

# Right to a Healthy Environment Global Coalition Wins UN Human Rights Prize

**July 20, 2023**

Today, the [Global Coalition of Civil Society, Indigenous Peoples, Social Movements, and Local Communities for the Universal Recognition of the Human Right to a Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment](#) is one of the recipients of the prestigious 2023 [United Nations Human Rights Prize](#). The coalition is awarded for its essential role in advocating for the recognition of the right to a healthy environment by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in July 2022.

## **Read the reactions from the members of the coalition:**

“Thousands of children, young people, and allies from across the world mobilized to demand the universal recognition of the right to a healthy environment. This prize is an important tribute to the power of their voices, and those of the many other groups and communities on the frontlines of the environmental crisis. It serves to remind us of our power when we come together and makes us more determined than ever to ensure that this right is realized.”

**Joni Pegram,**

**Secretariat, Children’s Environmental Rights Initiative (CERI) coalition**

“The adoption of the UN General Assembly resolution recognizing the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment was a breakthrough achievement at the global level offering hope to children everywhere that their governments will step up to deliver action to address the environmental and climate crisis that threatens their health, education, wellbeing and even survival. With more than 1 in 4 deaths of children under 5 attributable to unhealthy environments, the resolution offers significant potential to boost implementation of child rights obligations. This prize is a tremendous honor for all those involved in the Global Coalition for the Recognition of the Right to a Healthy Environment, but equally an important recognition of the vital role civil society, Indigenous Peoples, and grassroots social movements play in delivering change, particularly when we work together. We will leverage this recognition as we continue working with partners and elevate the voices and demands of children to enact policies to make this right a reality.”

**Inger Ashing,**

**CEO, Save the Children International**

“This prize is a well-deserved recognition of the massive mobilization and great collective efforts of bigger and smaller civil society and indigenous peoples organizations, from local to global. It also serves to show decision-makers internationally that we fought for a vital and just cause and that this cause cannot be ignored or undermined anymore.”

**Sandra Epal-Ratjen,**

## **Media contact:**

**Rossella Recupero**, Communications Campaign Specialist at the Center for International Environmental Law, [press@ciel.org](mailto:press@ciel.org) | +39 340 47 39 827

**Esther de la Rosa**, Communications Coordinator at ESCR-Net [edelarosa@escr-net.org](mailto:edelarosa@escr-net.org) | +1(305)984-66-50

## **UN Representative & Senior Legal Advisor, International Commission of Jurists**

"At a time when civic space is under threat around the world, the UN Prize for Human Rights for the campaign for universal recognition of the right to a healthy environment is testament to the power of collective effort and the importance of civil society in shaping a fairer, greener future. Together, we must now push for further constitutional and statutory recognition of the right so that it delivers tangible benefits for people and the planet."

**Elaine Geyer-Allély,**

**Interim Leader, Global Governance Practice, WWF International**

"The UN Human Rights Prize serves as a beacon, illuminating the path towards a global commitment to uphold fundamental rights. This recognition sends a clear message to all corners of the world that environmental protection is our duty. We are more than policymakers or citizens – we are custodians of our planet's future, driven by the power of collective action and unified in our resolve to ensure a healthy environment for all."

**Oussama Jamal,**

**Secretary-General, U.S. Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO)**

"Our award as a collective was to obtain a year ago the formal recognition by the United Nations of the Human Right to a Healthy Environment. The UN Human Rights Prize will help us to amplify the visibility of this cause, that civil society, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples have embraced for a long time."

**Maia Seeger,**

**Executive Director for NGO Sustentarse (Chile)**

"Today's award is a dual recognition. First and foremost, it highlights the essential role of civil society and Indigenous Peoples' organizations in placing people and the environment at the forefront of policymaking. Furthermore, it acknowledges the paramount importance of this right and, therefore, the need for urgent action by all UN Member States to ensure its effective protection. For those in Europe, this is a message of hope, as we are still awaiting European States to guarantee the effective recognition and protection of the right to a healthy environment under the European Convention of Human Rights. Today, we celebrate this Prize alongside thousands of advocates. Tomorrow we will raise our voices - louder than ever - demanding concrete action from States to ensure that the right to a healthy environment can be enjoyed by all, effectively."

