



PALAIS DES NATIONS • 1211 GENEVA 10, SWITZERLAND

www.ohchr.org • TEL: +41 22 917 9159 • FAX: +41 22 917 9006 • E-MAIL: srenvironment@ohchr.org

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment

28 September 2018

Dear friends and colleagues,

I am genuinely delighted and honoured to be serving as the new UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment. I am tremendously fortunate to be building on the strong foundation laid by Professor John Knox during his exemplary term as the first mandate-holder from 2012 to 2018.

It is also with great pleasure that I would like to introduce Dr. Soo-Young Hwang and Dr. Jamshid Gaziyeu, who are working to support this mandate at the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights in Geneva. Both Soo-Young and Jamshid have extensive experience on these issues, having worked with John as well as with other mandate-holders at OHCHR.

The Escazu Agreement

One of the most exciting developments of 2018 in the field of human rights and the environment was the successful completion earlier this year of negotiations on the [Escazu Agreement on Access to Information, Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). On 13 September 2018, 27 United Nations special procedures and I have issued a [press release](#) urging the prompt ratification of the treaty. This regional treaty is similar to the [Aarhus Convention](#), but places a stronger emphasis on the fundamental objective of protecting the right to live in a healthy environment. At a time when environmental human rights defenders are suffering unprecedented levels of violence, intimidation, and harassment, the treaty breaks new ground by including specific protection for these courageous individuals and communities. The Escazu Agreement opens for signature on September 27, and I urge States to move swiftly to sign and ratify it so that it can come into force at the earliest possible date.

Reports

I will present my first report to the UN General Assembly on October 25 in New York. The [report](#) was co-authored with John Knox because it had to be submitted in July. In the report, we review the extensive work done by John over the past six years, culminating in [the Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment](#). We call on the United Nations to expeditiously secure global recognition of the right to a healthy and sustainable environment, and provide specific recommendations on ways to achieve that goal. You can find the report in six UN languages on the website of my [mandate](#).

My first thematic report to the Human Rights Council in March 2019 will focus on the extremely important topic of air pollution. If current trends continue, more than twenty million people will die from illnesses caused by air pollution during the first three years of my mandate. Of particular concern are the impacts upon vulnerable populations, including women, children, and people living in poverty. I would greatly appreciate [your input](#) on this topic, particularly with regard to good practices in reducing the adverse impacts of air pollution. Please see the attached [Call for Inputs and submit your views by October 31, 2018](#).

Events

On August 14, I participated in a panel conversation on mining and human rights at an event in Santiago organized by ECLAC, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. I described the ongoing human rights violations caused by the mining industry and how States can look to the [Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment](#) to help them remedy past and ongoing violations and prevent future violations. My co-panellists were Dr. Michael Windfuhr of the German Institute for Human Rights (also a member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights) and Carlos de Miguel, Head of Sustainable Development Policies for ECLAC.

The week of my report to the UN General Assembly in New York (Oct. 22-26) will also feature an expert consultation, a meeting with other special procedures, a series of bilateral meetings, and several side events, including one on the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

On 30 October I will be participating in the [World Health Organization's first Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health](#). There will be a panel on children's health and air pollution, for which we are encouraging all participants to incorporate a rights-based perspective.

With a variety of partners including UN Environment, Terre des Hommes and Global Child Forum we are planning a series of regional consultations on children's rights and the environment, in order to continue John's excellent work in this area, as

documented in his [2018 report](#) to the Human Rights Council. We will provide more information on the workshops in due course.

Communications

Along with other special procedures, a vital element of our work is responding to communications that allege violations of human rights related to environmental damage, degradation, or hazards. Often in partnership with other special procedures, we identify the relevant principles and obligations of international human rights law, and ask States and in some cases businesses to respond to the allegations. Additional information will be provided in future newsletters.

Country Visits

We are in the midst of planning my first country visits. We have sent requests for visits for the first half of December 2018 to the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and New Zealand. While waiting for the feedback, we are considering another visit in the spring of 2019. We should be able to provide additional details in the next newsletter.

Conclusion

In terms of the overall focus of the mandate, I believe that there is a window of opportunity opening up for global recognition of the fundamental human right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment. I will harness my role as Special Rapporteur to do everything I can to make this happen, so that we can turn our attention to the vital work of implementing and fulfilling this right for everyone, everywhere.

Your feedback on the mandate, potential issues, and priorities are welcome! You can reach all of us (Soo-Young, Jamshid, and myself) through the official UN email address srenvironment@ohchr.org

I look forward to working with all of you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DR Boyd". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the letters "D", "R", and "B" being particularly prominent.

Dr. David R. Boyd
United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment
Associate Professor
Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability
School of Public Policy and Global Affairs
University of British Columbia