaped the Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders.¹⁹



Astrid Puentes Riaño

UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment

Principles for Private Conservation, a useful tool for connecting worlds and advancing the effective protection of the planet and human rights, integrally

The unprecedented planetary crises humanity is facing due to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution has prompted important efforts to solve it. This requires urgent and effective actions, where private actors are becoming increasingly relevant.

Many of these efforts are implemented by private actors, especially from the Global North, who finance and implement environmental conservation projects. Unfortunately, these initiatives have sometimes been carried out without effective participation or respect for the rights of the people who live in, use or protect these areas, including Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent, peasant communities and other rural, forest, fishing and coastal communities. Conservation efforts implemented in this way have caused the violation of the human rights of Peoples, groups and communities in these territories.

These violations include loss of their territories, displacement, inability to use important areas for hunting, fishing or gathering, affecting their collective property, food, and even access to sacred sites. **Women, girls and other marginalized people have suffered differentiated impacts on their rights.** When conflicts have intensified – due to the presence of armed law enforcement actors in conservation tasks to prevent poaching, logging or destruction of areas—there have been violent displacements, and clashes between the inhabitants of these areas and these actors. Some situations have even led to murder, imprisonment and violence, violating human rights.

Stopping these situations is vital, as well as prevent them, identify lessons and apply these in the future, ensuring reparation for human rights violations and guaranteeing these will not be repeated. This is especially crucial given that private funding for conservation could potentially increase, in line with the global target of protecting 30% of the planet by 2030. Clearly, any conservation action must also respect, protect and guarantee human rights.

States' obligations are clearly defined by international human rights law, treaties, jurisprudence and standards. Businesses and private actors also have obligations to respect human rights. Regarding private conservation, it has been argued that ignorance and lack of clarity about the applicable human rights standards have impeded compliance.

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"I consider... [the Principles] an important step to address and overcome these situations, reduce power imbalances and knowledge gaps, and bring the planets of conservation and human rights closer together."

¹⁹. The views expressed in this section are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of UNEP.

Continued from the previous page

Therefore, as the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, I consider the “Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders” as an important step to address and overcome these situations, reduce power imbalances and knowledge gaps, and bring the planets of conservation and human rights closer together. In the end, we only inhabit one planet.

It is important to note that the Principles are not intended to replace or displace existing human rights obligations and institutions. Rather, the intention is to provide a channel to improve knowledge and understanding of applicable obligations and standards, to ensure their systematic and comprehensive implementation in all conservation efforts.

On the other hand, these Principles may help to address and reduce systemic inequalities, exclusion, discrimination, and power imbalance that may exist between private conservation actors and Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants, peasant and other rural, forest, fishing, coastal and other communities that inhabit the areas to be conserved. Key human rights tools, such as the principles of universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights; the obligation of equality and non-discrimination; guaranteeing access to information, effective participation, and access to justice; and ongoing free, prior and informed consent, will be of great help in improving and increasing the effectiveness of conservation efforts.

While these Principles are an important step for understanding, incorporating and effectively respecting human rights in any conservation effort, they are not the end. Nor do they pretend to solve all outstanding questions and conflicts. Rather, **the Principles can help to inspire improvements and incorporate lessons learned, to resolve outstanding conflicts and problems from and with human rights at the center.** In an ongoing process, the positive effects of the Principles should be reflected in the territories.

I hope that the Principles will contribute to change the relationship with nature and territories, generating a systematic and true incorporation of ancestral knowledge for conservation, which has proven to be effective to protect nature. Furthermore, with an intersectional approach that ensures effective participation and consideration of diverse perspectives, including from Peoples, women, children and youth.

Recognizing that the Principles are perfectible and seeing them as a tool towards improving knowledge, implementation and respect for human rights, **I invite private conservation organizations and foundations to learn about these Principles, subscribe them and implement them effectively, to further contribute to respect, protect and guarantee all human rights, including, of course, the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for everyone, everywhere.**



Opening of the 23rd Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. New York, United States. Photo credit: UN Photo/Manuel Elías.



José Francisco Calí Tzay
Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

As the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, I welcome the adoption of the Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders and thank UNEP for their constructive engagement throughout the process.

These principles are essential to ensuring that conservation efforts do not compromise the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples. They address the well-documented²⁰ human rights violations linked to conservation initiatives, including the establishment of protected areas on Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories.

Private conservation organizations and funders have a responsibility to respect Indigenous Peoples' rights as enshrined in international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169).²¹ **I commend UNEP for emphasizing the necessity of respecting fundamental rights, including self-determination, lands, territories, and resources, as well as the right to consultation, and free, prior, and informed consent.** Only by upholding these standards, we achieve sustainable and equitable conservation outcomes.



“Now, we need to build stronger partnerships between conservation organizations, funders, and Indigenous Peoples, ensuring meaningful participation, respect for Indigenous institutions, and a firm commitment to securing their collective land rights and self-determination over their territories.”