**Sébastien Duyck,**

**Senior Attorney and Human Rights & Climate Campaign Manager, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)**

"This unprecedented recognition demonstrates how collaboration from civil society, Indigenous Peoples, movements, and local communities from all corners of our planet is essential to motivate governments to move in the direction that our rights and the planet need. The right to a

### **Media contact:**

**Rossella Recupero**, Communications Campaign Specialist at the Center for International Environmental Law, [press@ciel.org](mailto:press@ciel.org) | +39 340 47 39 827

**Esther de la Rosa**, Communications Coordinator at ESCR-Net [edelarosa@escr-net.org](mailto:edelarosa@escr-net.org) | +1(305)984-66-50

healthy, clean, and sustainable environment has been recognized for decades in many countries of the Global South, and we have worked hard in the Coalition to ensure that this right is universally recognized for all people. It is an award that honors, inspires, and reinforces our commitment to continue working together, embracing our differences and diversities. We will continue doing all we can to make sure it's universally protected.”

**Astrid Puentes Riaño,**

**Independent consultant on climate justice, human rights, and international law**

“The American Bar Association is proud to stand alongside a global coalition of partners and share in the honor of the UN Human Rights Prize. This acknowledgment highlights our shared dedication to environmental justice, the upholding of human dignity, and the support of each person’s right to a clean and healthy environment.”

**Deborah Enix-Ross,**

**American Bar Association President**

“This recognition underscores that through unified global advocacy and political engagement, we have the capacity to share our world, ensuring the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we inhabit are not just a privilege, but a universal reality for all. The UN Human Rights Prize is a poignant affirmation of the power of collective activism in securing the UN Recognition of the Right to a Healthy Environment.”

**Nadia Ahmad,**

**Law Professor at Barry University School of Law**

“A year ago, human rights defenders worldwide welcomed the historic adoption of a resolution recognizing the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Coming after almost five decades of activism, the UN resolution provides a powerful new tool to address the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and deadly pollution. Today, we are delighted that this award recognizes the crucial, collaborative work of defenders for a world that is more equal and fair, on a healthy planet. We call for all States to now stand up and make the resolution a reality for the lives of all people on Earth!”

**Pooja Patel,**

**Programme Director, International Service for Human Rights**

“Together, we have the potential to change how we live in this world. We can and must build a global society where everyone has clean air, clean water, and a healthy environment. This UN Human Rights Prize is a recognition that grassroots collaboration is the vital first step for environmental and climate justice.”

**Rebecca Bratspies,**

**Professor CUNY School of Law, director Center for Urban Environmental Reform**

**Media contact:**

**Rossella Recupero**, Communications Campaign Specialist at the Center for International Environmental Law, [press@ciel.org](mailto:press@ciel.org) | +39 340 47 39 827

**Esther de la Rosa**, Communications Coordinator at ESCR-Net [edelarosa@escr-net.org](mailto:edelarosa@escr-net.org) | +1(305)984-66-50

“Recognition of the right to a healthy environment marks an inflection point in human consciousness, filling a gap in the pantheon of human rights to reflect that a healthy nature is the infrastructure of human society and civilizations and the basis for realizing other human rights. This landmark achievement would not have occurred without the selfless, tireless collaboration of all elements of civil society – NGOs, businesses, educational institutions, foundations, and religious organizations–, combined with efforts from governments and intergovernmental organizations and their leaders”

**Daniel Magraw,**  
**Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University.**

“The only way to realize a healthy environment for all is through sustained, unrelenting, and collective action. It is an encouragement to us all that the United Nations has decided to award the UN Human Rights Prize to a large, diverse, and global coalition that has found itself unified in this one critical goal - to preserve our common home in a time of crisis.”

**Markus Heinze,**  
**Executive Director, Franciscans International**

“The recognition of the Right to a Healthy Environment makes it clear that the well-being of humans cannot be separated from the well-being of the natural world. All human rights – including the rights of future generations – can only be fully realized when the natural systems which sustain life are cherished and access for all to the blessings of creation are guaranteed.”

**David Hales,**  
**Trustee, Parliament of the World's Religions**

“This UN Human Rights Prize highlights the steadiness and unity of civil society and Indigenous Peoples’ organizations in the fight for the recognition of the right to a healthy environment. Through collective effort, we can make a difference. The fight is not over yet and we must keep encouraging States to recognize the right to a healthy environment at the national, regional, and international levels.”

**Victoria Lichet,**  
**Executive Director, Global Pact Coalition**

“Today’s award is a recognition of the universal right to a healthy environment that belongs to us all, but it is also a call to action. As this prize is being announced, people around the world are dying from the most extreme heatwave of all time. I’m seventeen. My generation will continue the fight for a more just and sustainable world because it is our right, it is our responsibility, and because it is our *only* path forward to ensure our survival.”

