

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 49th SESSION

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment

10-11 March 2022

In his opening remarks, **Mr. David R. Boyd, Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment**, congratulated the Council for adopting [Resolution 48/13 on 8 October 2021](#), a historic moment recognizing for the first time the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment play as the toxification of the planet is intensifying. He highlighted the fact that main international environmental law instruments do not mention human rights and that the burden of contamination falls disproportionately upon individuals and communities already enduring poverty, discrimination and systemic marginalization. The Special Rapporteur specified that people inhabiting “sacrifice zones” are exploited, traumatized and stigmatized and that pollution and toxic substances affect the enjoyment of the rights to life, health, water, food, housing, and an adequate standard of living. He expressed increased concern for the premature deaths, impaired health and lives lived in these sacrifice zones, which demonstrates that current approaches to managing the risks posed by pollution and toxic substances are failing. Finally, the Special Rapporteur urged States to prevent the further creation of sacrifice zones, and to take urgent action regarding the existing ones.

On his visit to **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**, the Special Rapporteur commended the country’s policy efforts and good practices regarding its waste management system and expressed that the country’s future is in the world’s hands, as it requires urgent climate action and increased climate finance.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (country concerned) recalled the devastation caused by the eruption of the La Soufriere Volcano in April 2021, and the severe floods and landslides. It highlighted that the biggest threat to the environment is climate change, and that the government is already taking steps to address the Special Rapporteur’s concerns on Saint Vincent and the Grenadines’ heavy reliance of fossil fuel, the management of toxic substances and chemicals, air quality and its monitoring, and public engagement on environmental matters.

Interactive dialogue: Most countries agreed to strengthen cooperation in the field of environmental protection and coincided on the fact that one of the most urgent issues associated with climate change is its proliferation of sacrifice zones. Most of the speakers shared best practices and strategies implemented for the effective protection of the environment and human rights. **Algeria** expressed the need to assign liability on the basis of the “polluter pays” principle with a view to cleaning and repairing polluted sites and denounced the destructive environmental impact of the radiation emitted by nuclear tests. **China** called on the [U.S.](#), [Canada](#) and other countries that have built large-scale polluting industrial facilities in the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities and denounced the “Cancer Belt” and “Chemical Valley” for seriously threatening people’s right to life and health. **Costa Rica (on behalf of Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Uruguay)** expressed that plastics also represent an obstacle in global efforts to adapt to and mitigate climate change. **Cuba** expressed its concern for the dumping of toxic waste and illegal fishing in the waters of [African countries](#), environmental pollution in extractive zones, and the inadequate management of waste by the tourism industry in the waters of [small island states](#). The **EU** and **Georgia** condemned the harmful impact that the [Russian](#) military aggression against [Ukraine](#) and its people will have on the environment and considered unacceptable any threats to the safety or military actions directed at NPPs (Nuclear power plants).

Finland (on behalf of Nordic-Baltic Countries) considered it vital to integrate a gender perspective and empower women for environmental sustainability and ensure that environmental human rights

remained committed to act as the Central Asia Regional Climate Hub for sustainable development. The **Russian Federation** called on the Special Rapporteur to refrain from trying to position individual recommendatory documents as legally binding and imposing new obligations on States in the field of environmental protection. The **U.S.** expressed concern over the plastic pollution that has spread to every corner of the planet. **Venezuela** denounced rich countries for exporting pesticides, hazardous materials and technological garbage to the countries of the South and highlighted that consumerism in the Global North is negatively impacting the right to health and ecosystems. The **State of Palestine** denounced Israel's illegal use of the OPT to dump and process its toxic hazardous wastes.

NGOs called to examine gender equality in the mining industry, as environmental degradation exacerbates the unequal burden that women bear; highlighted the importance of a human rights-based approach as well as the participation of youth and children in the negotiation of future treaties; asked States to provide a more coherent vision of the measures to be taken to prevent the emergence of sacrifice zones and to rehabilitate them; condemned the exposure of people to the toxic disasters in Brazil; called to ensure a gender just transition and the involvement of youth in environmental treaties and resolutions; denounced Israel's policies of land confiscation, settlement expansion, exploitation and pillage of Palestinian natural resources.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (61 country delegations):

Finland (on behalf of Nordic-Baltic Countries), European Union, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (Country Concerned), Costa Rica (on behalf of Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Uruguay), Monaco, Paraguay, Philippines, Egypt, Germany, Nepal, Djibouti, Libya, Fiji, Slovenia, Malaysia, Iraq, France, Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Luxembourg, Maldives, China, Senegal, Burkina Faso, India, Namibia, Marshall Islands, Armenia, Saudi Arabia, Cameroon, Pakistan, Switzerland, Indonesia, State of Palestine, Austria, Russian Federation, Cambodia, Benin, El Salvador, Peru, Panama, Morocco, Algeria, Chile, Togo, Sudan, Republic of Korea, Bangladesh, Uruguay, Tunisia, United States of America, Azerbaijan, Botswana, Vanuatu, Nigeria, Croatia, United Republic of Tanzania, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Cabo Verde, Qatar, Timor-Leste, Ukraine, Pakistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (12):

GANHRI, NHR Commission of Morocco, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), Ms. Camila Silva (Joint Statement), Sikh Human Rights Group, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Right Livelihood Award Foundation, International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), Advocates for Human Rights, Earthjustice, Franciscans International, FIAN International e.V., Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling.

International Organizations (5):

FAO, UN Women, UNICEF, UNEP, UN-Habitat

To watch full meeting refer to UN Web TV, [Part 1](#), and [Part 2](#).