Now, we need to build stronger partnerships between conservation organizations, funders, and Indigenous Peoples, ensuring meaningful participation, respect for Indigenous institutions, and a firm commitment to securing their collective land rights and self-determination over their territories. These are instrumental for the conservation of biodiversity and climate change adaptation. Direct financial support for Indigenous Peoples-led conservation initiatives is also crucial, given their key role in preserving biodiversity.

Particular attention must be paid to Indigenous women, who are vital transmitters of Indigenous knowledge. Supporting their leadership in conservation initiatives is essential for both their communities and global environmental efforts.

By embedding these principles into practice, we can begin to correct historical injustices and foster more just and sustainable conservation.

20. See, for example, A/71/229; A/77/238; A/HRC/54/31; A/78/162

21. It is my firm belief that following ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) and regional jurisprudence, tribal peoples enjoy the same set of rights as Indigenous Peoples and must also be protected under Principle Two.



Alfred Lahai Gbabai Brownell Sr.
Founding President, Global Climate Legal Defense Network (CLiDeF)
Lead Campaigner, Green Advocates International
2019 Goldman Prize Winner for Africa

In 2014, I narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by private militias and employees of an oil palm company due to my unwavering support for Indigenous communities in protecting their Customary Forest lands from encroachment by the company. The increasing threats forced my family and me into exile in 2016. I firmly believe that if private conservation organizations and funders had adhered to ten core principles, the severity of these threats could have been reduced. Several conservation organizations in Liberia partner with agricultural, logging, and mining companies to conduct environmental and social impact assessments. Integrating these principles into their assessments could have made a significant difference.

I wholeheartedly endorse the ten core principles for private conservation funders, as they emphasize the importance of understanding and implementing human rights norms and standards, particularly those of Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable communities. This includes establishing a human rights due diligence process, consulting with affected communities, preventing human rights abuses, providing effective remedies and redress mechanisms, and safeguarding against human rights violations in relationships and law enforcement activities.

For instance, the current approach to establishing Protected Areas (PAs) in most African countries lacks a human rights-based framework, leading to a disregard for the valuable input of local communities directly affected. The traditional knowledge of Indigenous forest dwellers has often been overlooked, despite its potential to contribute significantly to effective forest management and conservation.

In response to these challenges, I have spent the last twenty years engaging Indigenous communities in a participatory process across Africa, exploring the concept of Community-Driven Protected Areas. This approach emerged from concerns that governments have been hastily establishing Protected Areas without adhering to legal requirements and safeguards outlined in their environmental and natural resources laws and various international human rights and environmental agreements.

Conservation organizations play a critical role in protecting the environment and wildlife. However, it is equally essential for them to uphold human rights in their work. The ten core principles for private conservation provide a framework for organizations to protect, respect, and fulfill the rights of Indigenous peoples, communities, and individuals.

In conclusion, **I believe that these ten core principles could serve as vital guidelines to strengthen the design and implementation of the community-driven Protected Area model that I have been co-creating and co-designing with Indigenous communities in Africa.** This model aims to empower Indigenous Peoples and local communities to own, lead, and manage Protected Areas based on a process of community self-identification, as mandated by various norms, standards, and legislation, such as the Liberia Land Rights Act.

This initiative seeks to secure tenure, entrepreneurial, and conservation outcomes by addressing existing implementation barriers, challenges, constraints, and opportunities while integrating Indigenous ecological knowledge into the community-driven Protected Areas conceptual framework. By upholding human rights and ensuring that conservation funders adhere to strict Free, Prior, and Informed Consent from local communities and Indigenous Peoples in the establishment and gazettement of Protected Areas (PAs), **this approach can serve as a conflict prevention measure and provide a potential solution to the ongoing conflicts associated with existing conservation policies and programs.**

“The ten core principles for private conservation provide a framework for organizations to protect, respect, and fulfill the rights of Indigenous peoples, communities, and individuals”



David R. Boyd

Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment (2018 - 2024)

*"Let's be clear. These principles aren't optional. They have deep roots in international human rights law and apply to States, conservation funders, businesses and conservation organizations. Although the nightmarish era of fortress conservation has ended in some parts of the world, it continues to perpetuate egregious and utterly unacceptable human rights violations in some States. **A human rights-based approach to conserving, protecting and restoring the extraordinary diversity of life on Earth is the only ethical, equitable and effective way forward**, as confirmed by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework."*

Conservation Initiative on Human Rights (CIHR)

This statement is from a subset of CIHR members: BirdLife International, Conservation International (CI), Fauna & Flora, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), World Wide Fund for Nature International (WWF International)

Established in 2009, the Conservation Initiative on Human Rights (CIHR) is a consortium of international conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that seek to improve conservation worldwide by promoting the integration of human rights in conservation policy and practice. Our shared conviction is that, in doing so we can achieve positive, lasting outcomes for people and for the nature that sustains us all.

