

Human Rights & Sustainable Development

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CONFERENCE

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#WorldInCommon

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Foreword



Rémy RIOUX

Chief Executive Officer, AFD Group

Two years on from the first edition of the Human Rights and Development international conference organised by AFD, there is still a long way to go to protect human rights in all their diversity. We have entered the "age of consequences", where the impacts of climate change and the collapse of biodiversity are being added to multi-dimensional inequalities. At the same time, persistent violence is increasing all around the world and new conflicts are emerging.

On 10 December 1948, 75 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaiming it as "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations". A few years previously, in 1941, our predecessor organisation Caisse Centrale de la France Libre had been established in London and Central Africa. The organisation's objectives were to resist the forces most radically hostile to democracy and humanism, and to promote freedom and human rights. A commitment to fundamental rights is at the very heart of AFD's heritage and its advocacy of a world in common. Clearly new rights have emerged since the Declaration of 1948, real rights as well as legal entitlements. And when we consider the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), shouldn't we read these as an addendum, a reminder, a social, economic and environmental intensification of the great 1948 text? This is precisely what was explored at the conference, the proceedings of which are provided here, with analyses of human rights through the prism of ecological transition.

The demand for justice and the reconciliation of populations is growing louder in many parts of the world. It was on these subjects that civil society presented testimonies to the conference, in particular through the words of Eleanor Thompson, who fights for land justice and the protection of rural communities in Sierra Leone, and the contribution of Estelle Ewoule-Lobe from Cameroon who is an activist working for the protection of environmental migrants in the forests of the Congo Basin and who is a Laureate of the Marianne initiative for rights defenders, an award supported by the French President.

Alongside them, the AFD Group is endeavouring to renew its role as a sustainable development player by integrating human rights into the traditional agenda of development financing. This is no easy task, and must be conducted with the greatest of care and respect, as we seek to accompany others, never lecturing but instead investing in democratic innovations, in the very actions where rights are born. Universal rights, of course, but rights that always correspond to specific contexts and forms.

As the AFD Group, together with its subsidiaries Expertise France and Proparco, turns the page, the next road map promotes and supports the emergence of rights, with particular attention to encouraging a continuum between conventional human rights (economic, social, cultural, civic and political) and the right to a healthy environment. To achieve this, we will pursue partnerships, in particular with civil society in both the North and the South. We will also draw on analyses and the help of the research community to embrace long-term thinking and support a "human rights economy", as Nada Al-Nashif, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, invited us to do in opening the conference. All this comes with the hope of sparking dialogue and further practical cooperation with public development banks, now united within the Finance in Common (FiCS) movement, in this significant and essential domain.



1948, Adoption
of the Universal
Declaration
human rights
(Dudh) by the UN.

Introduction



Farid LAMARA

*Human development expert and strategic advisor,
Department of Strategy, Foresight
and Institutional Relations, AFD*



Sarah HAYES

*Human rights expert
and consultant for AFD*

Following the first conference "Human Rights and Sustainable Development Conference"¹, AFD again brought actors from the development community together on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) and the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998). The participants of the 2021 conference were united in their warning about the unprecedented decline in human rights that had taken place over several years. They agreed on the need to place human rights at the core of development actors' work as the fulfilment of human rights is indispensable to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The speakers also highlighted the consequences of the ecological crisis for the realisation of human rights and the importance of a development approach that extends to the rights of living beings in order to achieve a just, sustainable transition.

In line with this, the second edition of the conference was dedicated to how development actors can contribute in a practical way to the respect, protection and realisation of human rights, while ensuring that they emancipate themselves from an overly anthropocentric approach in order to adopt an ecocentric logic, in this manner better addressing the ecological emergency.

Marie-Hélène Loison, AFD Deputy CEO, and Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, set the tone from the start. Marie-Hélène Loison recalled AFD's explicit human rights mandate and the priority set by the French Presidential Council for Development² and the Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development³ in 2023 to "support human rights everywhere" through France's international cooperation policy. For her part, Nada Al-Nashif launched an appeal to development actors to support a "human rights economy, a concept that promotes a profound transformation towards economies prioritising human rights and climate" and also emphasised "*resolute action on the triple planetary crisis, translating the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment into tangible policies and programmes*".

¹ Conference proceedings: Human Rights and Development | AFD – Agence Française de Développement.

² Presidential Council for Development, Conclusions, 5 May 2023.

³ Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development, Conclusions of 1 August 2023.

The initial session offered a "world tour" of contemporary human rights issues. Six expert witnesses from six major regions dealt with a wide range of themes: the privatisation of agriculture, agribusiness and impacts on the human rights of local communities (Asia); the specific issue of women's rights in rural areas (Latin America); issues linked to free media and the protection of journalists (North Africa and the Middle East); the instrumentalisation of human rights and the accompanying relativism (Sub-Saharan Africa); the repercussions of war and conflict on human rights (Eastern Europe); and rights defenders and the shrinking space of civil society (Western Europe and North America). Overall, the session focused on conventional human rights⁴. It illustrated that no region of the world is free from human rights violations and everywhere people are stridently demanding the promotion, respect and protection of their fundamental rights.


The session that followed the opening of the conference comprised two round tables devoted to environmental issues and the triple global ecological crisis (climate, biodiversity and environment).

The first round table offered a framework by linking the global ecological crisis, sustainable development and human rights, and by explaining the founding concepts of the right to a healthy environment and the rights of living beings as a whole.

The second round table presented seven local initiatives and projects implemented in different regions of the world. These illustrated the collective progression of human rights, the right to a healthy environment and the rights of nature. The case studies emphasised that action is possible on a national scale (e.g. public policy in Colombia, land legislation in Sierra Leone, forest protection in the Republic of the Congo), as well as on a local scale (e.g. the municipality of Curridabat in Costa Rica). The role of civil society is also essential to these solutions, acting as the link between the duty-bearers (States) and rights-holders (populations). The initiatives in Bangladesh, Sierra Leone and Cameroon clearly illustrate this, with their specific focus on the rights of local communities and Indigenous peoples. Finally, a highly innovative example of the recognition of the rights of nature in New Caledonia demonstrated the continuing emergence of these new rights.

Overall, these debates underlined the importance of establishing links between conventional human rights, the right to a healthy environment and the emerging rights of nature in order to favour sustainable development. Whatever threatens the living world necessarily impacts human rights, giving rise to the need for concurrent action on these different dimensions.

⁴ The term conventional rights means human rights that are recognised and protected by a binding international treaty, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both adopted in 1966 and ratified by over 170 United Nations member states.



The subsequent sessions of the conference focused on the challenges of accountability in respect of human rights for development actors, as well as on the vision and expectations of civil society organisations in terms of integrating a human rights-based approach into development projects.

On the subject of accountability, the conference shared the results of the partnership between AFD and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, and in particular on a new pilot accountability framework for the human rights-based approach for development actors. The framework was developed with contributions from several actors, both institutional (European Commission; the World Bank Human Rights, Inclusion and Empowerment Trust Fund; bilateral cooperation agencies; and the foreign ministries of several European countries) and from civil society.

