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Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment

30 July 2018

Dear friends and colleagues,

In my final newsletter as the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, I will introduce David R. Boyd, my successor; describe our upcoming report to the General Assembly; and express my deep gratitude to you for the help you have given the mandate and me over the last six years.

Introducing the next Special Rapporteur. My second and final three-year term expires at the end of this month. On 1 August, David Boyd takes up the mandate for the next three years. The Human Rights Council selected David at its last session, on 6 July, choosing from a very strong group of candidates.

David is a professor at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, who has written extensively about the relationship of human rights and the environment. His many books include *[The Environmental Rights Revolution: A Global Study of Constitutions, Human Rights, and the Environment](#)*; *[The Right to a Healthy Environment: Revitalizing Canada's Constitution](#)*; *[The Optimistic Environmentalist: Progressing Towards a Greener Future](#)*; and, most recently, *[The Rights of Nature: A Legal Revolution that Could Save the World](#)*, about the worldwide movement to recognize legal rights for components of the natural world. Most recently, David contributed a chapter entitled "Catalyst for change: evaluating forty years of experience in implementing the right to a healthy environment" to a book published this summer, edited by Ramin Pejan and myself, entitled *[The Human Right to a Healthy Environment](#)*.

Before joining academia, David was the Executive Director of the Sierra Legal Defence Fund (now Ecojustice), Canada's leading public interest environmental law organization. He has advised many governments, international organizations, and civil society organizations on the relationship between human rights and the environment. More information is available at his website: <http://davidrichardboyd.com/>.

Many of you will already be familiar with David and his work. It is no exaggeration to say that he is one of the leading experts on human rights and the environment in the world. He will be an outstanding special rapporteur.

As David takes over the mandate, the various websites, social media accounts and communication mechanisms (such as this newsletter) associated with the mandate will be transferred to him as well. While this may take a few weeks in some cases, he will immediately have access to emails sent to srenvironment@ohchr.org. And the two terrific OHCHR staffers on the mandate, Jamshid Gaziyeu and Soo-Young Hwang, aren't going anywhere!

Report to the UN General Assembly. The Human Rights Council, in its resolution renewing the mandate, tasked the Special Rapporteur for the first time with reporting to the General Assembly as well as to the Council. This is an important step for the mandate, because it allows the rapporteur to present reports and issues to a broader audience.

David Boyd will present the mandate's first report to the General Assembly on 25 October. Because reports have to be submitted several months in advance of their presentation, David and I worked together to draft the report and I turned it in this month.

The main purpose of the report is to urge the General Assembly to recognize the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The report points out that the right has been recognized at the national and/or regional level by the vast majority of the countries of the world. Based on that experience, it is clear that recognizing the right would have many benefits, including raising awareness of the fundamental importance of a healthy environment for the enjoyment of human rights, and increasing support for efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.

Vehicles for recognition could include a new agreement, such as the Global Pact for the Environment proposed by France last year; a protocol to an existing human rights treaty; or a new General Assembly resolution, such as the 2010 General Assembly resolution that recognized the rights to water and sanitation.

As the report explains, the right would not be an empty vessel waiting to be filled. Human rights law already says a lot about the environment! My last report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/37/59) presented 16 Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment, which summarize the principal obligations of States under human rights law relating to the environment. The original and a more user-friendly version of that report, as well as a list of sources for the Principles, are available [here](#).

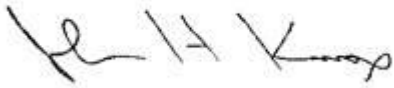
I hope that all of you will support the movement for global recognition of a human right to a healthy environment. As I told the Council, there is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come, and this is an idea whose moment is here.

Conclusion. As I come to the close, I cannot find adequate words to thank everyone for their support of this mandate over the last six years, much less the words to express my appreciation for the countless people around the world who are working to protect human rights and the

environment. As I said in my last report to the Council, I have made more than 50 trips to more than 25 countries as the special rapporteur, and everywhere I have gone, I have met people who are bringing human rights to bear on environmental threats, often at great personal risk. From attorneys in Mexico to park rangers in Mongolia, from professors in China to community activists in Madagascar, from a mother who founded an environmental organization in Kenya to conservationists in Sweden to judges in Costa Rica, from indigenous leaders in Brazil to climate negotiators in Paris to international civil servants in Geneva and Nairobi, people in every country are striving for a world in which everyone can enjoy the human rights that depend upon a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. It has been a great honor to support them in their efforts.

Of course, I'm not disappearing! I remain a professor [at Wake Forest University](#), where I'll continue to work on these issues. I look forward to seeing you down the road.

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 Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment
Henry C. Lauerman Professor of International Law
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