Towards that end, we have all made advancements and commitments as institutions to not only respect human rights, but to support and promote human rights in our conservation policies, programs and practices. Each organization has built its knowledge, systems, and processes to realize those commitments. At the same time, we recognize that we must continuously learn, adapt, and improve how we work. We are therefore committed to ongoing dialogue and learning.

The Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders (the Principles) are a welcome development to be read in conjunction with legal requirements and our respective institutional policies on human rights and safeguards. These voluntary principles can also play a complementary role to existing international standards for governments to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights obligations in conservation.

Equally important to the Principles is the dialogue and consultation process that they are built upon. An ongoing dialogue that contributes to, and learns from, conservation practice remains essential. We will continue to engage in these discussions to foster relationships that will strengthen conservation and human rights collectively.



Lemur, a small primate endemic to the island of Madagascar. Antananarivo, Madagascar. Photo credit: UN Photo/Mark Garten.

Forest Peoples Programme (FPP)

FPP welcomes the adoption of the new “Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders.” The launch of the “Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders” comes as a timely and welcome reminder to private conservation actors of their responsibilities to respect human rights. In 2022, States Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity renewed and expanded their commitment to follow a human rights-based approach to conservation.²²

It is well-evidenced²³ that conservation action is most effective when it respects human rights. Achieving rights-based conservation, however, will require all actors in the space – both state and non-state – to fundamentally reimagine their approach to conservation.

These Principles do not define new rights or duties; they are an important elaboration and clarification of some of the key existing human rights norms and standards applicable to conservation. One important element of the Principles is that conservation actors must respect international human rights norms and standards, which may set a higher bar than national laws; this is particularly relevant in the context of conservation-related law enforcement activities, which have too often been associated with serious human rights abuses. Another crucial clarification in these Principles is that the responsibility to respect human rights goes beyond a safeguarding, or “do no harm”, approach. The Principles note, for example, that private conservation actors should “support Indigenous Peoples ... in exercising their rights and advancing the realization of their rights...”. This proactive support for the exercise of rights within conservation action is a critical component of a human rights-based approach.

Private conservation organizations and funders must urgently internalize and effectively implement these Principles to transform their approach towards conservation. A recently-launched guide, *Conservation and Human Rights: An Introduction*,²⁴ developed by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Conservation Science (ICCS) at the University of Oxford and the Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), can support these conservation actors with tools to guide them in their implementation of these Principles. The guide provides an overview of human rights and human rights-based approaches, as well as of international human rights norms and standards, particularly those relevant to conservation. It then offers practical tools for conservation actors to use to implement social safeguard and human rights due diligence procedures; human rights impact assessments; free, prior, and informed consent processes; grievance mechanisms; and remedy and restitution. It also includes tools for supporting rights-holders to exercise and realize their rights, in particular their rights to their lands, territories, and resources.

These newly-launched Core Principles, together with practical tools such as the ICCS and FPP Conservation and Human Rights guide, can help private conservation actors to achieve rights-based conservation. Dismantling decades of deeply ingrained exclusionary structures and practices within conservation will not be easy, but **the widespread support for these Core Principles offers hope that conservation actors will put in the work to create new models of conservation that are more effective, more inclusive, and more equitable.**

22. See, Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (19 December 2022). Decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity 15/4. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, introductory sections. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbd.int/gbf/introduction>

23. Dawson, N. M., Coolsaet, B., Bhardwaj, A., Booker, F., Brown, D., Lliso, B., Loos, J., Martin, A., Oliva, M., Pascual, U., Sherpa, P., & Worsdell, T. (21 June 2024). Is it just conservation? A typology of Indigenous peoples' and local communities' roles in conserving biodiversity. *One Earth*, 7(6), 1007-1021. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2024.05.001>

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Palm leaves in the Primeval Palm Forest, Praslin Island, Seychelles. Photo credit: UN Photo/Mark Garten.

International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP)

IFIP centers its work on shifting power, mobilizing resources, and building partnerships to amplify Indigenous leadership and to support the self-determination and rights of Indigenous Peoples, their communities, lands, and territories worldwide. IFIP is dedicated to building an equitable and inclusive philanthropic ecosystem and advocating for the 5 Rs of Indigenous Philanthropy: Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Redistribution.

Indigenous Peoples possess a deep understanding of and have an intrinsic relationship and connection to their land, territories, and seascapes, which they have managed sustainably for generations. Particularly, Indigenous women play a crucial role in preserving ecosystems and managing natural resources, which contributes to combating climate change and sustaining biodiversity. Despite the critical role Indigenous Peoples play in conservation, Indigenous communities have continuously faced numerous human rights violations in the name of conservation. Therefore, it is imperative that a rights-based approach is adopted by conservation actors and the funding community. **Philanthropy has a deep responsibility to uphold human rights and the UN instruments that protect Indigenous Peoples' rights.**

IFIP supports the Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders and encourages its members to practice the Core Human Rights Principles as a key tool to inform and guide their giving. The Core Human Rights Principles bind together Declarations and Instruments which recognize Indigenous Peoples' Rights, including the ILO 169 and UNDRIP, in one document. The Core Human Rights Principles offer guidance for other actors to enhance their respect for human rights and adherence to international human rights norms and standards in conservation endeavors. It also calls for broader collaboration, accountability, and the establishment of grievance mechanisms. IFIP calls on philanthropy to support the effective implementation of these principles, focusing on actionable steps towards the self-determination and respect of the rights of Indigenous Peoples, their communities, lands, and territories worldwide.

