**54th session of the Human Rights Council**

**Biennial panel discussion on youth and human rights**

***Theme: Young people’s engagement with climate change   
and global environmental decision-making processes***

*Concept note (as of 6 September 2023)*

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| **Date and venue:** | **Tuesday, 26 September, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. (UTC+2)‎**  **Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva and online platform (Zoom)**  *(will be broadcast live and archived at* [*https://media.un.org/en/webtv*](https://media.un.org/en/webtv)*)* |
| **Objectives:** | The biennial panel discussion on youth and human rights will gather youth environmental human rights defenders and youth-led organizations in this field, representatives of United Nations agencies and funds, Member and observer States and other stakeholders.  The panel discussion provides an opportunity to explore the barriers young people face when engaging with climate and global environmental decision-making processes, lessons learned and good practices, and opportunities for effective, active and meaningful youth participation. It will explore the clear synergies between global youth rights, including the right to participate, and environmental processes, mechanisms and forums. It will set out how the *United Nations Youth Strategy*, the *Call to Action for Human Rights* and *Our Common Agenda* must be leveraged to promote effective, active, and meaningful youth participation in environmental forums and in decision-making processes relevant to them, including the 2024 Summit for the Future. |
| **Chair:** | **H.E. Mr. Marc Bichler**, Vice-President of the Human Rights Council |
| **Opening statements:** | **Mr. Volker Türk**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  **H.E. Ms. Adriana Mira**,Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador  *(video message)* |
| **Panellists:** | * **Ms. Evelyn Adzovi Addor**, Climate Negotiator for Ghana, Communications Officer for EcoCare Ghana and Member of Climate Youth Negotiators Programme * **Mr. Vishal Prasad**,Campaign Director for the Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change * **Ms. Xiomara Acevedo Navarro**, Representative of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network * **Mr. Zuhair Ahmed Kowshik**, Global Focal Point for the Children and Youth Major Group to the United Nations Environment Programme |
| **Outcomes:** | The panel discussion will contribute to the following outcomes:   * Enhanced understanding of the challenges to meaningful youth engagement in climate change and global environmental decision-making processes and the support young people need to do so; * Recognition of the crucial role that young people play in advocating for human rights, including the right to a healthy environment; and solutions to the climate emergency, pollution and biodiversity loss; * Presentation, through concrete examples, of good practices and sharing of lessons learned about youth participation in climate change and global environmental decision-making processes; * Recommendations to and identification of the opportunities for States, civil society, young people and other relevant stakeholders to facilitate the engagement of young people in climate change and global environmental decision-making processes; and * Increased understanding of the need for international cooperation and assistance in ensuring meaningful youth participation in climate change and environmental decision-making processes. |
| **Mandate:** | In its resolution [51/17](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/51/17) on youth and human rights of 6 October 2022, the Human Rights Council decided to incorporate into its programme of work a biennial panel discussion on youth and human rights, which is to be held during the September session of the Council as of its fifty-fourth session. It requested the Office of the High Commissioner to organize the panel discussion following consultations with young people, youth, and youth-led organizations and to prepare a summary report on the panel discussion for consideration at the subsequent session. Pursuant to resolution 51/17, the Council decided that the theme of the panel discussion to be held during the fifty-fourth session would be “young people’s engagement with climate change and global environmental decision-making processes.” |
| **Format:** | The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by a two-part interactive discussion and by conclusions from the panellists. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statements, panellists’ presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 12 States or observers, 1 national human rights institution and 2 non-governmental organizations. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Panellists will respond to questions and comments during the remaining time available.  The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Delegates who could not take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). |
| **Accessibility:** | In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the panel discussion will be webcast and made accessible. International sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided and webcast. During the event, participants can access live English captioning on the StreamText web page (<https://www.streamtext.net/player?event=CFI-UNOG>).  Hearing loops are available for collection from the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in the *Accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities* (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/accessibility>). |
