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## **Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment**

29 March 2018

Dear friends and colleagues,

I hope this finds you all well!

This month, the Human Rights Council held its 37th session. It was an important session for the work of the UN mandate on human rights and the environment, for several reasons.

**Presentation of final reports.** First, I presented my final reports to the Council. One of the reports (UN Doc. A/HRC/37/58) describes the effects of environmental harm on the rights of children, and outlines the obligations of States to protect children from such harm. The report, as well as a child-friendly version prepared with the help of students in Belfast (only in English, for now), is available [here](#).

Another report (A/HRC/37/59) presents 16 Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment, which summarize the principal obligations of States under international human rights law relating to the environment, as they have been applied and clarified by human rights bodies. With the help of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute, the Framework Principles were also published in a more user-friendly format, which even includes pictures! Both the official and the user-friendly reports, as well as a list of sources for the Principles, are available [here](#).

In the Framework Principles report, I also urged the Human Rights Council to support recognition by the UN General Assembly of the human right to a healthy environment. I told the Council that, as the French writer Victor Hugo said, it is impossible to resist an idea whose time has come. I believe that it is time for the United Nations to formally recognize this right. My public statement in calling for the recognition is available [here](#). An article in *The Guardian* about this call on the UN is available [here](#), as well as the [piece](#) by *the Deutsche Welle*.

I also presented two country reports, on Uruguay and Mongolia, which are available [here](#).

I presented all four reports to the Council on March 5. My written statement to the Council is available [here](#), and the video of my statement and the interactive dialogue with the Council is also available [here](#).

**UN Environment launch of its environmental rights initiative.** On March 6, UN Environment, the main UN environmental agency, [launched a new environmental rights initiative](#), which will help governments develop and implement policy and legal frameworks to protect environmental rights. “Those who struggle to protect planet and people should be celebrated as heroes, but the sad fact is that many are paying a heavy price with their safety and sometimes their lives,” Erik Solheim, the Executive Director of UN Environment, said. “It’s our duty to stand on the side of those who are on the right side of history. It means standing for the most fundamental and universal of human rights.”

UN Environment has long supported my work as the Special Rapporteur, including in a series of regional judicial workshops – the most recent in Lahore, Pakistan, on February 26-27, at which many judges from Pakistan and other Asian countries discussed their work in construing and applying constitutional rights to a healthy environment. This new initiative is a very important step towards further mainstreaming a rights-based perspective on environmental issues in the United Nations. More information about the initiative is available [here](#).

**Renewal of the mandate.** The third important development at the Council session occurred last week, on March 22, when the Council decided in [resolution 37/8](#) to welcome the work undertaken by the Special Rapporteur in the implementation of the mandate, to take note with appreciation of the reports addressing children’s rights and presenting the Framework Principles, to renew the mandate for another three years, and to mandate the Special Rapporteur to submit annual reports to the General Assembly. Showing the strong continuing support of the Council for the mandate, the resolution had over 60 co-sponsors and was adopted by consensus.

Applications for the next Special Rapporteur are now being accepted by the Human Rights Council. **THE DEADLINE IS MAY 4.** Information about the application procedure is available at [this UN website](#). I have no role in the decision-making process, so please do not send your applications to me!

The Council is expected to name the next Special Rapporteur at its next session, which will be on 18 June – 6 July. I will continue to serve as the Special Rapporteur until my successor begins his/her functions.

**Other developments.** Recent weeks also saw two extremely important developments in the Latin American and Caribbean region. First, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a far-reaching [advisory opinion](#) on human rights and the environment. The full opinion is available [only in Spanish](#), but a detailed summary in English is available [here](#).

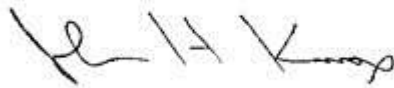
Then, on March 4, countries in the region, under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), [finished their negotiation of a treaty](#) on the rights of access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters, to implement Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This is, in my opinion, one of the most important regional environmental treaties and one of the most important human rights treaties of the last twenty years. Among many other important provisions, Article 9 provides that “each Party shall guarantee a safe and enabling environment for persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental

matters, so that they are able to act free from threat, restriction and insecurity.” The agreement will be open for signature beginning in September 2018.

**Climate change and human rights.** Finally, there are notable developments in climate change litigation. Last month, a [case brought by Dejusticia](#) in Colombia, on behalf of young plaintiffs, argued that the government should do more to protect their generation from the effects of climate change. And this week, the Philippines Human Rights Commission began [hearings on human rights claims](#) against 47 large companies that are among the largest carbon emitters in the world.

As always, thank you all for all of your work in defending human rights and the environment!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. Knox". The signature is stylized and cursive.

John H. Knox

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment

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