**Will Charouhis,**  
**Founder of We Are Forces of Nature, age 17**

**Media contact:**

**Rossella Recupero**, Communications Campaign Specialist at the Center for International Environmental Law, [press@ciel.org](mailto:press@ciel.org) | +39 340 47 39 827  
**Esther de la Rosa**, Communications Coordinator at ESCR-Net [edelarosa@escr-net.org](mailto:edelarosa@escr-net.org) | +1(305)984-66-50

"At a time when temperature records are constantly broken, extreme weather disasters unfold one after another and the outlook for the future looks even more gloomy, it is easy for people to feel powerless and overwhelmed. But this award is testament to what people's power can achieve, when civil society organizations, Indigenous peoples, social movements, and local communities, from different regions and values, coordinate and work tirelessly towards the same objective. The same spirit of collaboration, as well as many more voices, are now needed to pressure all states to recognize the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, implement and enforce it."

**Chiara Liguori,**

**Climate Justice Researcher and Adviser, Amnesty International**

"By adopting the Right to a Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment, the UN has set the stage for a more just and inclusive world. However, big headlines like this often miss all the background work that had to happen. The countless hours, grassroots organizing, wisdom from Indigenous and front-line communities, lessons from youth, and more are a testament to the power of community. The UN Human Rights Prize acknowledges this work and celebrates what happens when a diverse, committed, and passionate group collaborates for a common good. The Environmental Law Institute has been honored to support this work through innovative research, education initiatives, and convening open and honest dialogues."

**Kristine Perry,**

**Staff Attorney, Environmental Law Institute**

"With heatwaves and extreme weather events destroying lives, livelihoods and habitats across the world, we welcome the UN's recognition of the crucial leadership role that Indigenous Peoples, civil society organizations, social movements, and communities play in advocating for climate justice and a sustainable future. Awarding the UN Human Rights Prize to a diverse global coalition is proof that people power works. It sends a clear signal to governments, politicians and corporations that they must deliver the clean, healthy, and sustainable environment to which all people have the right. Until then, more and more people will continue to exercise their rights by taking polluters to court and marching in the streets."

**Mads Flarup Christensen**

**International Executive Director (Interim), Greenpeace International**

"The Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948 was a historic response to a devastated world. The recent recognition of a healthy environment as a human right is again an act of courage, vision, and compassion in the face of devastation. We - people from around the world - bear witness to this right which protects people and nature. As Quakers, we recognise the inherent dignity and 'that of God' in all people, and the call to care for the earth. We thank the UN for its recognition of the critical role that Indigenous Peoples, civil society organizations, social, faith-based, and grassroots communities have played in advocating tirelessly for this right. The work of healing and restoration intensifies."

**Lindsey Fielder Cook,**

**Representative, Quaker United Nations Office/Friends World Committee for Consultation**

**Media contact:**

**Rossella Recupero**, Communications Campaign Specialist at the Center for International Environmental Law, [press@ciel.org](mailto:press@ciel.org) | +39 340 47 39 827

**Esther de la Rosa**, Communications Coordinator at ESCR-Net [edelarosa@escr-net.org](mailto:edelarosa@escr-net.org) | +1(305)984-66-50

"The prize celebrates the important work of environmental human rights defenders to protect their livelihoods, health, and culture against environmental destruction and to confront the climate crisis. The recognition of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment equips the UN system, states, and civil society to address this issue. Now governments need to turn this challenge into reality by developing and enforcing stronger and more coherent environmental protection laws and policies to phase out fossil fuels and curtail pollution."

**Katharina Rall,**

**Senior environment researcher, Human Rights Watch**

"The UN Human Rights Award not only recognizes the extraordinary commitment and hard work of civil society, young people, and Indigenous Peoples' organizations. The recognition by so many states of the right to a healthy, clean, and sustainable environment underlines how fundamental it is to preserve our planet and all life for our children and grandchildren, future generations, and all living beings on Earth. And we will now work to ensure that States live up to their commitments and implement sustainable and forward-looking policies."

**Samia Kassid,**

**Senior Programme Manager "The Rights of Children and Youth", World Future Council**

"At a time when civic spaces are shrinking and under attack, this is a tremendous achievement for civil society which recognizes its crucial role in protecting people and the planet. This is also a message of hope and determination to children, demonstrating the power of civil society, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and social movements coming together, and encouraging children to continue to make their voices heard to protect their rights, the planet, and all of our futures. This award is a call to States to make the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment a reality for children today and for future generations to come."

