



GENEVA CENTRE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ADVANCEMENT AND
GLOBAL DIALOGUE



WOMEN CHAMPIONING ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

www.gchragd.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HUMAN RIGHTS RECOGNITIONS AWARDS 2023

<i>Foreword</i>	3
<i>About the Geneva Centre</i>	4
<i>HRRA 2023 Concept Note</i>	4

<i>The Jury Members</i>	6
<i>The HRRA 2023 Awardees</i>	9
<i>The Guest of Honor</i>	13

<i>The Ceremony</i>	14
<i>The Chairman's Allocution</i>	15
<i>Guest of Honor's Keynote Address</i>	17
<i>Speeches of the Awardees</i>	19
<i>Concluding remarks by the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre</i>	27



Foreword

Human rights are the bedrock of a just, fair, and inclusive society. Their celebration and defense is a testament to humanity's aspiration for equality, justice, freedom and dignity. It is in this spirit that the Geneva Centre initiated the *Human Rights Recognition Awards (HRRA)*.

The HRRA stands as more than just a recognition — it is a celebration of perseverance, dedication, and unyielding commitment to bettering our global community. While the awards come with a modest financial contribution, their true value lies in the unique opportunity they offer to the recipients: a platform for collaboration, amplified visibility, and avenues for professional growth.

Each year, the HRRA focuses on a distinct theme, illuminating particular facets of human rights advocacy. As applications for the awards pour in through public calls and individual invitations, we are reminded of the vast reservoir of human spirit and determination that exists globally.

For the 2023 edition, our lens was firmly focused on "*Women Championing Environmental Rights*." This theme resonates today more than ever, as the world grapples with environmental challenges that necessitate collective action. By celebrating women at the forefront of environmental rights, we hope to underscore the indomitable spirit and resilience of female advocates in this crucial realm. From safeguarding our precious natural resources to advocating for climate justice, their contributions are paramount.

On December 10th, as we commemorate International Human Rights Day, we also mark another year of the HRRA. This tradition, initiated in 2021, has grown to become a significant milestone in the human rights calendar. **The 2023 HRRA is not just an award; it is an acknowledgment, a tribute, and a clarion call for more women to lead the way in environmental protection and sustainability.**

To all our passionate female advocates and contributors: this is your stage, your moment. We celebrate you, honor you, and stand by you in your quest for a sustainable, equitable, and just world.



About the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement & Global Dialogue

Established in Geneva in 2013, the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement & Global Dialogue (GCHRADG) is an independent think-tank and advocacy institution committed to promoting a universal human rights system based on values of non-discrimination, equity, inclusivity and solidarity. In 2017, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) granted the Centre special consultative status. The Geneva Centre's mission is to identify and actively promote human rights and contribute to efforts to address the main challenges, as well as encourage those who work in this field.



HRRA 2023 Concept Note

Why the Human Rights Recognitions Awards was initiated?

Every year on December 10th, [International Human Rights Day](#) is observed in remembrance of the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This declaration was a landmark achievement in the history of human rights as it established the fundamental rights that should be enjoyed by all individuals irrespective of their race, gender, religion, or nationality.

In 2021, the Geneva Centre established the Human Rights Recognition Awards (HRRA) to mark the occasion of International Human Rights Day. The Awards are a tribute to the tireless efforts of individuals who work to promote and protect human rights worldwide. The 2023 edition of the HRRA Awards was even more special as it celebrated the [75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and its fundamental rights of equality, freedom and justice for all.



The theme for 2023: "Women Championing Environmental Rights"

The focus of the 2023 HRRA was on "Women Championing Environmental Rights". This theme was intended to acknowledge and pay tribute to women who have exhibited remarkable skills, innovation and perseverance in the realm of environmental protection, conservation, and sustainability. These include but are not limited to, safeguarding natural resources, championing renewable energy, advocating for climate justice, promoting sustainable agriculture, and implementing waste reduction measures.



The primary objective of the 2023 HRRA was to encourage and empower more women to assume leadership positions in the domains of environmental protection and sustainability, and thereby robustly promote and defend environment-related human rights. By recognizing the exceptional accomplishments of women in these fields, the awards aim to amplify their voices, raise awareness of their work, and inspire others to follow their lead.

Selection Process and Criteria



There are two ways to apply for the HRRA: through public calls and by invitations by sent by the Geneva Centre. All applicants are required to complete the application form via the designated website. A distinguished and impartial international jury, which included experts in environmental rights and a former HRRA awardee, was responsible for selecting the recipients.

The HRRA jury evaluates nominations based on the following criteria:

- Nominees must align with the year's theme, the 2023 being "Women Championing Environmental Rights," and have been involved in the related, mentioned activities for at least two years.
- Nominees must provide evidence-based proof that their work benefits the local community. To support their nomination, they are required to complete a Selection Form that includes external documentation, such as references and support materials from partners, beneficiaries, media, or other external stakeholders. The nominees must also outline how the financial contribution of the award will be used to advance their ongoing project or a new initiative.
- Nominees are expected to be actively engaged in related activities at the time of nomination.