The conference closed with inspiring appeals from young rights defenders Andraina Mahatanasoa from Madagascar and Zidane Satignon Kuessi from Benin. They reminded us that young people are not only the future but also the rights defenders of the present, and that they are all too infrequently given the chance to speak. Looking to the future, they urged all the actors involved to move resolutely against impunity and to work to protect the rights of nature and future generations, summed up by the motto: "the words of the future take shape thanks to our actions in the present".

Opening





Virginie LEPETIT

Editor-in Chief, Courrier international

Good morning, welcome everyone.

I'll be with you this morning for the opening of this wonderful "Human Rights and Sustainable Development" conference, organised by Agence française de développement, which coincides with the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We will spend today examining how development actors can contribute to respecting, protecting and realising human rights all around the world. I would like to stress this global outlook – the day will be packed full of contributions from different points of view and different geographical regions.

We are honoured to have five speakers to open the conference, followed by six expert witnesses to explore the "state of the world" on various issues. The afternoon will concentrate on feedback.





Marie-Hélène LOISON

Deputy Executive Director, AFD



I would like to reiterate AFD's deep devotion to humanist and democratic values, as well as to fundamental rights and peace.

*Dear colleagues, dear partners,
good morning to everyone and welcome,*

Thank you for joining us. I am delighted to welcome you to AFD today for this second edition of the Human Rights and Development conference.

The first edition, held two years ago in December 2021, allowed a wide range of development actors to share their observations on the precarious situation of human rights around the world and also to present possible courses of action for development actors in all their plurality. At that time, the participants were united in warning about the unprecedented retreat of human rights, circumstances which predated the Covid period. They agreed on the need to place human rights at the core of development actors' work as the fulfilment of human rights is indispensable to achieving the sustainable development goals.

This edition also launched a positive dynamic for collective progress on these issues. Once again we have brought together a broad range of actors, with a total of 1,400 people registered online and attending in person.

We are happy to once again bring together a wide range of participants, including Ms Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as participants from the European Commission and many development actors and partners from all around the world. Attendees include representatives of ministries, local authorities, the academic world, civil society, public development banks and technical cooperation agencies.

Today's speakers come from all around the world, from Africa, Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Oceania but also from Western Europe, bearing witness to the fact that human rights are genuinely universal in the same way as the SDGs. Human rights give rise to very high expectations, aspirations and needs in all the countries of the world.

I would like to reiterate AFD's deep devotion to humanist and democratic values, as well as to fundamental rights and peace. This devotion led not only to establishing the Agency in 1941, running counter to the obscurantism of the 1940s, but also to its evolution.

Beyond the agenda for sustainable development, we now have a very strong mandate in human rights, in particular since the launch of the "Human Rights and Development" strategy by France in 2018, which will be discussed by Ms Delphine Borione,

AFD's new strategy for 2024-2030 aims to make significant progress on integrating the human rights-based approach in its broadest sense.

Ambassador for Human Rights, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. This situation has been reinforced by the priority recently expressed by the French Presidential Council for Development and the Interministerial Committee to "support human rights everywhere".

In line with this mandate, AFD's new strategy for 2024-2030 aims to make significant progress on integrating the human rights-based approach in its broadest sense, for example by supporting those partners who want to move forward on issues concerning the right to a healthy environment and the rights of nature – subjects that we will return to later in the conference. Today we'll see that this is possible. We have a growing number of examples to demonstrate.

We are convinced that the human rights-based approach not only contributes to the resilience of democracies, but also to their emergence. In this sense, human rights are the basis upon which we can found our actions.

I hope you have a very fulfilling day. This will undoubtedly be the case given the programme. This conference will clearly be another step towards a convergence of AFD's actions with governmental priorities, while also being an occasion to participate and respond more effectively to our partners' requests and needs on these issues.

I wish you all an excellent day.





Delphine BORIONE

*Ambassador for Human Rights,
Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs*



**Yet the struggle
is far from over,
and we must
continue to
mobilise together,
more than ever
before, in the face
of the challenges
to human rights
around the world.**

*Ms Marie-Hélène Loison, Deputy Executive Director, AFD;
Ms Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights;
Mr Jonathan Van Meerbeeck, European Commission;
Ms Marianna Belalba, Civic Space Research Lead at CIVICUS;
and above all, dear friends and participants both in person and online,*

I am delighted to open this conference organised by Agence française de développement, to whom I offer my thanks, celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. There are many human rights defenders here today, and I welcome them.

Yet the struggle is far from over, and we must continue to mobilise together, more than ever before, in the face of the challenges to human rights around the world. As we see every day, the circumstances are indeed sobering. All too often, opponents are silenced, minorities persecuted, women's and LGBT rights obliterated, and human rights defenders threatened, harassed and persecuted. Freedom of expression is violated, civic spaces shrink or disappear, the administration of justice is arbitrary, and impunity persists.

And beyond these violations of the most fundamental human rights, armed conflicts rage and a global ecological crisis is turning the way we live upside down. This crisis reinforces inequalities and poverty and aggravates the human rights situation in many regions of the world.

This is a gloomy picture, although not entirely black as there are areas of hope: civil society organisations and youth movements in Africa, South America, Asia and Europe are waking us up and reminding us of our duty to act.

The inseparable link between achieving the sustainable development goals and the realisation of human rights has frequently been emphasised by France. Human rights are the stated objectives of the French policy of sustainable solidarity investment set out in the law of 4 August 2021 and reiterated by the Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development in 2023.

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights five years ago, France introduced its first "Human Rights and Development" strategy, coordinated by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. This strategy has a dual objective. On the one hand, it aims to make France's cooperation and development aid policy a lever for its diplomacy on the subject of promoting human rights. In this



way, France is committed to strengthening its capacity to act in several priority areas, including support for human rights defenders. On the other hand, it incorporates development cooperation in a human rights-based approach, such that all public development assistance contributes to achieving human rights. This approach applies to the policies of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs as well as to the actions implemented by its operators, such as Agence française du développement.

In order to achieve these objectives, an ambitious concrete action plan has been developed and deployed in close collaboration with our partners in other French ministries, as well as with public development operators and civil society organisations, whose actions are so important. We have already greeted many advances since 2019 on rights education, the protection of rights defenders and the support of institutional mechanisms for the protection and promotion of human rights. I would also like to commend Magali Lafourcade today, who represents the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH).

Our official development assistance, the fourth largest in the world, is working non-stop with the most vulnerable to contribute to the rights of all. In December 2021, the French President launched the Marianne initiative to provide, in addition to other programmes, practical support for human rights defenders around the world. Every year this programme provides 15 human rights defenders with six months of training and meetings to strengthen their actions and afford them the visibility they deserve. It also provides international support for those who defend freedom, often at the risk of their own lives. Some of them are here with us today and I am delighted to meet them again; I salute their courage and dedication. Defenders help to protect the victims

France's Human Rights and Development strategy will be renewed in 2025 in order to reinforce our actions and deploy the human rights-based approach throughout French development cooperation.

of human rights abuses and make sure they have access to the means of appeal and redress. They also remind public authorities of their international obligations, as defined by the treaties and conventions that they have freely ratified. Human rights defenders are our essential partners and we must support them and facilitate their actions.

