



## Mandate of the Independent Expert on human rights and the environment

30 July 2014

Dear friends and colleagues,

This letter is to provide an update on my work as the UN Independent Expert on human rights and the environment since the last newsletter in May.\*

**Best Practices.** A major element of my mandate is to identify, promote and exchange views on best practices relating to the use of human rights obligations to inform, support and strengthen environmental policymaking. In the spring, we sent a questionnaire to governments, international bodies, and civil society asking for views on such practices. Even though the deadline for responses has passed, we are accepting late submissions! If you would like to submit a good practice, please do so as soon as possible. If you need a copy of the questionnaire in English, French or Spanish, request one by replying to this email ([ieenvironment@ohchr.org](mailto:ieenvironment@ohchr.org)).

Another major event in the effort to identify best practices will occur on 5-7 September, at Yale University. UNITAR and Yale are hosting their third Conference on Environmental Governance and Democracy, with a focus on Human Rights, Environmental Sustainability, Post-2015 Development, and the Future Climate Regime. Other partners in the conference include UNDP, UNEP, and the World Resources Institute. The conference will bring together more than 150 scholars and policy experts, and cover more than 100 papers by researchers and practitioners from 40 different countries. For those interested in attending, the deadline for registration is **14 August 2014**. More information is available at <http://www.unitar.org/egp/3rd-unitar-yale-conference-environmental-governance-and-democracy>.

**Environmental Human Rights Defenders.** As I noted in the last newsletter, environmental human rights defenders – people who seek to defend the rights of themselves and others to their land and environment – are at great and growing risk. A recent study by Global Witness concludes that between the beginning of 2002 and the end of 2013, 908 people in 35 countries were killed because of their work defending environmental and land rights, an average of one a week for over a decade.<sup>1</sup> A disturbing increase in alleged murders, attacks on and acts of intimidation against environmental defenders has been reported by both the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders (A/HRC/19/55) and the Working Group on Human Rights

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\* If you know of someone else who would like to be on this email distribution list, please let us know by reply email, and we'll add them. If you do not want to be on this list, let us know the same way, and we'll remove your name.

<sup>1</sup> *Deadly Environment: The Dramatic Rise in Killings of Environmental and Land Defenders*, available at <http://www.globalwitness.org/deadlyenvironment/>.

and Business (A/HRC/26/25, para. 69) in their recent reports to the UN Human Rights Council. Harassment of environmental defenders is truly a global problem: another civil society organization, Article 19, recently published [a report on threats to environmental human rights defenders in Europe](#), and recent articles discussing this issue in the context of specific cases in Latin America and Africa can be found at: <http://ensia.com/features/dying-to-save-the-world/> and <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/the-mother-who-defied-threats-to-take-on-the-factory-spewing-out-toxin-9585416.html>.

In May, I held an expert consultation in Bangkok aimed at helping to identify good practices in the protection of environmental defenders, as part of the larger good practices project. The report of the consultation is now available at my website, <http://ieenvironment.org/>. This website, as well as the UN website on the mandate, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/IEEnvironment/Pages/IEEnvironmentIndex.aspx>, also contains a great deal of other information about the mandate, including my reports to the Human Rights Council.

**Climate Change and Human Rights.** At its June session, the Human Rights Council adopted an important resolution on climate change and human rights, which is attached to this email. Among other things, the resolution emphasized the urgent importance of addressing, as they relate to States' human rights obligations, the adverse consequences of climate change for all, particularly in developing countries and people whose situation is most vulnerable to climate change; called upon all States to continue to enhance international dialogue and cooperation in relation to the adverse impacts of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights; and decided to incorporate in the program of work of its March 2015 session a full day discussion on specific themes concerning human rights and climate change.

The resolution also encouraged relevant special procedures mandate holders to give consideration to the issue of climate change and human rights within their respective mandates. To that end, on 17 July I held a public consultation in Geneva on climate change and human rights. Together with expert meetings held over the previous two days in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the consultation helps to clarify the many ways that climate change is relevant to human rights, and vice versa. The relationship between the two areas is being addressed by many other sources as well. A report pulling together statements by human rights bodies, including special procedures, on climate change and human rights is available at my website, at <http://ieenvironment.org/mapping-report-2014-2/>.

In this respect, it is highly encouraging that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced on 14 July the appointment of Mary Robinson to be his Special Envoy on Climate Change. After serving as President of Ireland and High Commissioner for Human Rights, she founded and is the president of the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice, and her understanding of the relationship of climate change and human rights is unsurpassed. She has described climate change as “the biggest human rights issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

**Environmental Democracy Index.** Although this is not an activity of the mandate, many of you may be interested to learn that the World Resources Institute, together with The Access Initiative, is developing an Environmental Democracy Index (EDI), which it describes as

the first comprehensive index designed specifically to measure procedural rights in an environmental context. The EDI uses UNEP's Bali Guidelines for the Development of National Legislation on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters as an international standard against which it can assess national laws. For more information about this project, go to <http://www.wri.org/our-work/project/access-initiative-tai/commissions>.

Finally, I had the honor of being a scholar in residence at Vermont Law School in July, where I gave a presentation describing my work on the UN mandate on human rights and environment. A [video of the presentation](#) is available on YouTube.

As always, please feel free to share your comments and questions about the mandate!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. Knox". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

John H. Knox  
UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and the Environment  
Henry C. Lauerman Professor of International Law  
Wake Forest University School of Law