UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment

UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights

Researchathon on Sacrifice Zones and Human Rights

Research Period: March 1- August 31, 2021

As the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, I am preparing a series of reports for the Human Rights Council and General Assembly on the six substantive elements of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including [clean air](http://srenvironment.org/report/the-right-to-breathe-clean-air-2019), a [safe climate](http://srenvironment.org/report/a-safe-climate-human-rights-and-climate-change), a [healthy biosphere](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Pages/HealthyEcosystems.aspx), [safe and sufficient water](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F46%2F28&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop), [healthy and sustainably produced food](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Pages/HealthySustainableFood.aspx), and toxic-free environments in which to live, work, study and play.

For my forthcoming report on toxic-free environments in which to live, work, study and play (2022), I am partnering with the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights.

We intend to highlight the egregious problem of places that are being subjected to severe toxic pollution. A “sacrifice zone” can be defined as a region or community where extreme and/or pervasive pollution is causing human rights abuses or violations. While sacrifice zones vary in size, they are proliferating around the world and often result from policies that prioritize economic growth or corporate profits over human life, health, dignity, and wellbeing. Many sacrifice zones are located in low-income, ethnic minority, Indigenous or other vulnerable or marginalized communities. We are also keenly interested in the steps being taken (or proposed) to clean up and rehabilitate sacrifice zones and protect the human rights of local residents.

Thanks to the generous efforts of individuals around the world, a previous researchathon on [good practices](http://srenvironment.org/report/good-practices-in-implementing-the-right-to-a-healthy-environment-2020) in the implementation of the right to a healthy environment succeeded in producing more than 500 good practices from more than 170 States.

This [Google Sheet](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WifMQ49dpVoJ6Of92Qs1XOb-Ag27FFHNXrlk4PSgPw4/edit#gid=0) includes all 193 UN Member States. Please select one nation, enter your name (or an alias to protect your identity) in column B, and send an email to srenvironment@ohchr.org **committing to submit information on 1 or 2 sacrifice zones for that nation to srenvironment@ohchr.org by August 31, 2021**. Please use Sacrifice Zone Input in the email subject line.

Your email submission should be a maximum of three pages and should include:

1. Your name (unless you would prefer to remain anonymous)

2. Name of the country

3. Location of the sacrifice zone

4. A concise description of the sacrifice zone

5. Evidence that this sacrifice zone is contributing to human rights abuses or violations

6. Efforts to clean up or rehabilitate the sacrifice zone, if any

7. From one to five references, such as scientific studies, NGO reports, court decisions, media articles, and other sources, that describe the sacrifice zone and/or its effects

Submissions can be made in English/Spanish/French.

An example can be found on the following page. Useful sources include [PUBMED](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/), the [Environmental Justice Atlas](https://ejatlas.org/), [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/), and Google.

**Every person who completes a submission will have their name recognized in the UN report, unless you indicate that you prefer to remain anonymous. Thank you in advance for considering contributing your time and knowledge to this project!**

EXAMPLE: Sacrifice Zones and Human Rights

1. Name of submitter

David Boyd and Marcos Orellana

2. Nation

Canada

3. Title of the sacrifice zone

Chemical Valley near the Aamjiwnaang First Nation reserve and Sarnia, Ontario

4. Description of the sacrifice zone

One of Canada’s most notorious pollution hotspots – Chemical Valley in Sarnia, Ontario – has disturbing health effects on the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. There are more than fifty large petrochemical, polymer, and chemical facilities in close proximity to the Aamjiwnaang reserve, as well as a coal-fired power plant just across the border in the United States. This community endures some of the worst air quality in Canada. Both physical and psychological health problems are common, including high rates of miscarriages, childhood asthma, and cancer.

5. Evidence of human rights abuses

The severe pollution in Chemical Valley is a threat to the rights to life, health, dignity, water, food, and culture of the Indigenous community living near the many industrial facilities. The failure to reduce or eliminate industrial pollution also appears to violate the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

6. Efforts to clean up or rehabilitate the sacrifice zone

The provincial government has begun working to address the cumulative effects of air pollution in Ontario and recently strengthened the rules for flaring, sulphur dioxide emissions, and benzene. Two members of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation filed a lawsuit asserting that pollution violated their rights under Canada’s *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The case did not proceed to a hearing on the merits due to technical obstacles.

7. References

Cryderman, D., Letourneau, L., Miller, F., & Basu, N. (2016). An Ecological and Human Biomonitoring Investigation of Mercury Contamination at the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. *EcoHealth*, *13*(4), 784–795.

E. MacDonald and S. Rang, *Exposing Canada’s Chemical Valley: An Investigation of Cumulative Air Pollution Emissions in the Sarnia, Ontario Area* (Toronto: Ecojustice, 2007).

D.N. Scott, “Confronting Chronic Pollution: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Risk and Precaution,” *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 46, 2 (2008): 293–343.

D.D. Jackson, “Shelter in Place: A First Nation Community in Canada’s Chemical Valley,” *Interdisciplinary Environmental Review* 11, 4 (2010): 249–62.

World Health Organization, *Global Database of Urban Air Pollution* (Geneva: WHO, 2020).