International Indian Treaty Council (IITC)



“Demonstrating the great necessity for these Principles and their effective implementation, 76% of the respondents were not informed or did not know if they had been informed about the sources of funding for the conservation projects impacting their lands, territories, and ways of life.”

The IITC thanks UNEP for reaching out to our organization, which represents Indigenous Peoples in five regions, and for incorporating our inputs in the development of the “Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders”. IITC’s participation included coordinating the inputs of a drafting team representing impacted Indigenous Peoples from the Americas, Asia, and Africa. In addition to our IITC Office in Guatemala, IITC would like to recognize the active participation of our partners from Center for Indigenous Peoples’ Research and Development (CIPRED) (Nepal), and Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA) and Jamii Asilia Centre (Kenya).

Additionally, despite the short turnaround time provided for our input, IITC wanted to include direct and broad participation by other Indigenous Peoples impacted by “Conservation Projects” around the world. Towards this end, in July 2024, IITC disseminated a questionnaire in 5 languages to Indigenous Peoples from all 7 socio-cultural regions requesting information about their experiences with “Conservation Funding” and resulting projects in their territories, as well as their recommendations for ethical rights-based engagement with Indigenous Peoples.

IITC received 73 responses to the questionnaire from Indigenous Peoples, leaders, and organizations from all 7 regions, **representing a reported 722 distinct Indigenous Peoples and 8.3 million Indigenous individuals**. Demonstrating the great necessity for these Principles and their effective implementation, 76% of the respondents reported that they were either definitely not informed or did not know if they had been informed about the sources of funding for the conservation projects impacting their lands, territories, and ways of life. The majority (60%) also reported experiencing negative impacts resulting from these projects. **IITC greatly appreciates that our key recommendations, based on these responses, were incorporated into the final version and are pleased to express our support.**

We look forward to working with UNEP, funders and organizations involved in conservation to ensure that the internationally recognized rights of Indigenous Peoples are fully upheld and implemented as we work together to protect biodiversity, avert climate change, and fulfill our responsibilities to the Natural world and future generations.



IITC Executive Director, Andrea Carmen. Photo credit: R. Borrero.

Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI)

Adhering to human rights principles is essential for private conservation organizations and funders, particularly regarding Indigenous Peoples, who are vital stewards of Earth's biodiversity.

The Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders emphasize that conservation must respect and uphold Indigenous Peoples' rights, acknowledging their deep connection to ancestral lands, territories, and resources. Operationalizing these principles is imperative for achieving a genuine human rights-based approach and moving away from fortress conservation practices that violate rights.

Colonial conservation models, which separate humans from nature, often lead to severe human rights abuses, including forced evictions, criminalization of traditional livelihoods, and violence against Indigenous women and girls. The Core Principles stress the importance of obtaining Indigenous Peoples' free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) as a safeguard for their collective rights. This not only protects their rights but also builds trust and fosters collaborative strategies that span local to global levels, aligning with international standards, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Studies have shown that respecting Indigenous rights and their self-determined management of their territories is highly effective for conservation. The Core Principles' requirements for human rights due diligence and meaningful participation help prevent rights violations and ensure redress mechanisms are in place. Additionally, reporting and accountability measures promote transparency and hold organizations and funders responsible for their impact on Indigenous communities.

By embedding and adhering to the Core Principles, efforts by private conservation organizations and funders become more just and effective, fostering partnerships that respect the rights, knowledge, and contributions of Indigenous Peoples. Ultimately, implementing the Core Principles in good faith offers a pathway to a more just and effective conservation model, protecting both the environment and the people most connected to it.



Joan Carling, Executive Director of Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI) and Indigenous Peoples' Major Group representative, speaking at the Forest Event at UNFCCC COP26, Glasgow, Scotland. Photo credit: United Kingdom Government/ Karwai Tang.



Josefa Cariño Tauli (Sefa Tauli)
Global Youth Biodiversity Network

Children, youth, and future generations are confronted by a social-ecological crisis that is not of their own making, and that poses a direct threat to their well-being.

The inequities they face intersect with other forms of marginalization, with Indigenous children and youth, young people of minority groups, and children and youth with disabilities facing a bigger threat from environmental harm. It becomes a matter of urgency, then, to ensure that the rights of young people and future generations, including their right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, are respected by all actors.

Even as they face precarious futures, **children and youth remain on the frontline of movements for the environment**, demanding transformative action from others and taking transformative action themselves. **They must be unconditionally supported as they stand up for their environmental rights**, fully respected as environmental actors, and listened to in all decisions and actions made about biodiversity.