At the same time, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs has continued to express its unequivocal commitment to the human rights-based approach in multilateral forums and with aid partner countries. A project has been launched to strengthen the accountability of French development programmes in order to promote the mainstreaming of human rights in our actions. The objective is to make our operations more transparent and compliant with the principles of action and the human rights-based approach. This work, which will be discussed today, is being carried out by the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), funded by France in close collaboration with our partners and French civil society.

In light of these encouraging advances, we must continue to do better and do more. We must continue to support human rights defenders and ensure their protection, strengthen our support for civil society organisations and national human rights institutions, support the Universal Periodic Review and other institutional rights protection mechanisms, help the private sector to meet its human rights requirements, support local authorities to protect rights at local level, and fight against impunity for all perpetrators of human rights violations.

France's Human Rights and Development strategy is still being implemented and will be renewed in 2025 in order to reinforce our actions and deploy the human rights-based approach throughout French development cooperation and in all its sectors of intervention.

Thank you to AFD for organising this conference; it will enable the representatives of development actors and civil society from both the Global South and North to exchange views on all these different issues, and will promote the practical operationalisation of the human rights-based approach to development.

I wish you an excellent conference.



Marianna BELALBA

Civic Space Research Lead at CIVICUS



Making States and the private sector accountable necessitates precise knowledge of the human rights violations they commit.

This week, CIVICUS published its annual report: "People Power Under Attack"¹. This presents the situation of civil society around the world. This analysis of civic space includes freedom of association, freedom of expression and the possibility for human rights defenders to do their work and to demonstrate.

In this context, the recurring question is how to hold States and the private sector accountable for human rights violations. This was the very reason why the CIVICUS monitoring mechanism was set up seven years ago: making States and the private sector accountable necessitates precise knowledge of the human rights violations they commit. This question also has a bearing on how we do our work.

Here in this room, and online, we have a huge diversity of human rights defenders, civil society organisations, donors, philanthropists and individuals from the private sector who share the same goal, namely of protecting human rights. We all need information. Human rights defenders need to understand the environment in which they are working, whether they are in Venezuela, Bangladesh or Senegal, in order to be able to draw up a strategy to counter state repression. Donors must understand exactly what challenges rights defenders face. This allows them to provide the support and resources to enable them to carry out their work in very restricted environments.

In the private sector, we need to know where we are investing, and ask ourselves whether we are doing more harm than good in countries that attack human rights defenders.

CIVICUS rates countries as "open", "repressed" or "closed". These categories refer to a determination of whether or not the State in question protects rights defenders. At the publication of the first of our reports in 2018, 26% of the world's population lived in countries considered to be "closed". Now, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the statistics should be better. However, the situation has not improved, as 31% of the world's population now live in a "closed" country. For many of us, exercising our freedoms has become a very high-risk activity. In addition, very few of us live in countries considered "open", and this proportion has reduced from 4% five years ago to just 2% today. So the problem is not just in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba or Bangladesh, it has become a global one. This year, Germany and Bosnia-Herzegovina were downgraded due to attacks on climate defenders, and 12 European countries have been downgraded in the last five years.

¹ CIVICUS, People Power Under Attack 2023, available at: <https://civicusmonitor.contentfiles.net/media/documents/GlobalFindings2023.pdf>



We also track the tactics used by States to restrict civic space. Let me describe two of these tactics that have an impact on our work. The first concerns the freedom of expression, as States attack things that have an effect. We have noted over 900 violations of the freedom of expression in many forms such as intimidation, censorship and attacks on or killing of journalists, always with the objective of preventing the voicing of opinions. The governments of Kenya, Uganda and Ghana have prevented the publication of information pertaining to LGBT+ communities. In Mexico, journalists who have denounced corruption have been murdered.

A second tactic targets the right to peaceful assembly, which is not only a right in itself but also a vehicle for demanding other rights, such as the rights to health and basic services. Over the last five years we have documented severely repressive measures taken against the right to peaceful assembly. This year, over 200 protests have been interrupted or disturbed by excessive force (sometimes lethal) or by detaining protesters. In Africa, whether in Senegal, Congo or the DRC, political opponents are denied a voice. All dissent is currently prohibited in Bangladesh with elections due to take place in January.

I would like to focus on a group that is currently subject to most of these restrictions, namely climate defenders. We have documented that they are a prime target for all governments, in particular European governments, which present themselves as champions of climate action. We have seen restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly in Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Switzerland during street demonstrations to demand change. This issue is all the more important in our debates as we have to organise and demonstrate on the streets in order to have a chance to achieve the SDGs and reduce inequalities linked to the climate crisis and conflicts.

Despite all of this, I would like to end on a positive note with some recommendations. Yesterday, a speaker from Colombia described communities, CSOs and citizens as agents of change. We are these drivers of change, and our dynamic role as civil society must be recognised as such. We have proved that large-scale demonstrations work. This was the case in Georgia recently, where a mass mobilisation forced the government to withdraw its controversial law on foreign agents. We must focus on protecting the right to peaceful assembly, educating police officers to comply with international standards and the recognition of the violations committed. As far as donors are concerned, it is essential that they directly support organisations in the Global South and communities so that they can do their jobs.

Yesterday, another speaker described "unbalanced relations", a situation which encourages us to change the relationship between civil society and donors. Beyond the construction or implementation of projects, we need to encourage the building of a shared vision for change and transnational solidarity. In this sense, spaces like this conference are essential, because despite our diverse backgrounds and experiences, we can all stand together if one of us is attacked.



We're commemorating 75 years of human rights, but there's still a long way to go before we can celebrate them. The challenges are evolving, but I am convinced that they can be overcome by working together towards the same goal.



Nada AL-NASHIF

United Nations Deputy High Commissioner
for Human Rights



We believe
that human
rights can be
a game-changer
in advancing
the 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable
Development.

Good morning,

It is a real privilege to be with you today. In three days, we will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration constitutes a promise that we are all born equal in dignity and rights. It is a critical reminder of the universal values that human rights represent and a blueprint for action in a turbulent world.

We live at a time when global challenges abound in scope and complexity.

We are confronted with an alarming rise in inequalities, poverty levels not seen in a generation, eroding living standards and the growing in debt distress of developing countries. We also witness the loss of life as migrants embark on treacherous journeys in search of better lives. We are seeing a shrinking civic space and increasing hate speech, a growing digital divide, a mistrust of institutions and dangerous levels of polarisation. As well as, of course, the climate emergency. Without doubt, the most difficult challenges for some months have been the raging conflicts, transcending national borders, with regional and even global consequences. The war in Ukraine continues to take its toll, and we are witnessing devastation in Gaza, with so many other contexts of violence and loss of life, including in Sudan, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Haiti and Yemen.

This year marks the halfway point towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. And yet only 15% of the SDG targets are on track. Two billion people live without access to clean, safe drinking water, 84 million children will be denied access to school by 2030 and 300 million will not have completed primary school. Nearly 600 million people are projected to be chronically undernourished. While global wealth has never been greater, the benefits of economic growth are increasingly unevenly distributed within and among countries. At a time when we need to invest in people and the planet, projections indicate that this year 143 governments will have introduced austerity measures and cut spending, affecting 85% of the world's population.

Debt servicing is crowding out vital investments in economic, social and cultural rights. In Africa, the amount spent on interest payments is higher than spending on either education or health. Furthermore, many of the countries that are most affected by famine, drought, massive storms and rising poverty cannot take adequate action because they are hamstrung by debt.