Nomination Process

A shortlist of nominees is submitted to the Awards jury based on a pre-selection by the Geneva Centre. Following the application deadline, the jury reviews this shortlist and selects the four awardees. The process then proceeds as follows:

- Contacting the shortlisted nominees.
- Those selected to receive the 2023 HRRA are informed of their selection at the latest by the beginning of December, followed by an online award ceremony, this year on Friday 8th December 2023, since the 10th fell on a Sunday.

Award Categories

1. **Award of Environment Rights Champion:** A financial award of 1000 USD is presented to each of the three awardees.
2. **Award of Honor:** The Honorary Award is presented to the fourth awardee (no monetary prize accorded). All awardees receive a Certificate of Recognition after the Ceremony.

The Jury Members

This year, the Geneva Centre was honored to host a distinguished jury panel of five international experts, renowned for their expertise, steadfast commitment to environmental protection and sustainability. Each juror brought invaluable knowledge and unique insights for the evaluation of the short-list nominees and final selection of the awardees.

David Hunter

is a distinguished Professor of International and Comparative Environmental Law at American University's Washington College of Law.

His leadership extends to serving on the Boards of Accountability Counsel, the Center for International Environmental Law, the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide-US, and the Project on Government Oversight. As a Member Scholar of the Center for Progressive Reform and a key figure in several prominent environmental and legal groups, David's influence is widespread.

He is the co-author of acclaimed publications such as "International Environmental Law & Policy" and "Climate Change Law." With a deep-seated passion for human rights and environmental intersections, his research illuminates the stage.



Laura Schmitt Olabisi

is an esteemed Professor at Michigan State University, spanning both the Department of Community Sustainability and the Environmental Science and Policy Program. With a rich research portfolio, she delves into pressing global challenges: from soil erosion, deforestation, and greenhouse gas emissions to water sustainability and the adoption of organic agricultural methodologies. Laura's work stands as a testament to her commitment to both community and environmental well-being.



serves as the dynamic Country Director of APAD Indonesia, where she spearheads initiatives for disaster resilience and community sustainability. Formerly the Chairperson at PRAISE, Sinta significantly influenced sustainable packaging and recycling practices in Indonesia. A committed advocate for community empowerment and environmental stewardship, Sinta has led transformative projects under APAD and PRAISE, driving impactful change and laying a foundation for a sustainable future.

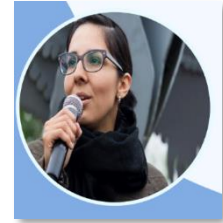


Is a passionate advocate who actively forges connections between indigenous peoples, local community leaders, their respective governments, and vital institutions within critical ecosystems spanning Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Her unwavering commitment lies in empowering strong national groups, with a special focus on securing land rights and land tenure recognition as fundamental prerequisites. These essential elements form the bedrock upon which policies and practices for the sustainable management of natural resources by indigenous peoples and local communities are built. At the helm of the Land Tenure Facility, Ms. Royo leads a dedicated team of fifteen professionals, working tirelessly to secure both financial and technical support for community-led initiatives. Their aim? To create lasting, sustainable solutions, even in the face of looming threats such as landscape conversion and devastation.



Eriel Deranger (🇨🇦)

is a passionate advocate for Indigenous rights and environmental justice, Eriel serves as the inaugural Executive Director of Indigenous Climate Action, Canada's premier Indigenous-led climate justice organization. Her leadership and commitment drive the intersection of Indigenous sovereignty and climate action.



Monique Ntumngia – Cameroon



Monique Ntumngia

Meet Monique Ntumngia, a trailblazing sustainable entrepreneur and human rights advocate fiercely championing climate-gender justice. Her mission? To illuminate the lives of every woman and girl in African villages with the fundamental human right to electricity and clean cooking fuel.

As a trained legal professional with a fiery passion for entrepreneurship, Monique is reshaping Africa's sustainable development landscape. She's the visionary Founder and Executive Director of Green Girls Organisation, a Pan-African energy social enterprise. Leveraging AI, her team identifies and tackles specific clean energy challenges faced by women and girls in rural African communities. Their solution? Tailored solar and biogas installations that bring light and sustainable cooking options to those in need.

Co-Founder and Executive Director of Monafrik Energy, Monique is revolutionizing the clean tech space. Her company's AI-powered smart home energy management system is a game-changer, optimizing energy use, slashing appliance costs, and fostering sustainability through real-time monitoring and personalized recommendations.

Monique's dedication to providing clean, affordable energy extends beyond Cameroon, touching lives across Africa and the world. She's not just lighting up homes; she's igniting hope and change.

Awardee Fatou Jeng – Gambia



HRRA 2023



Fatou Jeng

Meet Fatou: A Climate Change Powerhouse

Introducing Fatou, a dynamic force in climate change education, advocacy, and gender equality. With a rich 7-year journey in this critical field, Fatou's academic achievements are as impressive as her professional ones, holding a bachelor's degree in Journalism and Digital Media from the University of The Gambia and a master's degree in Environment, Development, and Policy from the University of Sussex as a distinguished Chevening scholar.

