



## Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment

5 June 2015

Dear friends and colleagues,

Happy [World Environment Day](#)! Each year, the UN Environment Programme highlights June 5 as an opportunity to do something positive for the environment. This year, the theme is “Seven Billion Dreams. One Planet. Consume with Care.” As UNEP explains, “Many of the Earth’s ecosystems are nearing critical tipping points of depletion or irreversible change, pushed by high population growth and economic development... Living within planetary boundaries is the most promising strategy for ensuring a healthy future.”

Perhaps the most obvious way that humans are pressing against our planetary boundaries is through the emission of greenhouse gases that lead to disruption of our climate. Negotiators are currently meeting this week and next in Bonn, Germany, to continue development of a climate agreement, with the hope of finalizing it this December in Paris. Today I joined with other special rapporteurs and independent experts in the UN human rights system to issue a statement drawing attention to the grave harm even a two degree Celsius increase in average global temperature would cause to the enjoyment of human rights around the world. We urge the negotiators to reach a climate agreement that reflects the obligations human rights law places on States to protect and promote human rights.

The [joint statement](#) draws on a paper several of us prepared for the Climate Vulnerable Forum, a group of twenty countries that are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. On behalf of the Forum, the Philippines, the current chair, [submitted the report](#) on May 1 to the Conference of Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Forum urged the COP to adopt a more ambitious target in the climate agreement currently under negotiation, in order to avoid the devastating effects of a rapidly warming planet on the basic rights of all of us who inhabit it. An interview I gave to UN radio on the report is available [here](#).

I will continue the conversation about climate change and human rights when I travel to Bonn and Geneva next week. In Bonn, I will participate in a side event on June 8, from 3:00 to 4:30 pm in Bonn III in the [World Conference Center](#), on “advancing human rights in the Paris Agreement,” which is co-sponsored by the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) and the World Council of Churches. On Tuesday, June 9, I will meet with civil society organizations in Bonn from 1:00 to 2:00 pm. Please contact Alyssa Johl at CIEL ([ajohl@ciel.org](mailto:ajohl@ciel.org)) with any questions about either event. In Geneva, I will participate in the annual meeting of the UN special mandate holders on Wednesday and Thursday. We will have a

general exchange of views with civil society and national human rights institutions between 3:30 and 6:00 pm in Room XXI in the Palais des Nations. Anyone holding a UN accredited badge is most welcome to attend that session.

**Sustainable development goals.** On May 18, a group of UN human rights experts joined together to call on UN member States to ensure that the new sustainable development goals are firmly grounded in international human rights norms and standards, including the principle of participation, and that they acknowledge the importance of a free and vibrant civil society for effective implementation. The full text of the statement is available [here](#).

**Statement on pollution.** On May 20, Baskut Tuncak, the Special Rapporteur on human rights and hazardous substances and wastes, [urged the World Health Organization to heighten its efforts](#) to protect people from the negative health impacts of toxic pollution. He pointed out that about 13 million deaths each year, and approximately 25% of the global burden of disease, result from environmental determinants of health such as air and water pollution, and that pollution is expected to increase sharply in coming years. Mr. Tuncak noted that in 2014, the UN Environment Assembly invited WHO to increase staff and other resources to better protect people from environmental threats to human health, but that only 2.5% of WHO's proposed program budget for 2016-2017 is dedicated to the Health and Environment sub-category. He warned: "The amount of work WHO dedicates to monitoring and preventing harm from toxic pollution is disproportionately low, given the impacts of pollution on human rights."

**Environmental Democracy Index.** Also on May 20, the World Resources Institute announced the launch of its new [Environmental Democracy Index](#). In the words of WRI, "The index offers new insights into the state of environmental democracy around the world and opportunities to use the tool to support reform. EDI is the first index to measure how well countries' national laws protect environmental democracy rights, namely: the right of the public to freely access relevant and timely information, to provide public input and scrutiny in decision-making, and to seek justice before an independent and fair legal authority in cases of environmental harm or violation of rights." As readers of this newsletter know, these three access rights have strong roots in human rights law. The index allows users to see whether and how those rights are reflected in domestic laws of countries around the world.

**Change of email.** Recall that as of May 1, my email address changed from [ieenvironment@ohchr.org](mailto:ieenvironment@ohchr.org) to [srenvironment@ohchr.org](mailto:srenvironment@ohchr.org). Emails sent to the old address will not be forwarded, so please use the new one!

Best regards,



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