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Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment

15 April 2015

Dear friends and colleagues,

This letter is to provide an update on my current activities as the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment.

Perhaps the most obvious development is that I have a new title! On March 26, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution by consensus that renewed the mandate for another three years, until March 2018, and changed the title from Independent Expert to Special Rapporteur. **One practical effect is that as of May 1, my email address will change** from ieenvironment@ohchr.org to srenvironment@ohchr.org. Please make a note of it!

The renewal of the mandate. The resolution requests me to undertake some new initiatives. In addition to asking me to continue to study the human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and to identify, promote and exchange views on good practices in the use of such obligations, the two principal components of the original mandate, the new resolution encourages me to promote and report on the *realization* of such human rights obligations, to emphasize practical solutions in their implementation, and to identify challenges and obstacles to their full realization.

The resolution thus widens the focus from a purely conceptual mandate that aims to clarify obligations and good practices, to include greater emphasis on the practical implementation and realization of such obligations. This is a sign of the continuing evolution and maturity of this area of human rights law.

Like other special rapporteurs with broad mandates, I will concentrate on one or two main themes in each year, as well as continuing to keep up with a wider array of issues within the scope of the mandate. In 2015, in particular, it seems appropriate to devote particular attention to issues relating to climate change, in light of the importance of the Paris conference in December. I am currently planning meetings that would help to inform my next annual report to the Council.

Statement to the Council. On March 9, I presented my third annual report to the Council. My previous newsletter described the report, which is available [here](#). The report gives an overview of more than 100 good practices in the use of human rights obligations in relation to environmental protection. Each of the good practices is also described in a one-page summary,

which is available as well at the linked webpage. During the interactive dialogue, many representatives of governments and of civil society participated, identifying good practices and encouraging further work in this area. I also presented my report from my mission to France, which is available [here](#).

Climate change panel. On March 6, I moderated a panel discussion at the Council on the effects of climate change on States' efforts to realize the right to food. An earlier panel discussed the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of a wide range of human rights. The statements of the distinguished panelists and the ensuing discussion among the participants are available [here](#).

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. On March 21, I met with the members of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, to describe my work and to obtain their views on the relationship between human rights and the environment. It was a very productive meeting, which will lead to further cooperation in the future.

Conference at Wake Forest University. On March 26 and 27, Wake Forest University, my academic home, hosted an interdisciplinary conference on "the human face of environmental inequality." Speakers included Mary Robinson and Andrew Revkin, the author of the Dot Earth blog for the New York Times. More information about the conference, including a program, is available [here](#).

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. Knox". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "K".

John H. Knox
UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and the Environment
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Wake Forest University School of Law