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Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment

24 March 2016

Dear friends and colleagues,

On March 3, I presented two new reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council, one on climate change and human rights, and one on the effective implementation of human rights obligations relating to the environment. Both of the reports, which I described in my last newsletter, are available here.

My presentation to the Council summarizing the report is available here, and the video of the presentation and the interactive dialogue with the Council is here.

One of the issues I highlighted in my implementation report was the need to heighten protection for environmental human rights defenders. Tragically, on the very day that I presented my report (and that Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, presented his), Berta Cáceres was murdered in her home in Honduras. She was a member of the Lenca indigenous people, the cofounder of the National Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), a recipient of the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2015, and a leading opponent of massive megadam projects in her country. Like many environmental defenders, she had received death threats for years, but had courageously continued to work for the well-being of the environment and all those who depend on it.

I joined with Michel Forst and other special rapporteurs to call on Honduras to allow an immediate, independent and impartial investigation of her death, and of the subsequent murder of another member of her organization, Nelson García, on March 15. We have also called on Honduras to ensure the safety and protection of Gustavo Castro Soto, a Mexican environmental defender who was injured in the attack on Berta Cáceres, and in particular to allow him to return to his home without further delay.

Other activities. Before presenting my reports to the Council on March 3, I visited the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn, where I discussed the application of human rights norms to climate actions after the Paris Agreement. I also visited the World Wildlife Fund in Gland, to discuss with them and with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature the relationship between human rights and conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, an issue on which I plan to focus more attention throughout 2016.

My activities in the next two months include the following:

- On April 6, I will meet with representatives of civil society and with Commissioners at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

- During the week of April 11, I will co-host a conference on "New Frontiers in Global Environmental Constitutionalism" at North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, together with partners from North-West University, Widener University in the United States, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Information about the conference is available here. **Please note that participants must register by 28 March.** With the same partners, I will also participate in a judicial workshop on human rights and the environment with judges from within and outside southern Africa.

- During the week of May 16, I will participate in an environmental conference at the Université de la Fondation Dr. Aristide (UNIFA) in Tabarre, Haiti.

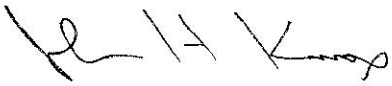
I am also working with UNITAR, as well as UNEP and the UN Development Programme, to prepare a new on-line course on human rights and the environment, which should be ready later this spring.

I have issued a number of communications to Governments in response to allegations of human rights violations relating to the environment. The website on my mandate maintained by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) includes a page listing these communications. Information on how to file a communication with OHCHR for the attention of myself or another special rapporteur is available here.

Finally, a reminder that if you like, you can follow me on Twitter! My address is @SREnvironment.

As always, thank you for your interest in and support for the mandate!

Best regards,



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