As a trusted climate advisor to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Fatou's influence is global. She's the founder of Clean Earth Gambia, a leading youth-led environmental NGO in The Gambia, and a pivotal co-leader of the Women and Gender working group of YOUNGO at the UNFCCC, shaping gender and climate change policies from COP23 to COP27. Her organization, Clean Earth Gambia, is at the forefront of environmental

action, mobilizing over 3000 young Gambians and training 2000+ youth in climate crisis awareness. Notably, under her leadership, over 42,000 trees have been planted, combating the city's vulnerability to sea-level rise and bolstering environmental resilience.

efforts have rallied support from lawyers, politicians, and civil society groups, amplifying the voices of those often unheard.

In partnership with Growing Green, Fatou co-hosted The Gambia's first-ever Eco-event, uniting environmental NGOs, sustainability entrepreneurs, and schools, and providing crucial support to smallholder farmers and schools in their environmental endeavors.

In 2022, Fatou's vision birthed the She-Climate Fellowship, a transformative 6-month program for young women in The Gambia, focusing on climate negotiations, entrepreneurship, and the gendered impacts of climate change.

As a former lead on Women and Gender at YOUNGO, Fatou has been instrumental in advocating for gender representation in climate negotiations. Her expertise has led to organizing webinars, training, and high-level panel discussions, including sharing the stage with global leaders at COP26.

Fatou's pen is as mighty as her voice. She's a published author on climate change impacts, contributing to significant publications and advocating for climate justice for vulnerable communities, especially in the global south.

Recognized as a Top 100 Young African Conservation Leader 2021 by WWF and one of the 8 women shaping Africa's Future by the Global Landscape Forum, Fatou's voice has resonated in over 20 global and regional climate events, including the United Nations General Assembly.

Featured in The New York Times, BBC, and more, Fatou's leadership continues to inspire and drive meaningful change in the climate arena.



www.gchragd.org

#HRRA2023 #WomenChampioningRights #EnvironmentalHeroes



Search A-Z Site Index



The Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change

Awardee Hero Wakil – Kurdistan, Iraq



HRRA 2023



to raising awareness about the mental health impacts of FGM and striving to eradicate this practice.

In 2016, I led the Peace Campaign for Syrian and Iraqi refugee women and girls, fostering economic independence through skill-building courses in sweet making, sewing, and more.

Since 2012, my focus has expanded to include environmental protection. I've spearheaded projects like tree planting in refugee camps, cleaning water sources, and tourist spots, and conducting educational seminars on the dangers of plastic and its reuse. My organization proudly runs a recycling center and a facility for plastic collection and reuse. We're also pioneering the use of cotton bags as a sustainable alternative to plastic, promoting their widespread adoption.

Today, I continue to be a driving force in human rights, environmental conservation, and women's rights. Our team conducts a myriad of courses, seminars, and activities, supported by international organizations. Our latest venture is a model house that innovatively reuses wastewater and harnesses solar energy for electricity. We're also empowering communities through sewing courses, transforming old fabrics into new treasures.

Join me in this journey of making a lasting difference – for our planet, for women, and for future generations.



www.gchrgd.org

#HRRA2023 #WomenChampioningRights #EnvironmentalHeroes

Hero Wakil Jafaar

Meet Hero Wakil – a visionary leader born in the historic city of Halabja in 1986. As the dynamic director of the Nwe organization, I am at the forefront of championing environmental sustainability and advocating for women's rights. My journey is rooted in the scenic landscapes of Halabja province, in the heart of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where my lifelong passion for nature and human rights took flight.

My career is a mosaic of impactful initiatives in human rights, environmental stewardship, and the empowerment of women. Starting in 2006, I spearheaded efforts at a center dedicated to women and girls, focusing on rights protection and skill development through engaging seminars and courses. The following year, I took to the airwaves on Radio Dangi Nwe, presenting a groundbreaking program on women's and human rights.

In 2008, my commitment to children's rights led me to oversee the Play Bus project, bringing joy and play to rural children through toys and play equipment. My journey then took a pivotal turn in 2014 when I became a trainer in women's rights and an advocate against female genital mutilation (FGM), collaborating with UNICEF to support affected women – a cause close to my heart. My efforts extended



Honorary Awardee Dr. Priscilla Achakpa – Nigeria



HRRA 2023



Dr. Priscilla Mbarumun Achakpa

Meet Dr. Priscilla Mbarumun Achakpa, the visionary Founder and Global President of the Women Environmental Programme (WEP). Since 1997, Dr. Achakpa has been a beacon of hope, transforming lives in Kaduna State, Nigeria, and beyond.

Under her leadership, WEP emerged from a deep concern for the pollution impacts on women and children. Dr. Achakpa's academic prowess spans from Business Administration to a Doctorate in Economics, fueling her passion for environmental and human rights advocacy. WEP's journey is marked by significant milestones: from preventing the demolition of informal settlements in Abuja to restoring peace in conflict-ridden communities like Agila in Benue State. Their work has earned them the prestigious Community Peacebuilding Award.

Dr. Achakpa's commitment extends to providing essential services like boreholes and sanitation training across Nigeria, empowering communities

towards self-sufficiency and resilience.

Championing women's participation in governance and fighting against gender-based violence, WEP has been instrumental in passing crucial legislation like the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act in Benue State.

In the face of climate change, WEP stands tall, aiding communities to adapt through sustainable agriculture and energy initiatives. Their advocacy led to Nigeria's National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change.

