

• STOP ECOCIDE FOUNDATION •

Statement to the UN Water Conference New York 22-24 March 2023

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues:

We all know that water is the lifeblood of the Earth and, like our blue planet, we are largely made up of it ourselves. Our lives and bodies depend upon unpolluted, safe water, and so does the life of the planet.

We also know that severe collateral damage of industrial activities, much of which already breach existing regulation, continues to affect water related ecosystems with impunity, with disastrous results for climate and biodiversity. Relevant regulatory and rights frameworks are all too often poorly monitored and badly enforced.

We would suggest this situation results from the deeply ingrained mindset we have developed over centuries of separating ourselves from the living world upon which we depend for our food, our water, the air we breathe... we simply take these things for granted and treat them as an infinite bank of resources, continuing to inflict levels of destruction which directly affect the future of millions of species including our own.

Making “ecocide” - severe and either widespread or long-term harm to nature - a **crime** could provide the legal guardrail to steer us back from this precipice by setting a clear outer boundary to deter, prevent and sanction the worst threats to vital ecosystems and keystone species.

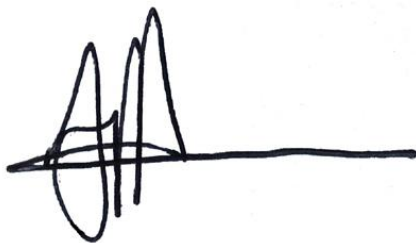
Moreover, putting this kind of outer boundary framework in place also serves to stimulate strategic change in the right direction, something that has hitherto been proving very difficult. We are witnessing a rising frustration at all levels with the failure to actually **implement** the multilateral environmental agreements and pledges which already exist. The correct criminal law parameters can act as a kind of creative constraint, provoking the urgent new thinking and innovation we already know is needed. (In this way ecocide law will positively contribute either directly or indirectly to a great many of the SDG targets: 3.9, 6.3, 6.6, 11.5, 12.4, 12.6, 12.c, 13.2, 14.1, 14.c, 15.1, 15.2, 15.3, 15.4, 15.5, 15.7, 16.3, 16.4, 16.5, 16.b, 17.13, 17.14.)

A swelling demand for international recognition of ecocide is now coming from voices as diverse as the [global youth movement](#) and the [global investment community](#), along with faith groups, lawyers, academics, NGOs and politicians.

An important milestone was passed in 2021, when an independent panel of legal experts from around the world, convened by our Foundation, reached consensus on a [legal definition of “ecocide”](#) as a proposed international crime. The core text is concise and balanced: *“ecocide means unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.”*

This definition has gained significant political traction around the world, and [individual states](#) are also now considering recognition of ecocide; indeed, discussion of it is on public record at parliamentary and/or government level in no fewer than [26 states](#) which are parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The Council of Europe has recommended its member states to legislate for ecocide, and the EU is seriously considering inclusion of ecocide-level crimes in its revised *Directive on the protection of the environment through criminal law*.

We strongly encourage both states and the private sector to take ecocide law extremely seriously, as a strategic preventive framework that has huge potential to protect climate and biodiversity and also to build in resilience, since when we know what we must avoid, it becomes so much easier to frame what we need for a thriving future.



Jojo Mehta

Chair, Stop Ecocide Foundation

Co-Founder & Executive Director, Stop Ecocide International



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Registered address: Willow Court, Beeches Green, Stroud, GL5 4BJ, UK. **Registered company number:** 10830859

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