John H. Knox

First United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Issue of Human Rights Obligations Relating to the Enjoyment of a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment (2012-2018)

It is not a new insight that the pursuit of fortress conservation has not just led to the violent dispossession of millions of people from their ancestral homes; it has also failed to conserve. For at least two decades, States and conservation organizations have affirmed that protecting human rights – especially the rights of Indigenous Peoples – results in better conservation. And yet, human rights abuses in the name of conservation have continued, as have the corresponding failures to reach conservation goals.

There are many reasons for these abuses and failures, but one important factor is a lack of clarity as to the responsibilities of private conservation organizations and funders. These Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders are designed to clarify their responsibility to respect in clear but detailed terms. The Core Principles do not create new human rights norms, but rather reflect existing ones, including not only those recognized in the International Bill of Rights, but also those set out in instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

To be clear, there is no doubt that States continue to have the primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with human rights obligations in all respects, including with respect to conservation. Nothing in these Core Principles should be read as undermining or diverting attention from that responsibility. Nevertheless, they address an area that has been in great need of clarification: the responsibilities of private organizations and funders. They have long played critical roles in the creation and implementation of conservation initiatives all around the world. They fund and even manage many national parks and other protected areas. Many of these organizations and funders have recognized their own responsibility to respect the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and others potentially or actually affected by these initiatives.

However, as important as their efforts in this respect have been, they have often been undertaken individually, rather than collectively, and they have not always reflected the concrete ways that international human rights bodies have already applied human rights norms to Indigenous rights, protected areas, and private multinational organizations. In some cases, they have simply fallen short of what those norms indicate is required.

By setting a common standard of achievement and providing the terms for practical human rights due diligence mechanisms, the Core Principles clarify both what is required and how those requirements should be met. In this respect, it is especially important that the development of the Core Principles resulted from input from a very wide variety of Indigenous and rights-based organizations and experts, as well as from conservation organizations and funders themselves. The Principles provide a solid basis for all of those engaged in conservation to embed human rights in inclusive conservation.

For that to happen, the Core Principles will have to be incorporated in practice. All of those engaged in this process agreed on the need for further education and engagement among all interested parties, to ensure that organizations' and funders' safeguards align with the human rights norms clarified in the Core Principles. In that effort, it would be particularly useful to institutionalize forums on conservation and human rights where these issues can be regularly raised and addressed. Working together, Indigenous peoples, other rights-holders, conservation organizations, conservation funders, States, and international organizations can and will protect human rights and the environment.

"All of those engaged in this process agreed on the need for further education and engagement among all interested parties, to ensure that organizations' and funders' safeguards align with the human rights norms clarified in the Core Principles."



Joshua Castellino

Co-Executive Director of Minority Rights Group and Professor of International & Comparative Law, University of Derby, United Kingdom

Anthropocentric domination, driven by violence, wreaked havoc upon the environment. It subjected the planet to untold harms, subjugated species, and dominated others within the human family, in pursuit of wealth and influence. Indigenous Peoples, nature's most fervent custodians were relegated to the margins, as greed threatened their existence and destroyed traditional lifestyles deeply interwoven into the lands and environs they inhabit. Indigenous peoples have been displaced, their forests logged, seas overfished, rivers dammed, cultural and spiritual sites destroyed, leaving them impoverished with their resilience diminished.

Despite their repeated warnings, planetary destruction remained unacknowledged, first because Indigenous values were dismissed as primitive, then in active climate denial science. When realization finally dawned, western science proposed solutions, with Indigenous traditional knowledge once again relegated to the sidelines. New violations were perpetrated in the name of conservation that treated Indigenous Peoples as collateral to be sacrificed in the name of environmental protection. These measures failed to address the alarming biodiversity loss revealing gross limitations in framing market-based remedies for fixing market-oriented excesses that contributed to planetary exploitation.

Placing climate financing at the behest of cultures that value sustainable environmental stewardship over rapid consumption is likely to improve humanity's pathway in addressing the climate crisis. **The Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders brokered by UNEP and arrived at through dialogue between funders, Indigenous Peoples and other civil society representatives working alongside them, are an attempt to arrive at a new compact between those seeking to mitigate planetary harm and nature's finest custodians.** Built on respect, they seek partnerships to address critical planetary issues. The ten core principles lay out a framework whereby funds required for climate mitigation, adaptation and system change can be devolved in a manner that could place Indigenous knowledge and experience at the heart of the struggle for planetary survival.



Luis Guillermo Izquierdo Mora
President of the ICCA Consortium

The ICCA Consortium is honoured to support the Core Human Rights Principles for Conservation Organizations and Funders. These Principles are crucial in guiding conservation efforts that are grounded in respect for human rights, particularly the rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth who are often the primary stewards of biodiversity-rich territories of life.