WEP's influence isn't confined to Nigeria; it's a force in several African countries and a key player in global climate change advocacy. Dr. Achakpa's leadership has been recognized globally, including the Albert Ballin Award for Global Action 2022 and being named a Climate Change Warrior by Vogue Magazine.

With over 20 million lives touched, WEP continues to combat extremism, promote peace, and empower women and youth. Dr. Achakpa's journey is more than a story of awards; it's a testament to relentless dedication to our planet and humanity.



www.gchragd.org

#HRRA2023 #WomenChampioningRights #EnvironmentalHeroes

The Guest of Honor

Ayisha Siddiqa

Climate Advisor to the United Nations Secretary General



HRRA 2023 Guest of Honor

Ayisha Siddiqa

Ayisha Siddiqa is the Climate Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General. Emanating from a rich Pakistani-American tapestry, Siddiqa is a steadfast champion for human rights and tribal lands. As the co-founder of "Polluters Out" and "Fossil Free University", Ayisha amplifies marginalized voices and demands accountability from global polluting firms. Presently a scholar at NYU School of Law, she bridges environmental and human rights sectors with the vibrant youth climate movement. Recently, her tireless efforts were spotlighted when Time Magazine honored her as 'Woman of the Year'.



The Ceremony

On December 8, 2023, the Awards Ceremony was held virtually and live-streamed on Zoom from 12:00 to 13:00 CET. The ceremony, orchestrated under the guidance of the Centre's Executive Director Dr. Umesh Palwankar, began with an opening allocution by the Chairman of the Centre, Ambassador Ghazi Jomaa. A pivotal moment of the ceremony was the delivery of a poignant message by Guest of Honor Ms. Aiysha Siddiqua, the Climate Adviser to the UN Secretary-General. Her words, resonating with urgency and insight, were transmitted directly from the heart of environmental discourse at the COP 28 conference in Dubai, adding a layer of global significance to the HRRR ceremony proceedings.

 													
Friday 8 December 2023	HUMAN RIGHTS RECOGNITION AWARD (HRRR) Women Championing Environmental Rights The agenda of the HRRR ceremony is scheduled from 12h00 to 13h00 Friday 8 December 2023												
12h00 to 13h00	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>12:00 - 12:05</td><td>Welcoming remarks by the Geneva Centre's Executive Director Dr. Umesh Palwankar.</td></tr> <tr> <td>12:05 - 12:10</td><td>Inaugural Address by the Chairman of the Board of Management, Geneva Centre, Ambassador Ghazi Jomaa.</td></tr> <tr> <td>12:10 - 12:15</td><td>Keynote Speech by the Guest of Honor Aiysha Siddiqua, the Climate Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General.</td></tr> <tr> <td>12:15 - 12:30</td><td>Speeches by the Three Distinguished Laureates of the Environmental Rights Champions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monique Ntumngia • Fatou Jeng • Hero Wakil </td></tr> <tr> <td>12:30 - 12:35</td><td>Speech by the Honorary Awardee Dr. Priscilla Achakpa.</td></tr> <tr> <td>12:35 - 12:40</td><td>Closing Remarks by Dr. Umesh Palwankar, the Executive Director.</td></tr> </table>	12:00 - 12:05	Welcoming remarks by the Geneva Centre's Executive Director Dr. Umesh Palwankar.	12:05 - 12:10	Inaugural Address by the Chairman of the Board of Management, Geneva Centre, Ambassador Ghazi Jomaa.	12:10 - 12:15	Keynote Speech by the Guest of Honor Aiysha Siddiqua, the Climate Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General.	12:15 - 12:30	Speeches by the Three Distinguished Laureates of the Environmental Rights Champions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monique Ntumngia • Fatou Jeng • Hero Wakil 	12:30 - 12:35	Speech by the Honorary Awardee Dr. Priscilla Achakpa.	12:35 - 12:40	Closing Remarks by Dr. Umesh Palwankar, the Executive Director.
12:00 - 12:05	Welcoming remarks by the Geneva Centre's Executive Director Dr. Umesh Palwankar.												
12:05 - 12:10	Inaugural Address by the Chairman of the Board of Management, Geneva Centre, Ambassador Ghazi Jomaa.												
12:10 - 12:15	Keynote Speech by the Guest of Honor Aiysha Siddiqua, the Climate Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General.												
12:15 - 12:30	Speeches by the Three Distinguished Laureates of the Environmental Rights Champions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monique Ntumngia • Fatou Jeng • Hero Wakil 												
12:30 - 12:35	Speech by the Honorary Awardee Dr. Priscilla Achakpa.												
12:35 - 12:40	Closing Remarks by Dr. Umesh Palwankar, the Executive Director.												

The core of the ceremony was dedicated to celebrating the remarkable achievements of four individuals who have made indelible marks in the realm of environmental rights. The awardees, **Monique Ntumngia from Cameroon, Fatou Jeng from Gambia, Hero Wakil from Iraq, and Dr. Priscilla Achakpa from Nigeria**, were recognized for their unwavering dedication and transformative impact in their respective fields.

The ceremony was attended online by several interested parties, including representatives from Permanent Missions, international and Geneva-based partners, academic institutions, various international organizations, NGOs, the media, and members of the universal public.

