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Mandate of the Independent Expert on human rights and the environment

7 May 2014

Dear friends and colleagues,

This letter is to provide an update on my work as the UN Independent Expert on human rights and the environment, since the last newsletter at the end of February.*

Reports. My last newsletter described the mapping report that I presented to the Human Rights Council in March. The report describes the human rights obligations relating to environmental protection, as they have been identified by a wide range of UN and regional human rights bodies. The mapping report is now available in all six official UN languages, at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Pages/ListReports.aspx>. Its number is UN Doc. A/25/53. The report on my country mission to Costa Rica last fall is also available, at the same web page, in English and Spanish.

I have attached to this email my statement to the Council presenting the reports. As always, statements, reports, and other information about the mandate are available at <http://ieenvironment.org>.

Best Practices Questionnaire. In addition to clarifying the human rights law relating to the environment, a second major element of the mandate is to identify, promote and exchange views on best practices relating to the use of human rights obligations to inform, support and strengthen environmental policymaking. To that end, we sent a questionnaire to governments, international bodies, and civil society asking for views on such practices. The deadline for responses is **30 June 2014**.

The questionnaire was sent to the distribution list of this newsletter two weeks ago, so you should have received it! If you did not receive it and would like a copy, please ask for one by return email.

Environmental Human Rights Defenders. Environmental human rights defenders – that is, people who seek to defend the rights of themselves and others in their land and environment – are at great and growing risk. A recent study by Global Witness concludes that between the beginning of 2002 and the end of 2013, 908 people in 35 countries were killed because of their work defending environmental and land rights, an average of one a week for

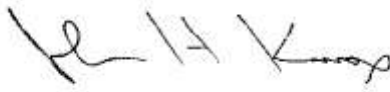
* If you know of someone else who would like to be on this email distribution list, please let us know by reply email, and we'll add them. If you do not want to be on this list, let us know the same way, and we'll remove your name.

over a decade.¹ And the problem is growing worse: the study reports that “[t]hree times as many people were killed in 2012 than 10 years previously, with the death rate rising in the past four years to an average of two activists a week.” Moreover, defenders face many threats short of death, such as physical violence, arbitrary detention, defamation, and intimidation.

I have attended two recent meetings on this pressing issue. The first was in March in Geneva, organized by the Universal Rights Group (<http://universal-rights.org/>). It brought together land and environmental rights defenders from Europe and Africa, with the intent of identifying lessons they have learned from their experiences. A second meeting, in April, was organized by friends of Chico Mendes (<http://www.chicovive.org/>), the rubber tapper who was murdered because of his efforts to protect the rain forest and those who depend on it. It commemorated the 25th anniversary of his death and brought renewed attention to the threats facing environmental defenders today.

In May, I am holding an expert consultation in Bangkok, together with UNEP and OHCHR, to learn from local defenders more about the problems they face. Together with the other meetings, the consultation will inform my efforts to identify good practices in the protection of environmental human rights defenders.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. Knox". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

John H. Knox
UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and the Environment
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¹ *Deadly Environment: The Dramatic Rise in Killings of Environmental and Land Defenders*, available at <http://www.globalwitness.org/deadlyenvironment/>.