The ICCA Consortium strongly believes that conservation must be rights-centered, with a deep commitment to justice, equity, and respect for the rights and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. **These Principles serve as a clear framework to ensure that conservation organizations and funders align their actions with these values, promoting inclusive and equitable practices that acknowledge and honour the traditional custodians of the territories of life.**

Our vision on these Principles is to build momentum for conservation that not only protects biodiversity but also strengthens the rights and voices of the communities that have been safeguarding their ecosystems for generations. By adhering to these Principles, conservation organizations and funders can foster meaningful partnerships that empower local rights holders and respect their autonomy, ultimately contributing to a more just and sustainable world.

Looking forward, we encourage all conservation stakeholders to embrace these Principles. Doing so is essential for a future where conservation efforts are not only ecologically sound but also rooted in human rights and social responsibility. Together, we can champion a conservation paradigm that works for both nature and Indigenous Peoples and local communities, ensuring resilient ecosystems and empowered communities for generations to come.



Mali Ole Kaunga
IMPACT Kenya

IMPACT Kenya has participated in the process of elaborating the human rights principles and norms, which according to our understanding is only a bare minimum for private conservation actors and funders. The conservation and funding agencies still have to adhere to the existing national laws and international laws and procedures of ensuring they respect the relationships, rights, livelihoods, cultural practices and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples and their land and territories. **We do hope that conservation funders and practitioners will integrate these principles in their international operating policies and use the principles to build trust, address already committed violations and relationships with Indigenous Peoples.**



Malidadi Langa

Chairman, Alliance for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities for Conservation in Africa (AICA)

The conservation of biodiversity and natural resources, particularly in designated formal protected and conserved areas (PCAs), has often been associated with human rights abuses and violations Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) living in proximity of such PCAs. Such abuses and violations have included forcible and violent evictions, and dispossession of IPLCs of their ancestral land and territories, criminalization and denial of access to vital life sustaining natural resources, and the resulting militarization of conservation which has climaxed in some of the most egregious human rights violations by overzealous and often unaccountable law enforcement officers.

Law enforcement related human rights violations include, among others, arbitrary arrest and beatings of suspects, collective punishment whole families and communities in lieu of suspects, 'poachers' being shot on sight, unexplained disappearance of people after trespassing into PCAs, sexual harassment and abuse, corruption and extortion by armed guards. The harsh conservation laws and penal codes that mete out disproportionately hefty fines and long jail terms on some of the poorest and defenseless people in the world also border on human rights violations when breadwinners, mostly young men, are jailed leaving behind wives and children. Unfortunately, governments and donors who support and fund such harsh conservation laws and law enforcement often pay a blind eye to such human rights violations. To the extent that most countries, particularly in Africa, have not enacted legislation to provide compensation and cover costs for losses related to human wildlife conflict (HWC). HWC also falls into the realm of human rights violation, and environment justice since it affects some of the poorest people at the risk of exacerbating marginalization, poverty, and inequality.



"It is in this regard that UNEP and all organizations involved in the process must be applauded for developing and publishing the Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders at this opportune time..."

These persistent human rights violations can be explained by adverse policy and legal frameworks that tend to prioritize conservation of natural resources over Indigenous Peoples, the denigration of Indigenous ecological knowledge and governance systems in preference for euro-centric scientific knowledge and exclusionary conservation models, and weak collective agency and capacity by the victims of human rights violations to challenge the perpetrators. **Yet recognition, respect, and protection of human rights is a sacrosanct duty of states which have ratified key international and regional human rights treaties and conventions for which they are legally accountable under international law.** Unfortunately, there are also powerful and well-resourced non-state actors like big private sector companies, international conservation NGOs, and entities holding management concessions for some PCAs, whose conservation work has also been associated with gross human rights violations, yet are not directly accountable for the protection of human rights. Further, the ideologies of fortress conservation are getting reproduced in what is now presented as community-oriented conservation initiatives. It is in this regard that UNEP and all organizations involved in the process must be applauded for developing and publishing the Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders at this opportune time when the

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accelerated momentum and urgency to deliver on the KMGBF Targets, particularly Target 3, and climate goals to reverse global warming might easily further victimize Indigenous Peoples and local communities living in biodiversity rich areas and exacerbate their human rights situation. Since AICA strongly believes in rights based conservation, and that we are nature and nature is us meaning that our lives and livelihoods are embedded in nature and vice versa, and has participated in the global consultation process leading to the finalization and publication of the Core Principles, **AICA therefore fully endorses the Principles and stand ready to participate in planned multi-stakeholder dissemination and implementation processes in Africa through its membership.**

On the community side, implementation of the Core Principles must be accompanied by adequate resources for, and capacity building of legitimate IPLC organizations to garner the much needed collective agency and action needed to better fend off perpetrators of human rights violations and to redress historical and contemporary human rights violations in conservation.

