

Working Group of the Parties

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Statement by OHCHR

Agenda item 6

Promotion of the Convention and other relevant developments and interlinkages

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends,

My name is Soo-Young Hwang, a human rights officer working with the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, Mr. David Boyd at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

It's my pleasure to have an opportunity to speak at the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention under this very important agenda item – on inter-linkages, promotion of the Convention and other relevant developments.

On Inter-linkages

The Aarhus Convention is at the centre of manifesting the inseparable inter-linkages between human rights and the environment. Its principles – the rights to information, to participation and to justice -- are also fundamental human rights that are stipulated in international human rights treaties. By implementing the Aarhus Convention, States are not only meeting their environmental obligations but also human rights obligations.

The human rights community including the Special Rapporteur himself has repeatedly stressed the important role that the Aarhus Convention is playing in the promotion and protection of human rights as well as a healthy environment.

On Promotion of the Convention

The Special Rapporteur's research concluded that the right to a healthy environment is recognized by over 150 States in their constitutions, national legislation and regional agreements. Majority of Parties to the Convention recognize this right at the national level, and additionally through the Convention.

While there are many ways of promoting the Convention, there are two specific ways that Parties might consider.

One is by fully implementing or applying all provisions contained in the Convention including Article 1 which refers to everyone's right to live in an adequate environment.

Two is by promoting the right to live in an adequate environment, or the right to a healthy environment, at the global level while promoting the accession to the Convention by other UN Member States especially those that recognize the right to a healthy environment at the national level.

On Relevant developments

The right to a healthy environment, despite its self-evident establishment at the national and regional levels, has not yet reached a universal and global recognition.

However, since the Special Rapporteur made a call for the global recognition of the right to a healthy environment, there has been a noticeable progress.

The UN Human Rights Council and the UN Environment Assembly adopted resolutions that make references to the right to a healthy environment. Several States have expressed their support for the global recognition and some States are exploring ways to recognize this right at the global level.

The leading voices on environment and human rights, including the former Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, have also explicitly supported the Special Rapporteur's call for the global recognition.

On behalf of the UN Special Rapporteur, I would like to invite Parties to the Convention to consider supporting the global recognition of the right to a healthy environment so that the right can be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere.

The recognition will not only ensure the enjoyment of everyone's right to live in a healthy environment but it will also help promote the objective and principles of the Convention and facilitate Parties to meet their human rights obligations at the same time.

Thank you.