| **Background:** | Young people have been at the forefront of calls for the recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, pushing for climate justice and effective action to address and promote accountability for environmental harms. The triple planetary crises of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss affect young people’s human rights and their lives now and, in the future, as well as those of future generations. However, while the world is now home to the largest generation of young people in history – 1.8 billion – the views and experiences of youth are often not heard or considered in environmental matters.  When youth seek to exercise their right to participate in climate change and global environmental decision-making processes, they continue to face multiple barriers to their effective, active and meaningful engagement. Young people are usually in transition towards financial independence and do not have the resources to ensure their participation in climate and global environmental processes and forums, especially among Indigenous Peoples and young defenders in rural communities. Harassment, physical and online threats and criminalization against young environmental human rights defenders contribute to the lack of a safe and enabling environment that empowers youth to share their knowledge and lived experiences, ultimately threatening their participation in public affairs. They also usually lack the physical safety, legal and psychosocial means to address these barriers. Furthermore, increasing restrictions to civic space have an impact on young people’s right to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly and association, which coupled with fear of reprisals from government and non-governmental actors, including in the digital sphere, hinder their ability to engage meaningfully. Young women and girls who are environmental human rights defenders also face a higher risk of such threats, in addition to sexual and gender-based harassment and violence. A lack of funding and digital connection can also impede young environmental human rights defenders’ ability and capacity to connect with their peers, build alliances and partnerships, and mobilize collectively.  Young people around the world also lack the necessary environmental and human rights education they should have received from childhood as well as the knowledge and skills to know how and where to engage in climate and global environmental decision-making processes and forums. Young environmental human rights defenders further encounter linguistic barriers, overly bureaucratic and administrative processes that are difficult to understand, a lack of information, lack of consultation, dialogue and partnership with public authorities, tokenistic participation, stigma and intimidating or patronizing behaviours towards them. These barriers are multiplied for those facing intersecting forms of discrimination or in situations of vulnerability, including youth with disabilities, Indigenous youth, and girls, among others.  Young people have been actively engaged in the decision-making architecture of environmental processes and forums for decades. This has evolved considerably during the past twenty years, yet major gaps in coverage remain. Their meaningful participation can also be further restricted if not well-funded or placed on a formal standing. Inclusive engagement on an equal basis with young people, youth-inclusive spaces and processes, such as consultations and youth networks, and capacity-building opportunities are all helping to address this imbalance, but more is clearly needed and now.  States have a human rights obligation to realize the right to a healthy environment and prevent the foreseeable adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation and ensure that those affected by it, particularly those in vulnerable situations, have access to effective remedies to enjoy lives of human dignity.  Under international human rights law, States should take active measures to ensure young people’s access to information, participation and justice, including in environmental matters. Youth participation should be prioritized, involving them in decision-making as change-makers, knowledge-holders and partners in developing sustainable solutions for present and future generations. Involving young people in the design of prevention and response measures to climate change, including through effective access to information, is crucial. Several human rights instruments contain provisions relevant to the rights of young people affected by the triple planetary crisis and guaranteeing their right to participation, including freedom of information and access to justice, such as the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Other relevant international legal and policy frameworks include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals as well as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.  In the environmental sphere, under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement States have an obligation to promote, enhance, and facilitate public participation.[[1]](#footnote-1) Furthermore, the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) requires States to ensure public participation in environmental decision-making.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Escazú Agreement) aims to guarantee the right of present and future generations to a healthy environment and sustainable development, and to ensure access to information, participation and justice in environmental matters. Justice is a core element of this participation as a matter of accountability and intergenerational equity.  The Guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs[[3]](#footnote-3) specifically mention youth and have been disseminated widely across youth networks as an effective tool to empower young people to claim their right to participate.  The United Nations, through its Youth Strategy entitled “Youth 2030: working with and for young people,” aims to strengthen youth engagement and participation in global agenda and frameworks relevant to them.  The Secretary-General’s 2020 Call to Action for Human Rights highlights the transformative nature of human rights in tackling crises and global challenges, including climate change, and identifies the importance of partnering with youth in combating such challenges. In this context, the Call to Action commits to creating space for young people to participate in shaping the decisions that will affect their future, including but not limited to climate change, based on which the [Step up!](https://www.sparkblue.org/system/files/2021-06/210615%20STEP%20UP%20-%20Joint%20Commitment%20by%20Heads%20of%20UN%20Entities.pdf) joint commitment by Heads of United Nations Entities was launched in June 2021. This joint pledge aims to promote action on the rights of young people and future generations to climate justice and a healthy environment, including their meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels.  