



**“The Future of Human Rights, the Environment and Climate:  
*Advancing the right to a healthy environment, including a safe and stable climate, for all*”**

**Roundtable 4, Human Rights 75 High-level Event  
12 December 2023, 3:00pm to 5:00 pm CET**

**Think Piece**

**Context and background**

All people have the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The recognition of this right by the Human Rights Council in 2021 and the UN General Assembly in 2022 was an important step forward in furthering the international commitment to addressing the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. This commitment has been since reaffirmed by references to the right to a healthy environment in the work of human rights treaty bodies (see e.g., CRC/C/GC/26), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the outcome of UNFCCC COP27, and the Bonn Declaration for Global Sustainable Management of Chemicals and Waste.

Yet, the impacts of the triple planetary crisis continue to affect the rights of people around the world – not just their enjoyment of the right to a healthy environment, but to an array of rights, including the right to food, to adequate housing, to health, and even the right to life. We see also a gendered and racialized dimension in how human rights harms are disproportionately felt.

Without urgent and decisive action, the human rights consequences of the planetary crisis will only get worse. More is needed for the international community to unite behind effective collective responses to this most existential of challenges to human rights.

Human rights, including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, offer a roadmap for preventing and remediating the harms caused by the triple planetary crisis. The right to a healthy environment is a guarantee to all people of the planet we need, with clean air and water, adequate and nutritious food, non-toxic environments in which to live, work and play, a safe and stable climate and healthy ecosystems and biodiversity. Sustaining this right requires participation, access to information and access to justice in environmental matters, the protection of environmental human rights defenders and education with respect for nature. It is deeply interlinked with other rights, including cultural rights, gender equality, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and belongs to both present and future generations.

**Objectives**

The purpose of this roundtable is to consider concrete recommendations to address the triple planetary crisis through the lens of human rights, and through steps to uphold these rights as a path to solutions.



This will include an opportunity to explore innovative approaches along with creative avenues for forging new partnerships between States, institutions, civil society, the private sector and other actors.

Looking ahead to the next 25 years, participants are invited to consider a number of guiding questions, along with recommendations for discussion, with a view to identifying priorities for action by governments and other stakeholders, including within the United Nations.

### **Guiding questions and possible recommendations**

- 1. How can the right to a healthy environment be embedded in national, regional and international laws and instruments?**

**Possible recommendation:** Identify, discuss and build on good existing examples – particularly at the national and regional levels – of making the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment actionable through effective laws, policies and programmes.

- 2. How can accountability for environmental harms be ensured, with a view to better protecting people and planet?**

**Possible recommendation:** Identify existing models to strengthen access to justice and to account for and remedy environmental harm. Consider a global commission of inquiry into environmental degradation, its causes, its human rights impacts, how human rights applies when harms are multi-jurisdictional and the actors responsible have different levels of contributions, with the mandate, expertise, resources and moral authority to ensure its recommendations are acted on by States.

- 3. What actions are needed to align our economic models with the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment and to scale up resources to address the triple planetary crisis?**

**Possible recommendation:** Adopt robust policy frameworks for a just transition and provide concrete guidance on how to replace economic and industrial growth as societal goals with achieving human health and wellbeing in harmony with nature. Prioritize the principles of equity, common but differentiated responsibilities, and “polluter pays” to help ensure that domestic and international funds prioritize the human rights of people, communities and countries that are disproportionately affected by environmental crises.

- 4. How can we ensure a shift in business practices to reduce harmful impacts on our environment and climate in line with their human rights responsibilities?**

**Possible recommendation:** Consider making human rights due diligence, including in respect of the right to a healthy environment, mandatory through national legislation; and bring to an end environmentally-harmful subsidies.

5. **How can we ensure meaningful and informed participation of all people in environmental decision-making** – including affected communities, leading scientists, and other voices?

**Possible recommendation:** Consider the proposed adoption of a Declaration for Future Generations and the appointment of a Special Envoy following the 2024 Summit of the Future to help support this work, also ensuring that the interests of those yet to come are taken into account in environmental decision-making.

For more information on the round table please contact [claire.morclette@un.org](mailto:claire.morclette@un.org) and [ohchr-right2environment@un.org](mailto:ohchr-right2environment@un.org)

#### 4. Resources

- What is the Right to a Healthy Environment? [[English](#)] [[Español](#)]
- [Key Messages on human rights and climate change](#)
- Key Messages on human rights, climate change and business [[العربية](#)] [[中文](#)] [[English](#)] [[Français](#)] [[Русский](#)] [[Español](#)]
- Key Messages on human rights, climate change and migration [[العربية](#)] [[中文](#)] [[English](#)] [[Français](#)] [[Русский](#)] [[Español](#)]
- Key Messages on human rights and biodiversity [[العربية](#)] [[中文](#)] [[English](#)] [[Français](#)] [[Русский](#)] [[Español](#)]
- Key Messages on human rights and hazardous substances [[العربية](#)] [[中文](#)] [[English](#)] [[Français](#)] [[Русский](#)] [[Español](#)]
- Key Messages on human rights, the environment, and gender equality [[العربية](#)] [[English](#)] [[Français](#)] [[Español](#)]
- [Framework principles on human rights and the environment](#)