We call
for a human
rights-centered
economy, [...] which prioritizes
human rights
and the climate.



Solutions are in plain sight. We believe that human rights can be the game changer to resume progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a reminder, during Covid-19, seven million people died as a direct result of the pandemic. Why did this virus have such devastating consequences? Because of gaps in health, education and social protection systems that were created by years of systemic inequality and discrimination, decades of underinvestment in social, economic and cultural rights.

Our economies must deliver better performance for people and for our planet. That is why we are calling for a human rights economy, a concept that promotes a profound transformation towards economies prioritising human rights and climate.

A human rights economy places rights safeguards on tax policies, budgets, and care support policies, ensuring that measures are taken to deliver fundamental rights, such as the right to adequate housing, quality education, food, and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and that these rights are ring-fenced against austerity. This concept treats rights not as mere aspirations, but as the legal obligations which in fact they are.

**Civic space
needs to be
protected
and our action
must empower
people as active
agents of
sustainable
development.**

A human rights economy intentionally aims to eliminate discrimination and reduce inequality, using human rights as a compass to navigate the inevitable trade-offs, to ensure that we can invest in public health, education, and social security, and dismantle entrenched discrimination and corruption. It enables active, meaningful participation and transparent decision-making in economic policy-making, especially for those who have been historically sidelined. It prioritises resolute action on the triple planetary crisis, translating the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment into tangible policies and programmes. Only such economies can withstand the most severe shocks, as they build social cohesion and stability.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has spoken of the urgent need to reform the international financial architecture, stressing that it is "outdated, dysfunctional and unjust". It hampers the implementation of the SDGs and the realisation of human rights. Such reform would be a key lever for redressing inequalities within and between nations, creating lasting solutions to debt problems and reshaping international public finances. Our call for a human rights economy relies on such a reform, underpinned by human rights and a more robust multilateralism, anchored in solidarity, with a stronger voice for the global south.

In this context, I welcome France's leadership in convening the Summit for a New Global Financing Pact in June this year. The World Bank's commitment at the Summit to pause loan repayments by disaster-stricken countries is, for example, a major step in the right direction.

As Marianna told us earlier, we are very concerned that civic space continues to be under strain globally due to widespread repression of peaceful assembly and infringement of religious freedoms. Almost everywhere, we are seeing growing attempts to silence the voices of those who are working to inform, empower, expose, and hold those in power to account. This is also true of human rights defenders, including environmental defenders and journalists. Civic space needs to be protected and our action must empower people as active agents of sustainable development. Disadvantaged groups, including women and girls, must have a seat at the table.

We need to recognise that civil society is the spark of transformation. We know that for any policy to really implement change, participation is a must. This is why we invite a continued focus on Sustainable Development Goal 16 as an enabler of all the SDGs. Development requires a vibrant civil society with meaningful participation, inclusive and accountable institutions, and good governance.

Frustrated with the world we live in, we see people increasingly taking to the streets. The driving forces are often socio-economic grievances, the erosion of democratic institutions or the destruction of our planet. Protecting our planet from environmental degradation and climate change is perhaps the greatest human challenge of this era. As our planet heats and its ecosystems fall apart, it is clear that we have failed in our collective responsibility. The climate crisis is certainly a manifestation of greed over solidarity, inequality over equity, and short-term gain over long-term loss. Low ambition on climate action condemns millions of people to premature death, hunger, disease, and displacement.

In a breakthrough moment last year, the General Assembly endorsed their claim that a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a human right. At least 155 States recognise this right in their national law.

The Paris Agreement is clear: climate action must be based on respect for human rights, informing decisions on climate financing, mitigation and adaptation, and loss and damage. The agreement to operationalise the loss and damage fund on the first day of COP28 reflects the important progress made in political discussions on the issue. However, the fund remains inadequately financed and falls short on ensuring access to effective remedies. We will be tracking this very closely. Our message is unequivocal: one planet, one people.



We must stop treating human rights and sustainable development as separate issues and place the former at the heart of all dimensions of sustainable development.

Distinguished guests,

The 2030 Agenda commitment to leave no one behind is a call for equality and non-discrimination.

The most exposed are always the most vulnerable, those who have suffered long-standing discrimination and compounded marginalisation. I mean women, children, disabled people, people of African descent, Indigenous peoples, minorities, LGBTI people, migrants and refugees. As our world increasingly unfolds in a digital space, digital technologies are a lifeline for millions, making information, remote working, schooling and even healthcare possible. And yet, one third of the world remains offline. It is our collective responsibility to current and future generations to bridge the digital divide.

Faced with so many challenges, what lessons can we use? The now-famous quote from Kofi Annan's 2005 report "In Larger Freedom" captures the essence: "We will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights". We must stop treating human rights and sustainable development as separate issues, and place rights at the core of all dimensions of sustainable development. Human rights are an essential lever for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs. What's more, adopting a human rights-based approach for sustainable development leads to more lasting and effective results. Human rights oblige us to be accountable to the people we serve. They are universal, indivisible and interdependent. This means that we must address all rights on an equal footing, whether economic, social, cultural, civil or political. This must be reflected in the design of development policies and plans. Because freedom of expression helps the small-scale farmer whose land is being cleared for a dam construction, and the right to social security helps the domestic worker live without violence.

We have an opportunity this year to revitalise the consensus on human rights that brought the world together to adopt the Universal Declaration 75 years ago. This declaration has captured the essence of universality across time and place. We have seen powerful social movements refute relativism, such as Black Lives Matters, #MeToo, Fridays for Future, the women's protests in Iran and Afghanistan. All these movements are rooted in the same values and aspirations: equality, dignity, and justice, which underpin international human rights law.

I encourage you all to seize the opportunity of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to push for the transformative and catalytic change to which we all aspire, and to make sure that we have a better world for the next 25 years at least.



Virginie LEPETIT

Thank you for reminding us of the fundamental and cross-cutting dimension of human rights, which will be the guiding principle of today, and for calling for a human rights economy in the face of unbridled inequalities and challenges.

Finally, I would like to call on Jonathan Van Meerbeeck to describe Europe's actions and partnerships, the challenges ahead and the expected coherence.





Jonathan VAN MEERBEECK

*Head of Sector – Human Rights,
Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA),
European Commission*



Democracy
is regressing
in many countries,
governments
are questioning
the interdepen-
dence, universality
and indivisibility
of human rights

I have the advantage of being the last speaker, and so I benefit from the overview presented by the previous participants. As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, we endorse the bitter observations of the Ambassador and the other speakers, in terms of climate challenges, environmental degradation, growing inequalities and restrictions on civic space. We at the European Commission fully agree with this assessment.

Added to these challenges is the further difficulty of the international community increasingly calling into question certain human rights achievements. Democracy is regressing in many countries, governments are questioning the interdependence, universality and indivisibility of human rights, and certain regimes are advocating the introduction of a hierarchy between collective and individual rights to justify restrictions on individual freedoms. We are concerned about these attacks on our standards in respect of human rights.

Faced with these challenges, the European Union must be irreproachable and play a leading role. Respect for human rights is enshrined in the European Treaty and Charter. We must respect these rights within the European Union, but also in terms of our external cooperation. Consequently, the European Union has drawn up the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 which underpins the actions of European institutions and individual Member States, all of which have signed up. This plan defines our ambitions and priorities and the tools for promoting human rights.

