

A transformative post-2015 human rights vision requires innovative linkages with environmental issues, Co-organized by OHCHR and UNEP, 12 December 2013

Representatives of both Member States and civil society participated at this event, which was co-organized by UNEP and moderated by **the Director of UNEP NYO, Mr. Elliot Harris**. The event aimed to highlight **linkages between environmental issues and human rights**, and the speakers emphasised that **the Post-2015 Development Agenda (P2015DA) needs to address these interlinkages and interdependencies**.

At the outset, **Mr. Harris** stressed that **human rights and the environment were inextricably linked**, for example through ecosystems that provided food for humans, and he noted that the linkages needed to be addressed in an integrated way in the P2015DA. **Mr. Craig Mokhiber, OCHR**, said there was a real urgency for action in terms of addressing environmental issues and argued that **the ongoing degradation of the environment was a direct result of failure to observe international human rights laws**. He emphasized that States had a legal obligation to protect the human rights to health, food, etc. but despite that, public and private actors continued to make decisions that negatively impacted those rights. Mr. Mokhiber stressed that civil society had an important role to play in the work to put an end to the policies that allowed environmental degradation. **Mr. John Knox, UN independent expert on human rights and the environment**, stated that the three pillars of sustainable development rested on the base of respect for human rights, and underscored that **States had a responsibility to regulate harm caused by private actors** as well as public ones. Assessing environmental impacts and making the information public was argued to be essential in order to be able to provide remedies to environmental harm. Mr. Knox stressed that **human rights and the environment were not only interrelated but interdependent**. Where the MDGs failed to safeguard the environment and, thus, prevented fulfilment of certain human rights, the SDGs needed to properly address the issue, he argued.

Mr. Matej Marn, Counsellor and DPR of Slovenia, stated that sustainable development was a key priority for the country and argued that future universal goals must integrate the full range of human rights, address all pillars of sustainable development and take cross-cutting issues into account. **The Director of the Environmental Health Program off the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), Mr. Marcos Orellana**, emphasized that linkages between the environment and the right to development could be operationalized, with indicators for monitoring implementation. He called for increased international cooperation with CBDR as a guiding principle, and underscored the importance of governance; stating that a global framework based on accountability was essential for a successful P2015DA. **Mr. Francisco Javier García-Larrache, Counsellor at Spain's UN Mission**, underlined that the rights to **water and sanitation, in particular, needed to be recognized as human rights**, and argued that access to those basic services was essential for sustainable development. He stated that the P2015DA should be human-rights based; including the rights of future generations. **Ambassador René Orellana (Bolivia)** emphasised that in order to achieve sustainable development, **humans must live in harmony with Mother Earth** and not only view nature as an object to be used as stock or capital but as a subject with rights of its own. The Ambassador was concerned that the UNEP document "Towards a Green Economy" regarded nature too much as a commodity and argued that **we need to use policies to operationalize the regeneration and restoration of nature** that was the goal of the Stockholm Declaration as well as the Rio outcome document.

During the open discussion, it was argued that SDG targets and indicators needed to be set in a way that ensured that all human rights were fulfilled. It was stressed that norms for human rights and environmental protection widely existed, but needed to be concretized into **tangible commitments with realistic means of implementation**. The issue of gender was brought up, and it was stated

that it should be included in targets concerning, for example, water and sanitation, as women suffer more from the consequences of the lack of these services than men. Equity, including gender equity, was argued to be an important part of sustainable development. An **Indian NGO** was concerned that **the right to development was not being seriously addressed in the context of the SDGs**.

A question was also raised as to why the **environmental and human rights situation in the Niger Delta** remained unsolved and what UNEP was doing to enable action in the area, following its assessment report of 2 years back. Mr. Harris replied that UNEP has provided the required reports but that it is the national governments that must take action. He said that accountability was often a problem on the global as well as the national level, and argued that the case of Nigeria illustrated the limits of the UN system, but that there was no clear answer to why problems in the region remained.