UN Environment’s Environmental Rights Initiative

Agenda item 3 - Protection of persons exercising their rights in conformity with the provisions of the Convention

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Already in 2018, around 50 defenders have lost their lives while protecting their community’s environment and natural resources.

Around 40% of those killed, harassed and intimidated are from indigenous and local communities from around the world.

This includes five rangers killed in the worst attack on Virunga National Park (DR Congo) to date.

This rising death toll is likely to continue if governments and businesses fail to act.
AND THINGS ARE GETTING WORSE…
UN Environment’s Policy on Environmental Defenders

• Objective: To promote greater protection for people defending their environmental rights, and identify solutions to mitigate the abuse of environmental rights which affects a growing number of people in many parts of the world

• Developed in response to growing severity of environmental rights problems and shrinking civil society space

• Three-pronged approach: 1) Speaking Out (Rapid Response Mechanism – statements, letters, social media releases); 2) Legal Assistance; 3) Scaling up Partnerships
UN Environment calls on governments and business to promote, protect and respect environmental rights

World Environment Day - 5 June 2018

Joint Statement by UN Environment and Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment

"It's time we all recognise the human right to a healthy environment"

GENEVA (1 June 2018) – Speaking ahead of World Environment Day on 5 June, the head of UN Environment* and the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment** issued a statement urging the United Nations to recognise the human right to a healthy environment.

“We believe that the historic moment has arrived for the United Nations to recognise the human right to a healthy environment at the global level.

The interdependence between human rights and the environment has become undeniable. A healthy environment is necessary for the full enjoyment of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and development. At the same time, the exercise of human rights such as information, participation, remedy, and freedom of expression and association, is critical for the protection of a healthy environment.

Unfortunately, the links between human rights and the environment are often most evident when environmental harm causes injury, destruction, and death. Over one million children die every year as a result of air and water pollution alone, and climate change and the loss of global biodiversity threaten present as well as future generations.

Our knowledge of new threats is growing – for example, the rising tide of plastic pollution demands greater attention and an effective response.
Environmental Rights Initiative

- The next phase in UN Environment’s work on environment and human rights.
- Priorities and actions to mobilize partnerships and advance environmental rights for people and planet.
- Mandate: Resolutions and decisions of the Human Rights Council, UN Environment Assembly, and Montevideo Programme IV.
- Global launch at Human Rights Council in March 2018. Regional launches being planned.
THE ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE

WORK AREAS

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC OUTREACH:

ADVOCACY

INFORMATION SHARING

PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

OBJECTIVES

PROMOTE AWARENESS:

PROMOTING INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

PROMOTE ACCESS TO INFORMATION:

STRENGTHENING ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

BUILDING THE KNOWLEDGE BASE ON ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS
BRINGING ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION NEARER TO THE PEOPLE

- Promote, Protect, Respect Environmental Rights

1. Support environmental defenders
2. Engage governments (and other legal stakeholders)
3. Collaborate with media
4. Work with businesses
Advanced through a Coalition of Environmental Rights Champions
Outreach: Communicating your work to a global audience and to decision-makers. Provide us with your links for important materials for www.environmentalrightsinitiative.org

Rapid Response Mechanism: eyes and ears on the ground...intelligence on emerging threats and actual incidents; unenvironment-defenders@un.org

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