The Chairman's Allocution

AMBASSADOR GHAZI JOMAA

Chairman of the Board of Management

Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue



Excellencies representatives of Permanent Missions, Esteemed Members of the Awards selection jury, Distinguished human rights recognition awardees, dear colleagues and friends.

I have the pleasure to inaugurate the 2023 edition of the Geneva Centre's Human Rights Recognition Awards ceremony.

International Human Rights Day is celebrated annually to commemorate the adoption of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. To contribute to the celebration of this commemorative day, in 2021, the Geneva Centre initiated its Human Rights Recognition Awards, which received widespread attention upon its inauguration. The Geneva Centre's Awards for Human Rights recognition are being given to individuals who work for the protection, promotion and advancement of human rights. The Centre trusts that the awards are not only an opportunity to acknowledge and increase the visibility of the significant work of such individuals but also present an occasion to celebrate human rights achievements. This initiative falls within the framework of the Geneva Centre's mandate to promote human rights and encourage fieldwork in this regard.

Allow me here to briefly present our Centre.

The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement & Global Dialogue is an independent, human rights think-tank and advocacy institution, established in 2013 with its headquarters in Geneva. The Centre was granted special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2017.

The Geneva Centre's mandate is based on the four pillars of research and publication on current human rights questions; training and national capacity building in human rights; advocacy through following and reporting on major international human rights developments and conferences, in particular the Human Rights Council sessions; and fourthly, the cross-cutting pillar of offering a platform for a global, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue on vital human rights issues, by organizing conferences and panel debates, with the publication of their proceedings, to promote human rights worldwide and foster mutual understanding,

tolerance and the celebration of diversity among the different peoples and regions of the world.

The theme of this year's Awards is "Women Championing Environmental Rights"

The focus of the 2023 HRRA is be on "Women Championing Environmental Rights". This theme is intended to acknowledge and pay tribute to women who have exhibited remarkable skills, abilities and innovation in the realm of environmental protection, conservation, and sustainability. These include but are not limited to, safeguarding natural resources, championing renewable energy, advocating for climate justice, promoting sustainable agriculture, and implementing waste reduction measures.

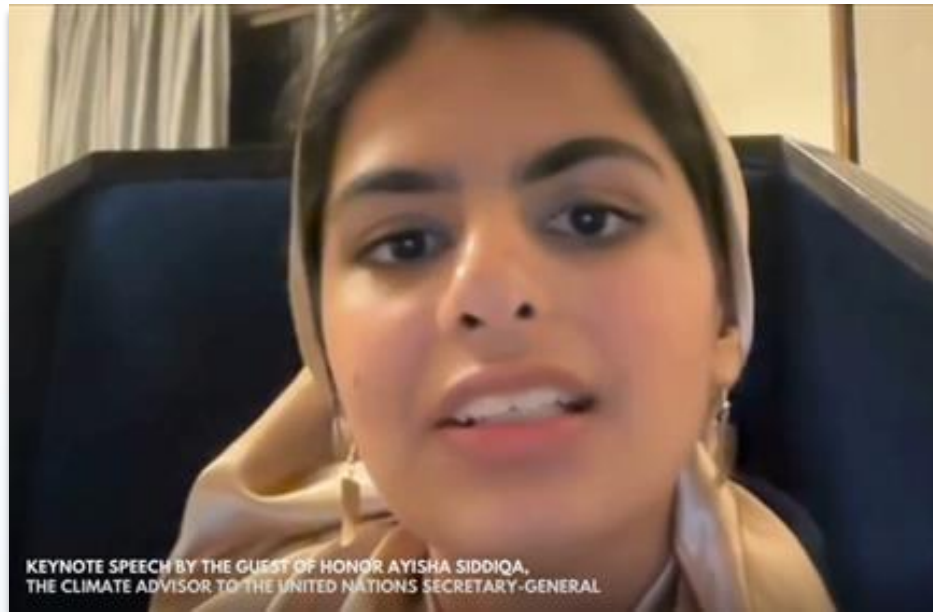
The primary objective of the 2023 HRRA is to encourage and empower more women to assume leadership positions in the domains of environmental protection and sustainability, and thereby robustly promote and defend environment-related human rights. By recognizing the exceptional accomplishments of women in these fields, the awards aim to amplify their voices, raise awareness of their work, and inspire others to follow their lead.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the President of the Awards Selection Jury, Dr. Laura Schmitt Olabisi from the USA, and to the other jury members: Dr. David Hunter (USA), Ms. Sinta Kaniawati (Indonesia), Ms. Antoinette Royo (Sweden), and Ms. Eriel Deranger (Canada), for their keen interest in these awards. They devoted considerable time and effort to the challenging task of selecting the awardees from among several deserving candidates. This dedication bears testimony to their steadfast commitment to advancing environmental rights and the role of women. With this, I open the Geneva Centre's Human Rights Awards 2023 event and passed the floor to the event Moderator, Dr Umesh Palwankar, Executive Director of the Geneva Centre.



Guest of Honor's Keynote Address

Ayisha Siddiqa



Good afternoon, and heartfelt greetings to everyone assembled for the Geneva Centre's 2023 Human Rights Recognition Award Ceremony. My name is Ayisha Siddiqa, and it is a profound privilege to be here with you today as a guest of honor for this special ceremony dedicated to celebrating women championing environmental rights.