In response to the concrete examples presented by the CIVICUS representative, I must mention our €1.5 billion programme specifically dedicated to the defence of human rights and democracy around the world. We support the essential role played by civil society and organisations such as CIVICUS. Just yesterday in Brussels, we signed a strategic partnership with six NGO consortia defending freedom of association and assembly, aimed at supporting those people who take to the streets and assert their rights. We signed a similar partnership last month to defend journalists and freedom of expression. We emphasise the crucial role of civil society, in particular in the defence of journalists, and we will also be working with media organisations.

Beyond our programmes offering direct support to civil society in the field of human rights and democracy, we must be consistent in all our actions. Ms Al-Nashif reminded us of the extent to which the Sustainable Development Goals are anchored in international human rights treaties, by which we are bound and which underpin all our objectives. We will not be able to achieve them, and we are still a long way off as



**Coherence
in our development
cooperation must
also be applied
to the European
Union's
investments
and its trade
policy.**

Ms Al-Nashif reminded us, without respect for human rights, because these are inter-dependent issues. I welcome the French strategy in this area, in terms of coherence between our approach to development aid and respect for human rights.

In order to achieve this coherence across all our cooperation programmes, the human rights-based approach, which France knows well, implies a methodology based on five essential principles: we must apply all human rights for all, ensure significant and inclusive participation through a genuine decision-making process in which civil society is involved, ensure non-discrimination and equality in our actions, be accountable for rights for all, from the point of view of States, and ensure transparency and access to information, including on the programmes that we develop.

In practice, this approach is implemented through a series of tools. In every country in which the European Union works, we follow a strategy, including with regards to all Member States, on the subjects of democracy and human rights. We also apply a methodology of risk analysis and country profiles on gender equality issues.

The coherence in our development cooperation must also be applied to the European Union's investments and its trade policy. In terms of investment, we have adopted the "Global Gateway" strategy, which will mobilise €300 billion in public and private investment for high-quality, sustainable projects in digital technology, health, transport, energy, education and research. These projects must respect the highest social and environmental standards and principles of good governance, which also align with our values. This is essential to demonstrate the genuine added value of the European Union's investment strategy compared with other actors.

We are developing [...] all over the world "Youth Sounding Boards", where young people express themselves on their issues and the way in which they can help us to design policies that make sense for them. [...] It is crucial to listen to them.



In respect of trade, consistency is also essential. This morning on the train I met a colleague from our Trade Department who was also on her way to Paris for a conference on Aid for Trade. I was reassured by the coherence of our comments. We had both planned to discuss the European Union's normative framework, which includes a series of regulations. We have adopted ambitious regulations on deforestation and prohibited products linked to forced labour and have also imposed a duty of vigilance on enterprises with regards to respect for human rights and environmental protection. We address these issues everywhere, in the belief that Europe must assure coherence with all its partners. This approach is known as "Team Europe", and brings together the European Commission, Member States, Member State agencies, public development banks and the European Investment Bank. Working groups meet regularly to harmonise our methods and ensure greater respect for social and environmental standards in our cooperation, investment and trade policies. We will also be talking to export credit agencies.

These efforts must be participatory, and we must be up to the challenge. At the start of the week, in Brussels, we brought together over 150 young activists from a hundred countries to celebrate the anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, in the presence of Ms Al-Nashif, among others. These young people have shared their vision for human rights for the next twenty-five years. The results of their discussions will feed into a "Youth Declaration" to be presented in Geneva next week, in this way conveying the European Commission's desire to systematically consult young people when drawing up cooperation policies. All over the world, we are developing "Youth Sounding Boards", where young people can express their views on issues important to them and describe how they can help us formulate policies that make sense to them. Their concerns are well known, as has been discussed, but these young people also have their aspirations, and decompartmentalise issues between, for example, individual freedom, environmental justice, climate resilience, the right to life, the right to education and fundamental freedoms. It is crucial to listen to them.

Virginie LEPETIT

Thank you for speaking on behalf of Team Europe, reminding us of the levers that have been implemented and the extent to which young people act as mobilisers and are full of energy and ideas, especially cross-cutting ideas. We suggest a five-minute break now. Please join us in this same room for a round-table discussion that will bring together six expert witnesses who will discuss the state of the world.

Thank you to all our speakers for opening this conference.



Human Rights

The state
of the world
by region,
six expert witnesses

Virginie LEPETIT

The second part of this morning is an examination of the state of the world. We welcome six expert witnesses, each of whom will take stock of their part of the world on a particular theme.

Our first three witnesses are:



For ASIA

Jyotsna MOHAN

Regional Coordinator of the Asia Development Alliance



For LATIN AMERICA

Luz HARO

Executive Secretary of the Network of Rural Women of Latin America and the Caribbean



For North Africa and the Middle East

Ayman MHANNA

Executive Director of the Samir Kassir Foundation, Lebanon





Asia

The privatisation of agriculture,
agribusiness and impacts
on the human rights
of local communities

Virginie LEPETIT

We start with Jyotsna MOHAN who will talk about Asia and the impact of agribusiness on human rights. She has expertise in this area through the Asia Development Alliance, a regional network that supports civil society in times of social change.



Jyotsna MOHAN

Regional Coordinator of the Asia Development Alliance



Thank you for giving me this opportunity today,

I represent Asia Development Alliance, which brings together 25 countries and other partners in Asia. I will discuss the implications of the privatisation of agriculture and agribusiness on human rights in Asia, a region with over 59% of the world's population. This region is known for its vibrant economies, rich natural resources and a complex tapestry of political and economic landscapes. My presentation concerns economic development and the related challenges, particularly in terms of the impact on human rights.

But before I start I would like to emphasise that this morning we discussed SDG 16, but in our experience hardly any Member States want to talk about this SDG. That's a pity.

Asia, and in particular South Asia and Southeast Asia, is a hub of economic dynamism. However, the rapid growth has not consistently benefited local communities. Large-scale land acquisitions, a by-product of development, have led to widespread expropriation, dispossession, exclusion and disruption for local populations. In Cambodia, for example, the pursuit of agribusiness projects has led to forced evictions – a stark example of land grabbing. Indonesia faces a similar crisis, as these practices have not only led to the displacement of communities, but also to significant deforestation that threatens Indigenous peoples. The Mekong project in particular has led to high levels of displacement of Indigenous populations. Furthermore, the disturbing trend of suicide among farmers in India underscores the severity and human cost of these land issues.

There are significant gaps in human rights protection in Asia. The existing measures, while robust in theory, are not applied in practice. The region grapples with opaque economic practices and a lack of corporate accountability. Consequently, the dividends

Asia [...] is a hub of economic dynamism. However, this rapid growth has not always benefited local communities.

The gap between the scale of human rights violations suffered by local populations and the protection offered by existing human rights instruments is alarming, particularly in rapidly developing countries such as China and India.

of corporate growth in Asia and Southeast Asia rarely flow down to the most affected workers and communities. This raises pressing questions about the sustainability of these growth models and their alignment with the dynamics of world trade.

