



Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment

9 February 2016

Dear friends and colleagues,

On March 3, in Geneva, I will present two new reports to the UN Human Rights Council, one on implementation and one on climate change. The reports are now available [here](#).

Report on implementation. The [report on implementation](#), A/HRC/31/53, is submitted pursuant to Council Resolution 28/11, which requested me to hold an expert seminar on the effective implementation of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, challenges thereto, and the way forward. In accordance with that request, and with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), I organized a meeting of more than 20 experts on 26 and 27 October 2015, and held a public consultation on 28 October. In addition, I received more than 40 written submissions from Governments, civil society organizations, and others.

Drawing on all of those sources, the report describes possible methods of implementing human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a healthy environment. Although the methods listed are not exhaustive, they give a wide range of approaches that would further the following goals, among others: (a) disseminating information about the human rights norms relating to the environment; (b) building capacity; (c) protecting the rights of those who are most vulnerable; and (d) strengthening cooperation between different actors. The report is addressed to all those in a position to implement human rights norms in relation to the environment, including the Human Rights Council and other intergovernmental organizations; regional human rights bodies and other regional organizations; Governments and national human rights institutions; civil society organizations; and myself.

Report on climate change and human rights. My main thematic focus in 2015 was the relationship between climate change and human rights. As I described in a previous newsletter, last spring I and other special procedure mandate holders issued [a joint report for the Climate Vulnerable Forum](#), which emphasized that even a two-degree increase in average global temperature would have grave effects on the worldwide enjoyment of human rights. I also joined with other mandate holders in [a statement released on World Environment Day](#), June 5, which drew attention to specific ways that climate change interferes with human rights.

In December, I attended the Paris conference of the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in December. I joined [the High Commissioner](#) and [other special procedure mandate holders](#) in [urging the parties to include a strong reference](#) to human rights in the climate agreement under negotiation. As you know, the parties succeeded in adopting a new climate agreement on 12 December 2015. The Paris Agreement commits States to a range of actions to address climate change. Notably, it also includes the strongest language on human rights of any global environmental treaty: “Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.”

In my report to the Human Rights Council on climate change and human rights, A/HRC/31/52, I describe the increasing attention paid to the relationship between climate change and human rights in recent years, review the effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights, and outline the application of human rights obligations to climate-related actions. The report assesses the Paris Agreement in light of the procedural and substantive human rights obligations of States relating to climate change. It concludes that in order to ensure that global temperatures do not rise to levels that would impair a vast range of human rights, States should fully implement all of their commitments in connection with the Paris Agreement and strengthen their commitments in the future. Each State must also adopt a legal and institutional framework that assists those within its jurisdiction to adapt to the unavoidable effects of climate change. In all of these actions, States must take care to protect the rights of the most vulnerable.

Meeting with civil society in Geneva. I intend to hold a meeting with civil society in Geneva on March 2, at 9:30 a.m. in Palais Wilson (Room 3-016). For those who can attend, please RSVP by February 24 to srenvironment@ohchr.org.

Recent publications. In my other life, as a professor, I have recently published several short pieces on issues relating to human rights and the environment: “[Environmental Disasters and Human Rights](#),” which will appear in a forthcoming book entitled *The Role of International Environmental Law in Reducing Disaster Risk*, edited by Jacqueline Peel & David Fisher; “[Human Rights, Environmental Protection, and the Sustainable Development Goals](#),” in the *Washington International Law Journal*; and “[The United States, Environmental Agreements, and the Political Question Doctrine](#),” in the *North Carolina Journal of International Law*.

Best regards,



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