I was asked to share a little bit about myself as the keynote speaker, and to do this, I wrote a small poem that I'd like to read to you. It is called "The Land Talks Back." My whole world is small, yet it contains multitudes. My world is my relatives – my mother, father, siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, and the earth.

My world is the land's family. It's spiders, cattle, sugarcane, and dust storms; the smell of the Atlantic Ocean, and the sand particles in every crevice of my home. My whole world is ancient. It is concentrated in the melody of a few people and places for whom I would give my last breath. That is what nature defending itself means to me, because losing any speck of my world would feel as if the whole world ended.

I share this with you today because, as environmental activists, as defenders, as winners of this prestigious award, sometimes it feels like we are being asked to save the entire world. But we don't have to. If we just protect our little corner, and everyone protects their little corner, we can make a huge difference. To me, being a human rights advocate is synonymous with being a

climate justice advocate. And I make this distinction of human rights because the loss of biodiversity and land is intimately connected to women's issues and human rights. The same structures that we are using to obstruct and excavate, harming Planet Earth, we have used against women. This brings me to share that I am incredibly inspired by the women who are champions in their own right, tirelessly working to protect their little corners of the world.

To the winners and all the nominees: Your dedication and achievements are a beacon of hope and inspiration. Your work is making a tangible difference in the world. Thank you.

I urge you, and the women and girls around the world, to step forward to embrace your role as leaders and changemakers. Take even the smallest step you can, and advocate for policies that protect our planet. Engage in community efforts to promote sustainability, and most importantly, believe in your power to make a difference.

Let us be the change we wish to see. Let us be nature defending itself, for our planet and for our future. Congratulations once again, and thank you.

Speeches of the Awardees

Awardee Monique Ntumngia – Cameroon



Ladies and gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

All due protocol observed,

It is an absolute honour and privilege to be the 2023 distinguished recipient of the Geneva Centre's Human Rights Recognition Awards as a woman championing environmental rights through the work I carry out with my Pan-African energy social enterprise, the Green Girls Organisation. As a trained legal practitioner who specialized in gender and human rights, and being passionate about entrepreneurship and women's empowerment, I never imagined I would lead Africa's only Pan-African energy social enterprise. We use artificial intelligence to provide sustainable, clean energy solutions for women and girls in African villages, who are the primary victims of the energy crisis.

I know what it means to lack access to basic amenities like electricity and potable water, having grown up using a bush lamp to light our house when my late mother could not afford a decent house with electricity and water. This was after the death of my father, when his family took everything from us, as my parents were not from the same tribe. I remember taking a vow at 12 years old that no woman or girl should have to experience what my mother and I went through simply because we were women. Therefore, entering the legal field, specializing in gender and human rights, and fighting against climate-gender injustice, did not come as a surprise at all.

For over 8 years, the Green Girls Organization has made an impact across 7 African countries and 78 African rural communities, trained 3,500 women and 5,500 girls, and set up 78 Green Girls Clubs in the villages we have impacted. These clubs are eco-educational platforms that allow women and girls who participated in our trainings to act as peer educators and facilitators to their fellow women and girls who, due to circumstances beyond their control, could not take part in our training when we were present in the village.

We have carried out 3,100 biogas installations that provide clean cooking fuel and 1,500 solar installations that provide electricity. The women have been equipped with eco-entrepreneurial skills on how to assemble solar lamps and sell them, and how to collect, package, and sell

organic fertilizer, which is an agricultural by-product obtained from biodigesters. The journey to achieving this much impact on the African continent comes with many challenges. We face these daily in the field with my team, to whom I am eternally grateful for their diligence and solutions-oriented approach, regardless of the obstacles we encounter.

This prize award money will be used for operational costs as we wrap up our work in the South region of Cameroon for the year 2023.

My ultimate goal and focus are to make an impact across every African country and ensure that, in this 21st century, every woman and girl in an African village has access to electricity and clean cooking fuel, which is a basic human right

I am grateful to my team, my donors, mentors, and family for supporting me throughout this journey. To the entire Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, thank you for your platform and recognition, which validates our work and lets us know as a team that we are seen, heard, and are advocating daily through our work for a just cause.

Thank you all.

Awardee Fatou Jeng - Gambia

Good afternoon, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I am very honored to be recognized as one of the three distinguished recipients of the "Award for Women Championing Environmental Rights" by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue.


Coming from The Gambia, a tiny country in West Africa with less than 3 million people, yet highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, I am continually inspired to defend the rights of vulnerable and minority groups, including children, women, and youth, in the face of climate crises. Although the prize is given to me, it acknowledges the work of so many individuals and groups across The Gambia, Africa, and around the world who, despite not receiving recognition, work tirelessly to advance climate justice and gender equality. They continue to plant the seeds of hope in their communities, and I am sure they are proud today.

My motivation to advocate for climate justice started at a young age, seeing my father, a farmer, struggle with the impacts of climate change on agricultural yield. This is a common challenge for many families in a country mainly dependent on agriculture, where 70% of the agricultural workforce is women. My city, Banjul, home to over 35,000 residents, is at risk of sea-level rise if the sea level rises by 1 meter. We have, as a country, over the years, experienced a rise in heatwaves, drought, and climate-induced displacement of families due to irregular rainfall patterns. With these and many other climate threats, I am inspired daily to fight for equality and justice in climate action and to contribute to building the resilience of affected communities.