There are a number of specific examples I would like to highlight here, with case studies from Malaysia and Indonesia, where the palm oil industry imposes exploitative working conditions and encroaches on Indigenous lands. In Nepal, the promotion of cash crops has led to a loss of agricultural biodiversity. In the Philippines, agribusiness projects often proceed without proper consultation with Indigenous communities. In Cambodia, large-scale land acquisition for agribusiness has resulted in the forced evictions of local communities. The corporatisation of agriculture in Sri Lanka has led to the displacement of smallholders, impacting livelihoods and land access.

I would also like to talk about the use of pesticides and the impact on health. Countries such as China, India and Vietnam, among the world's biggest pesticide consumers, face significant health issues related to pesticide use. Pesticides, essential for pest and disease management, pose risks due to inadequate safety measures and a lack of proper user guidelines. Bangladesh's success in reducing deaths from pesticide self-poisoning is a model worth emulating.

With regards to the impact of challenges of agribusiness in South Asia, it is clear that the effects of privatisation have been mixed. While India's agriculture has become more efficient, market concentration and the loss of agricultural biodiversity, as in Nepal, are raising serious concerns. In Pakistan, private agribusinesses have improved market access, but the broader region faces challenges such as environmental degradation and social inequities.

Human rights defenders play a pivotal role in navigating the complex interplay between economic development and human rights. They serve as vital links between local communities and companies, as well as government entities, advocating for the rights and welfare of people affected by rapid development and land acquisitions. Despite their crucial role, human rights defenders face significant challenges, particularly climate rights defenders. The gap between the human rights violations suffered by local populations and the protection offered by current human rights instruments is alarming, particularly in rapidly developing countries such as China and India. The fast pace of growth, combined with transparency issues, raises serious concerns about the sustainability of this development and its impact on the well-being of workers and communities. The lack of strong regional mechanisms aggravates these challenges, contributing to instability and inadequate governance. It is imperative to address these gaps to ensure that economic progress is inclusive and respectful of human rights, while protecting the interests of all stakeholders.

I would like to talk briefly about community-managed natural farming as a solution to these challenges. This type of agriculture, based on community participation and agro-ecological practices, offers a sustainable alternative. Initiatives such as Zero Budget Natural Farming in India and the System of Rice Intensification (SRI)

in the Philippines have had a positive impact on biodiversity, human and climate resilience, and community empowerment. These models are essential for preserving agrobiodiversity and countering the dominant productionist agricultural model.

The Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) project in Andhra Pradesh, India, is a positive model for sustainable agriculture. Recommendations for development actors include the adoption of agro-ecological practices, legal protections for defenders and the adoption of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights for corporate accountability. Furthermore, capacity building within the framework of international conventions and the improved transparency of regulatory risk data are essential.

Turning now to my recommendations, it is essential to collaborate with international conventions such as the Rotterdam Convention to strengthen regulatory frameworks and capacity building. It is necessary to enhance transparency in pesticide regulation and advocate environmentally sustainable practices. It is also necessary to support the re-evaluation of pesticide registrations and promote integrated pest management programmes such as those in Indonesia. Furthermore, legal frameworks that integrate the various aspects of agricultural biodiversity conservation must be encouraged.

In conclusion, although Asia's rapid economic growth has brought many benefits, it has also led to significant human rights challenges in the context of agricultural privatisation. An effective remedy requires a multi-faceted approach, involving stronger legal frameworks, community initiatives and international cooperation, all focused on protecting local communities and the environment.

Thank you so much for your attention.





Virginie LEPETIT

Thank you for this overview of the situation in Asia. Asia has 59% of the world's population. However, the continent is likely to experience a rice crisis in the next few years, aggravated by global warming.

In India in 2021, the government backed away from agrarian reform that planned to liberalise the sector: after a year of intense demonstrations by farmers, their unions finally won the day. Does this mean that mobilisation can work?

Jyotsna MOHAN

Absolutely: there is immense hope, and it lies in democracy. It should be remembered, however, that the narrative of democracy changes depending on the government and how it wants democracy to be portrayed. Despite this, we feel that there is increased hope after the farmers' movement of 2021, the scale of which forced the government to listen to the demands. When the community is involved, it affords immense hope. I am very optimistic: if it can be successful in India, I am sure other countries can follow suit.



Virginie LEPETIT

That's a note of hope.

I have another question. Small farmers are disappearing to the benefit of large multinationals, but it can also be noted that the desire to be a farmer is declining. I am thinking in particular of Indonesia, which has lost five million farming families in ten years. People don't want to be farmers any longer, and some have burned their oil palms. Faced with these difficulties and the poverty of small farmers, is there a decline in the number of people wanting to be farmers?

Jyotsna MOHAN

This phenomenon can be seen everywhere in Southeast Asia: the landholding is decreasing. In these countries, parents give their land to their sons. If a farmer leaves his land to his four children, the area is divided by four. At the same time, people are increasingly attracted to big cities: there is genuine urban migration. This leads to the loss of the farming tradition, and it is not passed on to future generations; they prefer to move to urban areas where there is more work. It is therefore important to make villages and small towns self-sustained, the way it used to be, with small farms. Commercial crops such as rubber and sugar cane also require a lot of land. In my

region, I've also noticed an increasing number of land purchases by large construction companies. More and more small farmers are selling their land, because they feel they can get a very good price for it. However, this leads to a significant change in land use. Governments need to consider that agricultural land is limited, and if it continues to be used for building, farmers will continue to leave for the cities. Governments need to think about the sustainability of land and the management of small farms.

Virginie LEPETIT

In short, the world needs farmers to feed itself. These farmers need to be able to make a decent living from their work, while implementing good agricultural practices. It's a daily struggle. Before moving on to the next speaker, could you give me one word to sum up your testimony?



Jyotsna MOHAN

It's transparency.



Source: Workers in rice fields in South East Asia / 123rf.com (ndul).





Latin America

Women's rights
in rural areas

Virginie LEPETIT

We will continue the discussion with Luz HARO, Executive Secretary of the Network of Rural Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, from Ecuador. Women are also farmers, but do not necessarily get any recognition. They are a workforce that is often cheap and sometimes unpaid and exploited. It is about this topic that you will now speak.



Luz HARO

Executive Secretary of the Network of Rural Women of Latin America and the Caribbean

*Good morning to everyone,
I salute you respectfully and fraternally,*

I am an Ecuadorian farmer. I am the Executive Secretary of the Network of Rural Women of Latin America and the Caribbean and I have set up several social organisations since the 1980s. I was born in the canton of Penipe in the province of Chimborazo in the central highlands of Ecuador. I live in the heart of the Amazonian rainforest, in Pastaza. I greet you here on behalf of the millions of rural women of Latin America and the Caribbean in the hope that my message can get some key points across.

Certain women have been very important to us, for example Matilde Hidalgo de Prócel², who gave us the right to vote nearly 100 years ago, as well as access to education. Matilde Hidalgo de Prócel, in addition to being a pioneer of votes for women in Ecuador, was also in the vanguard of the fight to allow girls to continue their studies after primary school. She gained a baccalaureate and then a medical degree. Young Ecuadorian women are now free to choose a university course, pursue their studies and graduate. However, in many countries in the region, this right is mainly limited to urban areas and implicitly denied to rural adolescents.