This is important because empowering IPLC organizations to effectively fight for their rights is probably the best strategy and safeguard against perpetrators of human rights in the name of biodiversity conservation. On the side of private conservation actors and funders, some form of human rights compliance mechanism, whether voluntary or state sanctioned, will also be necessary to hold non-state conservation actors and funders accountable for their actions in the human rights sphere. **One hopes too that state actors, as duty bearers, will also be inspired by these Core Principles to better protect human rights in their conservation work.**



A view of Mae Salong, in the northwest of Chiang Rai Province. The forested area around Mae Salong is home to several hill tribes. Chiang Rai, Thailand. Photo credit: UN Photo/Kibae Park



Laura Garcia
*President and CEO
Global Greengrants
Fund*



Nisha Owen
*Executive Director
Global Greengrants
Fund UK*

At Global Greengrants Fund, we advocate for a paradigm shift in conservation that prioritises the leadership and rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities – essential for effective environmental protection. **We cannot deny the colonial legacy that underpins and shapes global conservation efforts resulting in violence, displacement, exclusion and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. However, we can break this cycle and forge a new path.** It requires moving away from top-down approaches and externally generated priorities, towards greater support for those who live in biodiverse, vulnerable places to conserve their own nature.

The repeated failure of conservation interventions over the years demonstrates that they simply cannot succeed in the long-term without embedding justice, equity, and human rights. In contrast, communities with secure land and resource rights are more likely to engage in and support conservation initiatives, underscoring the importance of a rights-based approach to conservation.

For conservation funders and organisations, our goal is to protect our planet, shared with all life on earth, and to steward it for future generations, recognising that Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities have long been the custodians of the world's biodiversity and are the ones risking their lives to defend it.

Embracing a rights-based, inclusive, and equitable approach to conservation is not just morally imperative; it's the only viable path to achieving lasting impact. Our failure to adopt this approach has contributed to the current biodiversity and climate crises. These challenges exacerbate existing inequalities and human rights abuses, further undermining conservation efforts.

By endorsing and genuinely operationalising these principles, we can chart a course for meaningful change. This transformation requires collective action and mutual accountability - only by working together and resisting the false binary of people versus nature, can we address the complex, interconnected crises facing our planet and all its inhabitants.

Congo Basin Rainforest. Congo Basin, Cameroon.
Photo credit: Flickr / Corinne Staley.



Meg Caldwell

*Interim Vice-President for Environment & Science,
The David & Lucile Packard Foundation*

*“The Packard Foundation is committed to upholding our responsibility as a funder by adopting a foundation-wide safeguarding policy. We are especially focused on strengthening field-level capacity to protect and uphold human rights in conservation and climate work. With our funding and implementing partners, we are working to enhance the conservation sector’s capacity to address the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss while protecting human rights. **These Principles provide a vitally important roadmap for our field of work.**”*



Patricia Mupeta-Muyamwa, Ph.D.
*Global Director of Human Rights in Conservation,
The Nature Conservancy (TNC)*

When I was invited to participate in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) process to clarify how existing human rights norms apply to conservation organizations, I immediately understood the value of creating a universal baseline to help bring together conservation organizations around the rights of people to secure their livelihoods, enjoy healthy and productive environments, and live with dignity.

With decades of experience cultivating equitable, rights-based partnerships with traditional and Indigenous communities and a codified Respecting Human Rights Policy passed in 2022 by our Board of Directors, **The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports UNEP’s 10 Core Human Rights Principles for Conservation Organizations and Funders and committing to implementation of these principles** within our organization and partnerships in the following ways:

1. TNC will join the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)’s effort to develop the standards for operationalizing the 10 Principles among the more than 1,400 IUCN member organizations.²⁵
2. TNC will lead an effort to put the IUCN human rights standards and accountability measures into practice across our organization, strengthening the confidence of partners and funders by:
 - a. Developing a human rights due diligence process—an early warning system to identify potential human rights concerns.
 - b. Implementing an Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework²⁶ to identify and then avoid, mitigate and minimize adverse environmental and social impacts of conservation projects.
 - c. Adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples best practices using tools like our Human Rights Guide²⁷ and the Voice, Choice and Action Framework.²⁸
 - d. Creating a grievance mechanism system to help outside entities who feel that TNC may have harmed them report potential or ongoing human rights issues and violations, creating an independent way for impacted communities to raise concerns.

“We will use our voices to support these principles globally among our staff, partners, peer organizations, and multilateral efforts to build momentum for human rights-based conservation worldwide.”

The work to commit to and uphold Human rights at TNC requires more than just one team or one project. It is the beginning of a journey aimed at changing our policies, practices, and culture by implementing human rights-based guidance, training, and standards for TNC programs and partnerships. We will use our voices to support these principles globally among our staff, partners, peer organizations, and multilateral efforts to build momentum for human rights-based conservation worldwide.

25. International Union for Conservation of Nature (n.d.). Members page. International Union for Conservation of Nature. Retrieved from <https://iucn.org/our-union/members>.

26. The Nature Conservancy (March 2023). Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts. The Nature Conservancy’s Integrated Performance Standards Policies and Procedures for Green Climate Fund (GCF) – Funded Projects.