**Isabelle Kolebinov,**

**Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Child Rights International Network (CRIN)**

"The awarding of this prize to a global coalition for the first time in history underscores our belief in 'the power of many'. As the world's largest partnership for nature, representing national NGOs in 115 countries, our thanks go to the 120,000 people around the world who joined our #1Planet1Right campaign championing the right to a healthy environment. We have been privileged to join forces with thousands of other diverse, inspiring, and passionate voices from across civil society to make our collective call a reality, and we are proud that the UN has recognized our efforts in this way. We hope this prize – coming in the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - highlights the importance of this now universal right, and helps galvanize the action needed to deliver it so that all people, everywhere, forevermore, enjoy their human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment."

**Noëlle Kümpel,**

**Senior Policy Advisor, BirdLife International**

**Media contact:**

**Rossella Recupero**, Communications Campaign Specialist at the Center for International Environmental Law, [press@ciel.org](mailto:press@ciel.org) | +39 340 47 39 827

**Esther de la Rosa**, Communications Coordinator at ESCR-Net [edelarosa@escr-net.org](mailto:edelarosa@escr-net.org) | +1(305)984-66-50

"This award honors a decades-long global collaborative effort to secure recognition of a fundamental human right. Everyone is entitled to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. When climate change, ecosystem destruction, and pollution prevent people from accessing these basic human rights, governments must act to defend them. Earthjustice remains steadfast in our commitment to ensure that the laws and their enforcement guarantee these human rights. The UN resolution gives us a powerful new tool in achieving environmental justice. This award is an honor and also a call to action."

**Abigail Dillen,**  
**President, Earthjustice**

"This award recognizes that the declaration of a healthy environment as a universal right was a collective achievement that involved many actors from many regions of the world around an issue that is urgent and vital. The voices and needs of civil society were heard, from a universal perspective and highlighting the critical context of Latin America in the face of the social and environmental crisis it is experiencing. The recognition of this right strengthens the legal frameworks for the protection of the environment and all other related human rights. It is a very important call for States to recognize that the environment involves essential elements without which our existence on the planet would not be possible."

**Liliana Ávila,**  
**Coordinator of the Human Rights and Environment Program, Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA)**

"For Indigenous Peoples, this resolution reaffirms and builds upon our right as recognized in Article 29 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of our lands and resources. We are grateful that the rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is now recognized as a universal human right. Indigenous Peoples have always known that human health and the health of our Mother Earth can not be separated. This is an historic victory for our future generations and for the Natural World as well and we thank and congratulate our partners in this global coalition, the UN system, and everyone who made their recognition for our efforts possible."

**Andrea Carmen,**  
**Executive Director, International Indian Treaty Council (IITC)**

---

## SPANISH

"Este reconocimiento sin precedentes demuestra cómo la colaboración desde la sociedad civil, los Pueblos Indígenas, movimientos y comunidades locales de todos los rincones del planeta es esencial para motivar a los gobiernos avancen en la dirección que nuestros derechos y el planeta necesitan. El derecho al ambiente sano, limpio y sostenible ha sido reconocido por décadas en muchos países del Sur Global, quienes hemos trabajado intensamente en la Coalición, para asegurar que este derecho sea universalmente reconocido para todas las personas. Es un premio que honra, inspira y fortalece nuestro compromiso como Coalición para continuar

### Media contact:

**Rossella Recupero**, Communications Campaign Specialist at the Center for International Environmental Law, [press@ciel.org](mailto:press@ciel.org) | +39 340 47 39 827

**Esther de la Rosa**, Communications Coordinator at ESCR-Net [edelarosa@escr-net.org](mailto:edelarosa@escr-net.org) | +1(305)984-66-50

encontrándonos en nuestras diferencias y diversidades, y seguiremos trabajando para su implementación efectiva.”

**Astrid Puentes Riaño,**

**Consultora independiente en justicia climática, derechos humanos y derecho internacional**

“Como ecofeministas latinoamericanas y del Caribe estamos felices por este reconocimiento a esta increíble alianza global que hizo un enorme trabajo para lograr que el derecho al ambiente sea finalmente y formalmente reconocido como un derecho humano. Estamos en la región del planeta donde matan más defensoras y defensores ambientales, donde los derechos de la Naturaleza son violados cotidianamente y en un planeta que están matando a causa de un modelo de mal desarrollo económico extractivista. Agradecemos este gesto pero esperamos que se transforme en HECHOS CONCRETOS que reviertan esta situación. Queremos en el mundo justicia social, justicia ecológica y justicia de género.”

