UNEP Compendium on Human Rights and the Environment

Selected international legal materials and cases





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PREFACE

Human rights and the environment are inherently interdependent and play an integral role in achieving sustainable development objectives. Each human being depends on ecosystems and the services they provide, such as food, water, disease management, climate regulation, spiritual fulfillment, and aesthetic enjoyment. At the same time, efforts to promote environmental sustainability can only be effective if they occur in the context of conducive legal frameworks, and are greatly informed by the exercise of certain human rights, such as the rights to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice.

The linkages between human rights and the environment are multi-dimensional and reciprocal and advancing goals in either field has the potential to promote the achievement of goals in the other. A significant number of court cases, national constitutions and legislation, and international instruments have acknowledged the close linkages between these fields, and this is an important step towards an organic and coherent consideration of human rights and the environment in national and international frameworks.

The synergies between human rights and the environment have been increasing dramatically through recent developments. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have strengthened their collaboration in this field. In 2012, a Joint Report on Human Rights and the Environment was released by OHCHR and UNEP during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. In the same year, the United Nations Human Rights Council established, as part of its special procedures, an Independent Expert on human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment and appointed Professor John Knox to this position.

UNEP and OHCHR have then undertaken to jointly work on the identification and dissemination of good practices in this field, which will among other things support the fulfillment of the Independent Expert's mandate, which includes the identification, promotion and dissemination of good practices that relate to the use of human rights obligations and commitments to inform, support and strengthen environmental policy making, especially in the area of environmental protection.

As part of UNEP's efforts to promote environmental sustainability and in the context of its collaboration with OHCHR and the Independent Expert, this compendium provides a comprehensive compilation of legal instruments respectively on human rights and the environment at the international and regional levels, as well as jurisprudence of international and regional judicial and semi-judicial bodies related to the relationship between human rights and the environment. The compendium aims to serve as reference material for legal professionals and policy makers both in the fields of environment and human rights, and to increase awareness and knowledge of the practical applications of the linkage between these two areas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was developed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in cooperation with the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL). The Compendium was initiated by Bradnee Chambers, former Head of the Environmental Law and Governance Branch of the Division of Environmental Law and Convention of UNEP, now Executive Secretary of the Convention on Migratory Species. It was drafted and edited by Marcos Orellana, Director of the Human Rights & Environment Program of CIEL with inputs from a number of CIEL interns including Ana Paula Parente, Lydia Slobodian, Dominique Lochridge-Gonzales, Jamie Sawyer, Dustin Lauermann and Erica Smith. Inputs were also provided by the Organization of American States.

Maria Cristina Zucca and Lara Ognibene, Legal Officers with the Division of Environmental Law and Conventions of UNEP, undertook a final critical review and consolidation of the Compendium. Further, Felicitas Werber and Catherine Ayres, respectively an intern and a consultant with UNEP, have contributed to the final editing.

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