



Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment

13 May 2016

Dear friends and colleagues,

I write to draw your attention to new developments in climate change and human rights, and to inform you of a new online course on human rights and the environment.

Climate change and human rights. On April 22, the Paris Agreement was opened for signature, and in a [press statement](#) I applauded the commitment that States made to respect and take into account their human rights obligations when taking actions to address climate change. At the same time, I emphasized that they need to take further actions to meet the Paris Agreement's target of keeping the global temperature increase well under 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

I'm issuing [another statement today](#), in advance of the meeting next week of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA). That meeting presents the first test of States' commitments to respect human rights in the climate regime.

The SBSTA has been tasked with developing a new international climate mechanism that will facilitate the transfer of funds from developed to developing countries for projects that contribute to the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions and support sustainable development. The new fund is expected to be the successor to the Clean Development Mechanism, which has been highly criticized for contributing to some hydroelectric and other projects that were linked to human rights abuses, including displacement of indigenous and other communities without transparency or adequate consultation.

The main problem with the Clean Development Mechanism has always been that it lacks effective safeguards to ensure that human rights are taken into account. To ensure that the new mechanism does not repeat those mistakes, I have made a number of concrete recommendations on social and environmental safeguards, including prior assessment, requirements of public participation, and the establishment of effective grievance mechanisms, which would go a long way toward protecting human rights, and which would bring the new mechanism in line with other climate mechanisms such as the Adaptation Fund. The letter setting out the recommendations is available [here](#).

New online course. I am happy to report that UNITAR is making available a new online course, entitled [Human Rights and Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development](#). In the words of UNITAR, “This course aims to empower policy makers, experts and advocates with the tools needed to develop and implement innovative public policies and laws for the protection of the environment and human rights, specifically targeting the relevant SDGs.” Sessions are offered 13 June - 4 July and 5 - 26 Sept 2016. I assisted UNITAR in the development of the course, but if you’re interested in finding out more about it, please don’t email me! Instead, click [here](#) for more information on the content and cost of the course, and on how to register.

Other activities. During the week of April 11, I participated in a wonderful conference on “New Frontiers in Global Environmental Constitutionalism” at North-West University, in Potchefstroom, South Africa, which was organized by professors at North-West University and Delaware Law School, and supported by the United Nations Environment Programme. I was very impressed by the range and depth of scholarship in the field of human rights and the environment being undertaken in Africa and around the world.

On April 15, I participated in a judicial workshop on applying human and constitutional rights to environmental issues, which was held at the University of Pretoria with judges from South Africa and Ghana, and which was facilitated by professors from South Africa and the United States. With UNEP and other partners, I am exploring the possibility of replicating the workshop in other regions.

On the evening of June 24, I will be speaking at University College London (UCL) on climate change and human rights, at an event co-sponsored by UCL and Unicef UK. If you will be in London and are interested in attending, please click [here](#) for more information.

The following week, I will be participating in meetings on human rights and environmental protection in Montevideo, Uruguay.

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

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John H. Knox', written in a cursive style.

John H. Knox
UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment
Henry C. Lauerman Professor of International Law
Wake Forest University School of Law