



4TH INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON
**Small Island
Developing States**
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ST. JOHN'S, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

SIDS4 Conference Side Event

Right to a Healthy Environment: A Prerequisite for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean

May 28, 2024, 12pm, Room 4

**Organized by: Jamaica Environment Trust (JET),
Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), Office of
the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
(OHCHR) and the Department of Sustainable Development,
Government of St. Lucia**

Background on the event

Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are highly dependent on a healthy natural environment for their economic development. They are, however, extremely vulnerable to natural hazards and are already experiencing severe ecosystem loss and environmental pollution. These environmental issues significantly impact people, especially vulnerable and marginalized communities who rely heavily on nature for their livelihoods, culture, and well-being. Our session explored the meaning of the right to a healthy environment, its importance for sustainable development, the role of the Escazú Agreement, and the crucial contribution of environmental defenders to sustainable development. We also provided recommendations to strengthen access rights, supporting the right to a healthy environment. Currently, the right to a healthy environment is not widely recognized or protected in the Caribbean. Nonetheless, it is essential for addressing the development challenges faced by SIDS, including building resilient economies, ensuring environmental protection, and creating safe and prosperous societies.

Key Issues discussed

- Endorsing the right to a healthy environment is essential for the social and economic development of Small Island Developing States. This recognition paves the way for stronger environmental laws, enhanced public participation, and sustainable practices for the betterment of individuals and communities.
- Unfortunately, environmental issues have been seen largely as academic and needs to how it touches and affects people's lives.
- Access to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters, which are key pillars of the Escazu Agreement, contributes to upholding the right to a healthy environment.
- Environmental rights defenders in the Caribbean play a multifaceted and crucial role in protecting the region's natural heritage, promoting sustainable development, and ensuring the health and well-being of its inhabitants. Their work is vital not only for preserving the environment but also for supporting economic stability, public health, and community resilience in the face of environmental challenges.
- Endorsing access to information and transparency in environmental decision-making reduces the risk of mismanagement and corruption practices, enabling positive monitoring of the allocation of climate funds.
- We need to create robust local framework that not only recognizes, but also actively enforces the right to a healthy environment, ensuring that it is respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Key recommendations for action

- Caribbean SIDS need to do much more to recognise and protect the right to a healthy environment as central to delivering sustainable development. Currently, only two countries in English speaking Caribbean recognize the right to a healthy environment in their constitution.
- The right to a healthy environment must be central to delivering sustainable development, and it needs to be seen as a relevant to people.

- The right to a healthy environment needs to be recognized at the local, national and regional level but also extended to the global commons. Deep sea mining has the potential to negatively impact people's right to a healthy environment and this must be recognized and discussed.
- Caribbean governments need to sign on as a Party to the Escazu Agreement and implement it. The public should get involved and use the mechanisms: action plan, committee to support implementation and compliance.
- We must recognise, value and support the important work of environmental defenders and build solidarity across the region.
- National constitutions, laws, policies, mechanisms, standards must be strengthened and implemented to protect environmental defenders and deliver the procedural access rights: information, participation, justice. We need to share expertise, experiences, lessons and recommendations across the region.