Launched in 2020, “Our Common Agenda,” which included engagement with young people in its preparation, identified human rights as a catalyst for change and included a priority of listening to and working with youth and future generations, particularly in the fight for climate justice. It has placed working with and for youth at the centre of the work of the United Nations in the years to come.  As we reach the point of no return and the need for urgent environmental action which respects human rights and supports sustainable development, the full, effective and meaningful participation and leadership of young people in climate change and environmental decision-making processes is essential. It is a prerequisite to protecting and promoting the human rights of young people and ensuring effective and informed actions and solutions to address the triple planetary crisis. |
| **Background documents:** | * [Human Rights Council resolution 32/1](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/32/1) of 30 June 2016 on youth and human rights * [Human Rights Council resolution 35/14](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/35/14) of 22 June 2017 on youth and human rights * [Human Rights Council resolution 41/13](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/41/13) of 11 July 2019 on youth and human rights * [Human Rights Council resolution 48/12](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/48/12) of 8 October 2021 on human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people * [Human Rights Council resolution 48/13](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F48%2F13&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False) of 8 October 2021 on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment * [General Assembly resolution 76/300](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FRES%2F76%2F300&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False) of 28 July 2022 onon the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment * [Human Rights Council resolution 51/17](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/51/17) of 6 October 2022 on youth and human rights * Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights implications of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on young people ([A/HRC/51/19](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F51%2F19&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False), 2022) * Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on intersessional seminar on the challenges and opportunities of young people in the field of human rights ([A/HRC/49/32](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F49%2F32&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False), 2021) * Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on youth and human rights ([A/HRC/39/33](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2FHRC%2F39%2F33&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False), 2018) * Our Common Agenda, Policy Brief 3, Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policy and Decision-making Processes <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-youth-engagement-en.pdf> * Report of the Secretary-General, Our Common Agenda ([A/75/982](http://undocs.org/A/75/982), 2021) <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda> * Secretary-General’s Call to Action for Human Rights (2020) <https://www.un.org/en/content/action-for-human-rights/index.shtml> * Youth2030: Working with and for young people - United Nations Strategy on Youth (2018) <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf> * Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Draft guidelines for States on the effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs ([A/HRC/39/28](https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/report-guidelines-right-participate-public-affairs), 2018) * Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 26 (2023) on children’s rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change ([CRC/C/GC/26](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGC%2F26&Lang=en)) * What is the Right to a Healthy Environment? [Information Note](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/climatechange/information-materials/2023-01-06/r2heinfofinalweb.pdf) * Summary report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on panel discussion on the adverse impact of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of human rights by people in vulnerable situations ([A/HRC/52/48](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/ahrc5248-panel-discussion-adverse-impact-climate-change-full-and-effective), 2023) * Report of the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity on international solidarity and climate change ([A/HRC/44/44](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc4444-international-solidarity-and-climate-change-report), 2020) * Fact Sheet No. 38: Frequently Asked Questions on Human Rights and Climate Change <https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-no-38-frequently-asked-questions-human-rights-and-climate> * OHCHR web page on youth <https://www.ohchr.org/en/youth> * OHCHR web page on climate change and environment <https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/climate-change-and-environment> * Report of the Co-Chairs, First session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law ([A/HRC/34/46](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/34/46), 2017) * Report of the Chair, Fourth session of the Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law ([A/HRC/52/72](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/52/72), 2023) |

1. UNFCCC, art. 6; Paris Agreement, arts. 7, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://unece.org/DAM/env/pp/documents/cep43e.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/DraftGuidelinesRighttoParticipationPublicAffairs.aspx> (based on A/HRC/39/28) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)