I speak here today, dedicating this award to my team at Clean Earth Gambia for believing in our vision for climate justice and gender equality, and for joining me in the fight to protect and advocate for the rights of impacted groups and communities over the past years. At Clean Earth Gambia, one of the biggest youth-led environmental organizations in The Gambia, I have mobilized and

worked with over 3,000 young Gambians in protecting our environment by conducting a series of capacity-building training for more than 2,000 youth to be aware of the growing climate crises, and we have volunteers across The Gambia planting over 35,000 trees. In collaboration with the Banjul City Council, we planted over 13,000 coconut and baobab trees at Banjul Beach





in 2020 and 2021 due to our vulnerability to sea-level rise. My team continues to work with rural women farmers, developing their capacities to adapt to the impacts of climate change on their agricultural activities, and continues to advocate for the protection of their farmlands. In 2021, my team and I worked with the youth of Gunjur, conducting massive advocacy to protect the farmlands of the women farmers in Gunjur who were at risk of losing the farms they had been using for over three decades due to an expansion of a corporation. Our advocacy about the situation not only created awareness but also garnered the attention of lawyers, politicians, other civil society groups, etc., to join the campaign in protecting the farms of these women farmers. Our efforts, and due to my leadership, resulted in the farmlands of these women farmers not being taken from them. We have organized several beach clean-ups and community clean-up initiatives over the years in partnership with UN agencies, including UNICEF, and different youth networks. We organized the first-ever She-Climate Fellowship in The Gambia, a 6-month-long training for 25 women and girls on climate and gender issues with expert trainers/resource persons. This is part of our goal to train 1,000 women and girls to be climate leaders and policymakers in their communities.

We have also led several policy works in pushing for countless policy changes to ensure the meaningful participation of children, youth, and women in the climate decision-making process. I am confident that we will continue to push for positive changes in the climate landscape because I believe that the solution for a better and healthier Africa will come from us, the youth who are motivated and eager for action.

As I receive this award today, I want the world to recognize not only how affected women and girls in the Global South, and in particular Africa, are when climate change impacts hit. They continue to be exposed to other threats as a result of climate change, making it difficult for effective adaptation. I implore

all to call for more investment and finance for gender-just and gender-responsive climate adaptation policies and programs for women and girls in Africa and to call for more women in climate leadership. I am very particular about using a bottom-up approach in our climate programs, ensuring that women and youth are consulted in the design, implementation, and long-term funding of women-led and youth-led environmental organizations in Africa.

We must recognize the need for more actions to address the climate crises, especially as African countries are the most vulnerable and affected by the crises. We must ensure world leaders take addressing the climate crises seriously and our transition to climate-just societies. Let us call for transparency and accountability from our leaders in the implementation of promises made. I continue to be committed to pushing for this, most especially in my role as

Climate Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General, who continues to champion climate justice!

Finally, I wish to thank once again the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, on behalf of Clean Earth Gambia, our project beneficiaries, and African women and youth. I also wish to thank our project partners for working with us over the past years and believing in the work we do, and my family and husband for their support.

As I receive this Award today, I am more encouraged and inspired than ever!

Awardee Hero Wakil – Kurdistan, Iraq

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I stand before you with immense gratitude and a heart full of appreciation for this incredible honor. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you and express my deep appreciation for being recognized in the field of environmental advocacy. First and foremost, I want to extend my gratitude to the Geneva Centre's Human Rights Recognition Awards for selecting me as the distinguished recipient of the "Award for Women Championing Environmental Rights – 2023 Edition."



My name is Hero Wakil. I was born in 1986 in Halabja and currently serve as the director of the Nwe organization, which is dedicated to protecting the environment and women's rights.

Growing up in Halabja province, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, I have dedicated my career to the cause of environmental sustainability. I developed a profound connection to nature, which has been the driving force behind my commitment to preserving and protecting our environment.

From the outset of my journey, I understood the urgency of addressing environmental challenges. My city faced numerous wars and destruction in the past, including a significant event on March 3, 1988, when Iraqi forces under Saddam Hussein's command dropped deadly chemical bombs. This attack killed more than 5,000 people and left over 10,000 injured or missing. The incident had a profound impact on the environment, completely destroying the city and leaving toxic chemical residues in the dust for many years. Therefore, I considered it my duty to help develop the environment of my region. I have carried out several projects and

activities to increase greenery and clean water resources after their destruction and to protect the region's environment from plastic materials.

In 2012, we established the Nwe organization, a non-governmental organization working on protecting the environment, women's rights, and media. Its mission is to dedicate itself to gender equality, the empowerment of women, and improving the environment as a valuable asset in our country through implementing sustainable development projects.

At the beginning of my career in the fields of human rights, environment, and women's rights, I started working in 2006 at a center for women and girls that focused on protecting women's rights and developing their skills through a series of seminars and courses. In 2007, I prepared and presented a program on women's rights and human rights on Radio Dangi Nwe, our organization's radio station. In 2008, I worked for two years to protect and defend children's rights and supervised the Play Bus project, which provided toys and various playing equipment for rural children. In 2014, I became a trainer in women's rights and female genital mutilation (FGM), working with UNICEF to support women who were victims of FGM, a plight I also share. I discussed the effects of FGM on mental health and worked to end this practice in the community, a mission I continue to pursue. During seminars, I explained laws protecting human rights and women's rights to raise awareness and combat violence against them. In 2016, I supervised the Peace Campaign for Syrian and Iraqi refugee women and girls, helping them become economically independent through courses such as sweet making and sewing.

