



Mandate of the Independent Expert on human rights and the environment

December 20, 2013

Dear friends and colleagues,

This letter is to update you on my work as the UN Independent Expert on human rights and the environment since the last newsletter in August.*

Statements and meetings. On October 9, I spoke on human rights and climate change at the annual meeting of the International Bar Association, and met with the task force preparing a report on the topic for presentation to the IBA next year.

In the third week of October, in Copenhagen, I participated in the Asia-Europe Meeting Seminar on human rights and the environment, which brought together experts from government, civil society and academia, from countries in Asia and Europe. I spoke at the opening of the Seminar on October 21 and held an expert consultation on the 24th, which examined how international institutions and mechanisms can integrate human rights with environmental protection.

On October 31, I spoke long-distance to the third meeting of the signatory countries of the declaration on the application of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Lima, Peru. I described how human rights law supports and strengthens the rights in Principle 10 to information, participation and remedy.

And on December 12, at the United Nations in New York, I spoke at a side-event at the sixth session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. The side-event, which I helped to organize with the UN Environment Programme and OHCHR, concentrated on bringing a human rights perspective to the SDG process.

In my remarks there, I explained that a human rights perspective underlines the critical importance of including strong commitments to environmental protection in the SDGs. The MDGs did not do nearly enough to protect the environment, and the resulting environmental harm is interfering with the full enjoyment of many human rights, including rights to life, health, food, water and housing. Those rights cannot be fulfilled without much more sustained efforts to protect the environment. The SDGs should therefore reflect the need for States to incorporate environmental protection into their law and to take concrete, concerted actions to better

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implement those protections. The SDGs should also include criteria for good governance that address access to environmental information, public participation and remedies for environmental harm.

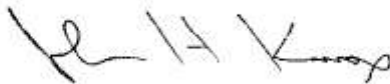
Reports. I am currently preparing two reports to the Human Rights Council, to be presented in March 2014. The main report will address one of the primary aspects of the mandate, by mapping the current law on human rights obligations pertaining to the environment. It is based not only on the many meetings and consultations on this topic over the last year, but also on extensive research into a wide range of sources in human rights law. The second report will present findings and conclusions from my visit to Costa Rica in August, which will describe both good practices and challenges.

Future Expert Consultations. Together with UNEP and OHCHR, I am planning expert consultations in Johannesburg, South Africa in late January, and in Bangkok, Thailand in May, on good practices in the use of human rights obligations to inform environmental policy.

Website. More information about the mandate will be posted as it becomes available on the website for the mandate, <http://ieenvironment.org>, as well as the UN website, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/IEEnvironment/Pages/IEEnvironmentIndex.aspx>.

Throughout 2013, I have heard from many of you about bringing human rights to bear on the many environmental challenges facing us. As always, I am inspired by your dedication and courage. I wish you all a very happy new year!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John H. Knox', is centered on the page.

John H. Knox
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