27. The Nature Conservancy (2024). Human Rights Guide for Working with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. Retrieved from: <https://www.tnchumanrightsguide.org/>

28. The Nature Conservancy (2024). The Voice, Choice, and Action (VCA) Framework A Conservation Practitioner’s Guide to Indigenous and Community-Led Conservation. Retrieved from: <https://tncvoicechoiceaction.org/>



Radhika Murti, Ph.D.
*Centre for Societal Transformation/Headquarters,
International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)*

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is proud to support the Core Human Rights Principles for Private Organizations and Funders, having actively contributed to their development as part of our commitment to fostering a just and rights-based approach to conservation.

As the world's largest environmental network, IUCN recognizes that these principles are essential in establishing clear, actionable standards that close the gap between human rights principles and conservation practices.

Our organization has been deeply involved in this process, engaging with partners in workshops and consultations to ensure that the final framework reflects diverse, on-the-ground insights. We believe these principles will not only safeguard the rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other marginalized groups but also improve conservation outcomes by involving these communities as essential partners in ecosystem stewardship. IUCN is committed to integrating human rights at every level of our work and looks forward to supporting the development and implementation of further guidance, frameworks and tools needed to enable action at large.

04 Supporters of the Principles

As of 22 November 2024, the following individuals or organizations expressed support for the Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders and the process leading to their implementation. An updated list of individuals and organizations who support the Core Human Rights Principles for Private Conservation Organizations and Funders can be found at

<https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/core-human-rights-principles-private-conservation-organizations-and-funders>

Organizations

Accountability Accelerator	Exploring Womanhood Foundation, India
Alliance for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities for Conservation in Africa (AICA)	Fanonga Fokonolona, Madagascar
Alianza Team (Colombia)	Fondo Acción Solidario, AC, Mexico
Amazónicos por Amazonía (AMPA)	Forest Peoples Programme (FPP)
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)	Fundación Kara Solar
Asociación Ecológica de San Marcos de Ocotepeque - AESMO (Honduras)	Funder Safeguarding Collaborative, Global
Association for Rural Planning and Action, Indian	Global Greengrants Fund
Association of Indigenous Village Leaders in Suriname (VIDS)	Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN)
Big Life Foundation	HUTAN, Malaysia
Blue Venturess	ICCA Consortium
Campaign for Nature	International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP)
Centro Interdisciplinario de Investigación y Desarrollo Alternativo U Yich Lu'um (Mexico)	IMPACT Kenya
Community Foundation for the Western Region of Zimbabwe	Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program - Initiative on Indigenous Peoples Affected by Protected Areas & Other Conservation Measures, University of Arizona
Community Health and Sustainable Environment (CHASE), Africa	Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI)
Community Leaders Network for Southern Africa	International Indian Treaty Council (IITC)
Dana and Qadisiyah Local Community Cooperative (DQLCC), Jordan	International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
EarthRights International	Kara-Tunga Foundation, Uganda
EDGE Funders Alliance	Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, Myanmar–Thailand
Environmental Defenders Watetezi, Congo Basin	Minority Rights Group International
	Natural Justice
	Nature Kenya
	Observatorio Ciudadano, Chile
	Ontario Land Trust Alliance, Canada
	Overberg Renosterveld Trust, South Africa
	Pastoralists Indigenous Non-Governmental Organizations - PINGO's Forum

Continues next page

Continued from the previous page

Rainforest Foundation UK	Claudia Ituarte Lima, Senior researcher and thematic lead at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute and Director of the Global Network for Human Rights and Environment.
Rainforest Trust	
Réseau des Femmes Africaines pour la gestion Communautaire des Forêts (REFACOF), Africa	David R. Boyd, Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable environment
Rights and Resources Initiative	David Barkin, Distinguished Professor, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Mexico
Rights and Rice Foundation, Liberia	
Rueda de Medicina A.C. , Mexico	Elisa Morgera, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Context of Climate Change
Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU), Liberia	
Survival International	Fernanda Hopenhaym Cabrera, UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights
The Nature Conservancy (TNC)	Francisco José Calí Tzay, Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Tanzania Forest Conservation Group, Tanzania	
Thousand Currents	Jenny Springer, Equator Group
Tikva Grassroots Empowerment Fund	Juan Manuel Crespo, Fundación Kara Solar
Tima: Ethical Connectors	Mary Ann Manja Bayang, Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change expert
Turning Tides	Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention
Uganda Forestry Association, Uganda	
Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism	Milena Murta, EDF Renewables, France
UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)	Poooven Moodley, International Human Rights and Environment Lawyer/ Council Member of ICCA Consortium
Viet Nature Conservation Centre, Viet Nam	Sener Dalyan, Independent Consultant
Winam Grassroots, Kenya	
Women4Biodiversity	
World Land Trust	
Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA)	

Individuals

Alfred Brownell, Goldman Environmental Prize Winner, Founder of Global Climate Legal Defense

Ashish Kothari, Kalpavriksh

Astrid Puentes Riaño, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment

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