Since 2012, I have been actively involved in environmental protection. I have conducted several activities and projects in this field, including planting trees in refugee camps and other areas, cleaning water sources and tourist spots, and conducting awareness seminars about the harms of plastic and how to reuse it. My organization owns a small recycling center and a special facility for collecting and reusing plastic, making cotton bags as an alternative to plastic bags, which have been distributed to many people to encourage their use in daily life.

I am still working in the fields of human rights, the environment, and women's rights. We conduct numerous courses, seminars, and activities through various projects funded by international organizations. We are also currently opening a model house to reuse wastewater and use solar energy to generate electricity. We offer sewing courses to repurpose old fabric into new items.

To continue my activities in environmental protection, I plan to use this award to protect the city's environment from the damage caused by plastics. This will be achieved through awareness seminars, leaflets, radio programs, and environmental guidelines in public places.

We are also developing our factory to collect more plastic, benefiting the local environment. This project is nearly complete, expected to be operational in 6 months.

I want to express my appreciation for the collaborative spirit that defines the environmental community. None of my achievements would have been possible without the support and dedication of my colleagues, mentors, and the communities I have had the privilege of working with.

As we celebrate this moment, let us not forget that the work ahead is both challenging and crucial. Our planet faces unprecedented environmental threats, and it is our collective responsibility to address them. I am deeply committed to continuing this journey, working hand in hand with all of you to create a more sustainable and resilient future. In closing, I want to thank my family for their unwavering support, my mentors for their guidance, and every individual who has been part of my journey. This award is not just a recognition of my efforts but a testament to the power of collective action.

Let us, together, strive for a world where our actions today lay the foundation for a healthier and more sustainable tomorrow. Thank you once again for this incredible honor.

Honorary Awardee

Dr. Priscilla Achakpa – Nigeria

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, and distinguished guests,

Thank you so much for this incredible honor. I am truly humbled and grateful to receive and accept the “Honorary Recognition of HRRA Women Championing Environmental Rights Award 2023”. I would like to thank the Geneva Center for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, the selection jury, and the sponsors for making this event possible. This award is not just a recognition of my personal journey, but a testament to the collective spirit and relentless efforts of those dedicated to environmental and human rights.

I would also like to thank my family, my friends, my colleagues, partners, and my mentors for their constant support and encouragement. Without them, I would not be receiving this award.

This award holds immense significance for me as my work with the Women Environmental Programme (WEP) began as a response to the environmental challenges faced by our communities, particularly the pollution of rivers and streams in Southern Kaduna. It was a call



to action that resonated with many, leading to a movement that today spans across continents. We have stood against the demolition of informal settlements in Abuja, championed the cause of peace in conflict-ridden areas like the Agila community, and tirelessly worked to provide essential services like clean water and sanitation to those in need.

Our efforts in promoting women's participation in governance, combating gender-based violence, and empowering communities to adapt to climate change through sustainable practices have been both challenging and rewarding. The passage of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act in Benue State, Nigeria, and our advocacy leading to Nigeria's National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change are milestones that fuel our resolve to forge ahead.

As I accept this award, I am reminded of the immense work that lies ahead. This honor is not a finish line but a marker in our ongoing journey. I dedicate this award to all the women championing environmental rights around the globe. Your resilience, courage, and unwavering commitment are the true drivers of change. Together, we stand at the forefront of a movement that is not just about protecting our environment but about securing a just, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

Let this recognition serve as a beacon of hope and a call to action. May we continue to collaborate, innovate, and inspire each other to reach greater heights. Our journey is far from over, and I am excited to see what we can achieve together in the years to come.

Thank you once again for this incredible honor. It is a privilege to be part of this extraordinary community of changemakers.

Concluding remarks by the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre



Dr. Umesh Palwankar brought the ceremony to a fitting conclusion with his closing remarks:

To combat the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women, advocates at COP28 emphasized that decision-makers must not only enact policies that meet their specific needs but also recognize and utilize the unique knowledge and expertise women offer to support effective climate action. Women play a crucial role in climate solutions, as highlighted on 'Gender Equality Day' at COP28. There, women changemakers demonstrated how they are driving action. *"Women stand at the forefront of the climate battle, whether as scientists, legislators, indigenous leaders, or youth activists. They are fighting to keep the 1.5 degrees Celsius target alive"* UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed stated in her video remarks at COP 28.

Indeed, the future of our global society lies largely in their hands. Through this year's awards, the Geneva Centre offers a modest recognition of their invaluable contributions.

A huge thank you to everyone present. I warmly congratulate the awardees once again, with whom we will continue to interact. I am confident that their work will inspire many others to promote and further respect human rights worldwide.

The link to the HRRA 2023: <https://gchragd.org/geneva-centres-human-rights-recognition-awards-hrra-2023-celebrates-women-championing-environmental-rights/>