² Matilde Hidalgo de Prócel (1889-1974) was a rural woman born in Chimborazo province, Ecuador. A doctor and poet, she was also an activist who fought for women's rights. She was the first Ecuadorian woman to be awarded a bachelor's degree (1913) and a doctorate in medicine (1921). She campaigned for votes for women. Ecuadorian women won the right to vote and stand as candidates on 9 June 1924. Hidalgo became the first Ecuadorian woman to vote in a national election. In 1941, she became the first female candidate and the first woman to be elected to public office. She was vice-president of the National Electoral Council and a founding member of the Association of Electoral Magistrates of the Americas. She was the executive secretary of the LAC Network.



Our fight is also part of the struggle initiated by Tránsito Amaguaña³ and Dolores Cacuango, two Ecuadorian Indigenous women who became leaders and had to confront the violence of landowners and bosses who saw Indigenous people as little more than beasts of burden and labourers. The work they did was virtually slavery. They suffered persecution, violence against family members, some of whom were murdered, and were imprisoned simply for demanding better living conditions, freedom of association, access to education for their children and acknowledgement of their human dignity.

At that time, rural communities had very limited access to healthcare, housing and food; and this is still the case today. As women in rural communities, we face severe restrictions on the ability to enjoy our rights.

People living in rural Ecuador do have the same rights as any other Ecuadorian, even if they cannot fully exercise them. They have the same rights even if the State infringes these rights by failing to act as a guarantor. It's a historic struggle.

Powerful women leaders also established women's social movements in other countries throughout the region:

Margarida Maria Alves (1933-1983) was a union leader murdered for her fight for rural workers' rights in Alagoa Grande, Paraíba, northeastern Brazil. Her killing gave rise to the Daisies March that brings together hundreds of thousands of rural women from the countryside, forests and rivers.

Patria (1924-1960), Minerve (1926-1960) and Maria Teresa Mirabal (1935-1960) were three sisters murdered by the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic (1930-1961). The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is celebrated in their honour every year on 25 November.

There were also Bartolina Sisa⁴, Gregoria Apaza (Bolivia), Micaela Bastidas⁵ (Peru), Juana Azurduy⁶ (Argentina), Isidora Katari (Bolivia), Manuela Tito and so many others.

People living in rural Ecuador do have the same rights as any other Ecuadorian, even if they cannot fully exercise them. exercise them.

³ Tránsito Amaguaña (1909-2009) and Dolores Cacuango (1881-1971) were two Ecuadorian Indigenous activists who pioneered the promotion of rural Indigenous women's rights. They led the first farmworkers' strike in Omello in 1931. Members of the Communist Party, they founded the first agricultural unions in the country, the first Quechua-Spanish bilingual schools and the Ecuadorian Federation of Indians in 1946 to campaign for land redistribution and fight the large estate model. Shortly afterwards, the "huasicama" system of domestic service was abolished.

⁴ Bartolina Sisa (1750-1782) and Gregoria Apaza Nina (1751-1782): Indigenous leaders from the La Paz region (Viceroyalty of Peru during the Spanish Empire) who were murdered after leading an Indigenous Aymara-Quechua revolt against the Spanish crown. International Indigenous Women's Day is held on 5 September every year in their honour.

⁵ Micaela Bastidas (1744-1781, Cusco, Viceroyalty of Peru during the Spanish Empire): known as "Zamba", a name given in colonial times to individuals of mixed African and Indigenous descent. Alongside her husband Túpac Amaru II, she led a rebellion against the Spanish Empire in 1780. Both were condemned to death, tortured and executed in 1781.

⁶ Juana Azurduy (1780-1862, Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata, Upper Peru, present-day Bolivia): a mestizo woman and soldier, she took part in the wars of independence for the emancipation of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata from the Spanish monarchy. She assumed command in the wars that led to the formation of the Repùblica of La Laguna.

The RedLAC Network was founded in San Bernardo in 1990 to ensure that rural women were given a voice at international meetings of women and feminists. If we are invisible, then we do not count and do not exist.

It is essential that the struggle of these great women and so many others who dedicated their lives to serving their families, communities and region is remembered. Once more we need to raise our voices and claim the spaces that belong to those who live on the land, because we don't always get a say in the construction of the country, city or community in which we want to live.

We want every young woman who lives in a rural setting to be free to exercise their rights without any media pressure, infringements of their freedoms, or real or imagined insufficiencies.

This leadership, moreover, and its historic struggle, demands that we promote the universalisation of rural women's rights.

Who are we?

Our organization consists of over 200 women's organisations from Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

Faithful to the historical legacy of our predecessors, both in Ecuador and the other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the RedLAC Network was founded in San Bernardo in 1990 to ensure that rural women were given a voice at international meetings of women and feminists. If we are invisible, then we do not count and do not exist.

To combat this lack of visibility, women can turn to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979.

The RedLAC Network aims to promote effective civic and political participation by rural women through a range of strategies. The direction taken by the Network has been decided at five major meetings held between 1996 and 2023 in Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Panama and the town of Coyhaique in Chilean Patagonia. We discuss our problems at these meetings, seek solutions to propose to governments and research strategic alliances such as this one. At the Third Meeting in Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador, we drafted the first Political Agenda of the RedLAC Network, which revolves around five major themes: 1) land, work and production; 2) water, birth, life and death of water; 3) violence and rights; 4) the political participation of rural women; and 5) community communications and ICT. A sixth theme on climate change was added at the meeting in Chile in 2023.

I have been part of this network since 1995. We have fought hard for human rights. We have tried to implement our efforts from the bottom up. I was born in 1949, and human rights date back to 1948, so we are almost the same age. Yet these rights are still denied to the most humble women, those who live in the countryside and remote communities. We are entitled to be told that these rights exist for us, irrespective of whether we can read and write. The illiteracy rate in remote communities in Ecuador is 17%. We often don't even have an ID card to document our existence.

I was born in 1949. Human rights date back to 1948, so we are almost the same age. However, these rights remain absent for the most humble women, who live in the countryside and in remote communities.

In my province, in the Ecuadorian part of the Amazon, the province of Pastaza, there are 17 rural communes, of which only 13 are accessible by road. The others can only be reached by river or air. The Indigenous women and girls of the Amazonian rainforest don't know about anything. Most cannot read or write. They have no rights to healthcare, education, sanitation, basic services, electricity or connectivity.

The reality of their experience is completely different from that in the cities. When we talk about statistical data and economic averages, we are talking about Quito and Ecuador's other major cities, such as Guayaquil and Cuenca. This is what happens in all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, where the statistics do not show the reality because they are skewed towards urban figures. When they say that poverty is decreasing, it's a distorted vision. We don't choose to be poor. There are no opportunities or investment in these communities as local governments prefer to invest in infrastructure rather than human development. If we don't receive an education, we can't demand our rights. We don't even know how to write.

This is why our network supports training schools for rural women leaders, which raises awareness of our rights. This helps us to strengthen our leadership and promote the fight for the rights that are enshrined in international conventions as well as in the constitution and law.



Source: Young girls in Iquitos, Peru / 123rf.com (123mn).



Source: Schoolgirl in the classroom of the old town of Suchitoto in Salvador / 123rf.com (gonzalobell).