**María José Lubertino,**

**Red de defensoras del Ambiente y el Buen Vivir. Asociación Ciudadana por los Derechos Humanos. Facultad de Derecho Universidad de Buenos Aires - Argentina**

**Red Ecofeminista Latinoamericana y del Caribe- Integrante del WMG y del WGC**

“El premio a la defensa de los derechos humanos es un acto simbólico importante, pero las Naciones Unidas deben ir más allá de reconocer y exaltar la labor de los defensores. Es necesario que la ONU promueva una verdadera alianza entre la sociedad civil de los países más vulnerables en materia de derechos humanos e impulse verdaderas regulaciones para frenar los atentados al ambiente y los abusos corporativos que agudizan la vulneración de estos derechos y ponen en riesgo la vida de defensores que buscan preservar nuestro planeta y proteger a todas las personas.”

**Martha Devia Grisales,**

**Miembro Comité Ambiental en Defensa de la Vida. Ibagué - Colombia**

"Hace un año, personas defensores de los derechos humanos de todo el mundo acogieron con satisfacción la histórica adopción de una resolución que reconoce el derecho a un medio ambiente limpio, saludable y sostenible. Tras casi cinco décadas de activismo, la resolución de la ONU proporciona una nueva y poderosa herramienta para abordar la crisis climática, la pérdida de biodiversidad y la mortífera contaminación. Hoy estamos complacidas de que este premio reconozca el trabajo crucial y colaborativo de las personas defensoras de un mundo más igualitario y justo, en un planeta sano. Hacemos un llamado a todos los Estados para que ahora se movilicen y hagan realidad esta resolución por la vida de todas las personas que habitan la Tierra".

**Pooja Patel,**

**Directora de Programas, Servicio Internacional para los Derechos Humanos**

“Este premio reconoce que la declaración del ambiente sano como derecho universal fue un logro colectivo que involucró a muchos actores de muchas regiones del mundo en torno a un asunto

**Media contact:**

**Rossella Recupero**, Communications Campaign Specialist at the Center for International Environmental Law, [press@ciel.org](mailto:press@ciel.org) | +39 340 47 39 827

**Esther de la Rosa**, Communications Coordinator at ESCR-Net [edelarosa@escr-net.org](mailto:edelarosa@escr-net.org) | +1(305)984-66-50



que es urgente y vital. Las voces y necesidades de la sociedad civil fueron escuchadas, desde una perspectiva universal y poniendo de relieve el contexto crítico de América Latina frente a la crisis social y ambiental que vive.

El reconocimiento de este derecho fortalece los marcos jurídicos de protección del ambiente y de todos los otros derechos humanos relacionados. Es un llamado muy importante para que los Estados reconozcan que el ambiente involucra elementos esenciales sin los cuales no sería posible nuestra existencia en el planeta”.

**Liliana Ávila,**

**Coordinadora del Programa de Derechos Humanos y Ambiente, Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente (AIDA)**

---

## FRENCH

“Il y a un an, les défenseur.e.x.s des droits humains du monde entier ont salué l'adoption historique d'une résolution reconnaissant le droit à un environnement propre, sain et durable. Après cinq décennies d'activisme, la résolution de l'ONU fournit un nouvel outil puissant pour faire face à la crise climatique, à la perte de biodiversité et à la pollution. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes ravi.e.x.s que ce prix récompense le travail crucial et collaboratif des défenseur.e.x.s qui s'engagent pour un monde plus égalitaire et plus juste, sur une planète en bonne santé. Nous appelons tous les États à se lever maintenant et à faire de la résolution une réalité pour la vie de tous les habitant.e.x.s de la Terre!”

**Pooja Patel,**

**Directrice Programmes, Service International pour les Droits de l'Homme**

### Media contact:

**Rossella Recupero**, Communications Campaign Specialist at the Center for International Environmental Law, [press@ciel.org](mailto:press@ciel.org) | +39 340 47 39 827

**Esther de la Rosa**, Communications Coordinator at ESCR-Net [edelarosa@escr-net.org](mailto:edelarosa@escr-net.org) | +1(305)984-66-50