Training schools were set up in Pastaza, Ecuador in 1990, and have since spread throughout the region. These are training courses rather than physical spaces; they help with capacity building for rural women. During the pandemic, in 2020 and 2021, we organised leadership training schools for 16 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Without this, we would have been totally disconnected from each other.

The pandemic highlighted all the social injustices which have been imposed on us by governments. Indeed, it became apparent that there was no connectivity in Ecuador: only 16% of rural areas have fixed telephony.

The COVID19 pandemic led to an alarming degradation of many aspects of rural women's lives. Throughout this period, women played five different roles: farmer, producer, mother, housekeeper and community worker, all without pay or compensation, at all times responsible for feeding everyone. However, they receive almost no recognition. These training schools allow us to unite, grow stronger and continue to assert our rights and pursue our struggles.

Thank you to Coopération française who made it possible for us to be here today. Thanks also to the Eurosocal programme for bringing together people from all around the world to try to resolve what, up until now, has not been resolved.

We would like education to reach the most remote populations: during the pandemic, millions of girls and boys had no access to schooling. As a result, they have fallen behind in their studies and cannot access schools and universities. Education in rural and remote areas leaves much to be desired, and effectively excludes our children from universities.

Furthermore, girls are absent from class because they become pregnant at a very young age. Instead of studying, they become mothers as a result of rape and incest. Some girls become pregnant at the age of ten, twelve, fifteen. Such is the reality of Latin America and Ecuador.



The lives of victims, after an early pregnancy, are no longer the same and their living conditions worsen. They have to stop school and many of them are chased away from their parents' home and even from the community.

When I was 14, being the eldest daughter of two poor Ecuadorian peasants and having only attended school up to third grade, my family considered the option of marrying me off to a man aged over 45. The objective was to ease the burden on my family and give me a better future. Who knows what would have become of me if my parents had accepted this horrible proposal!

These kinds of things still happen in rural areas. Girls and teenagers from the country are often handed over by their parents to older men who become their partners. This removes them from the family home and gives the men the chance to have children. These desperate, illegal arrangements lead to a whole cascade of related problems and create a vicious circle.

Over 40,000 girls become mothers in Ecuador every year (World Vision Ecuador, 2022). In 2021, according to the Rapid Gender Analysis report, 12% of girls aged 10 to 19 had been pregnant at least once, and 80% of adolescent pregnancies were due to sexual abuse. Furthermore, 78% of adolescent pregnancies occur between the ages of 10 and 14, and 31.2% of the surveyed women did not know a contraceptive method. It should be recalled that under the Criminal Code, sexual abuse is punishable by a sentence of 7-13 years depending on the victim's age (Art. 170) and rape by a sentence of 19-22 years according to Arts. 171 and 171.1.

Beyond the crime and penalties, the lives of victims after an adolescent or early pregnancy, when not within a forced marriage, are no longer the same and their living conditions deteriorate. They have to stop going to school, and many of them are thrown out of the paternal home and even the community, making them doubly victims and increasing their degree of vulnerability. Many other children also have to leave school before completing their studies, which restricts their skills development and considerably reduces their chances of entering paid employment.

In addition, access to the agrarian social security system is very limited, with coverage of just 30.7% of the unsalaried agricultural population in 2017 (ILO, 2018).

Moreover, the incomes of these new families are often low, perpetuating poverty. In Ecuador, the poverty rate fell over a ten-year period, from 61% in 2007 to 41% in 2017. However, in 2021, after the pandemic, this percentage rose to 49%, with 28% of the rural population suffering extreme poverty (INEC, 2021).

Access to basic services is both the right of citizens and an obligation of the State as a provider. The various levels of government in Ecuador are responsible for providing the infrastructure and services to enhance the quality of life of their citizens. However, according to the Ecuadorian Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), there is a lack of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in the homes of one in two children and adolescents in Ecuador (2.6 million) (INEC, 2018). A high percentage of these homes are located in peri-urban and rural areas. In 2020, 79% of urban areas had drinking water supplies and 60% had sanitation services (Water Control and Regulation Agency, 2020). No information is available for the rural sector.

As rural women and as farmers, we are the guardians of life, of nature, seeds, healthy food and production without genetic modification. The men leave, but we continue to work the land, although our daily wages do not even reach half of those of the men.

As rural women and as farmers, we are the guardians of life, of nature, seeds, healthy food and production without genetic modification.

While men earn 15 dollars a day, women are paid just 7 dollars a day for the same work. Since we don't have social security, we are in a disadvantaged position. Many women are not even paid anything. Yet we produce 51% of our food through our labour and represent 43% of the agricultural workforce, while we own less than 20% of agricultural land, according to CEPAL figures.

Some 45% of women in the region do not have access to the Internet. As a result, we are completely disconnected from national and global realities, and it limits our access to training. Agrarian social security cover in Ecuador is just 30.7%, the lowest figure in the region.

Lack of access to credit can also restrict the opportunities for the economic growth of women's activities. The average income of rural women varies between \$45 and \$150 a month. If we invest in rural financial services, we will help women to be heard, and that will facilitate a reduction in poverty.

If local and national government policies were fairer, we wouldn't have to fight to reach the Zero Hunger goal. The world needs to recognise that we, women in remote communities, start our work on the land before dawn and continue until after sunset, earning nothing. We produce at the risk of losing. This is the reality we have to live with, because there are no proper roads, because there are no marketing channels to sell our fresh and healthy products, at fair prices. We have very low levels of education, but we are the guardians of nature.

There is huge deforestation in Ecuador and Latin America. Of course, we are now talking about reforestation, but this leads to the planting of foreign plants and trees that absorb too much water and are not native to the region, such as pines, eucalyptus and teak. It is often said that there will soon be wars over water, but governments are attracting foreign investment to plant non-native trees that are not suitable for our soils, and are granting access to land by taking it away from local farmers.

Women are invisible, especially rural women. We need accurate, disaggregated statistical data on the exact situation of women, girls and adolescents throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, from Mexico to Chile.

The RedLAC Network launched a study with the UNDP and FAO that showed that women contribute to the well-being of urban populations. We have also seen that it is necessary to reappraise the value of where we live in order to recover traditional practices and not suffer the international solutions of people who decide for us even though their alternatives are far removed from our reality. This means putting in place a form of governance that places women at the heart of the debate. Because we women are the givers of life, and we contribute to the development of rural populations.

The RedLAC Network is not just analysing the problem, we are also seeking out strategies to improve the conditions under which nearly 60 million rural women in the region live every day. In 2006, we launched a campaign to declare a Decade of Rural Women. The proposal was put to Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of UN Women, during her visit to meet the Ecuadorian government in Quito in 2012 as well as at the Rio+20 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 2018, I delivered the RedLAC Network's express request at the 62nd session of the Commission on

the Status of Women at the United Nations in New-York. We have received strong support from parties including the Mayor of Zacatecas, Mexico, the Minister of Women's Affairs in Córdoba, Argentina, and other strategic allies in Latin America, who declared the start of the Decade of Rural Women in 2020.

In 2021 and 2022, we asked the Panamanian government to advocate the plan to the Organization of American States. Finally, on 23 June 2023, after much work and diplomatic negotiations with the representatives of the 32 Member States, the OAS adopted the Declaration of the Inter-American Decade for the Rights of All Women, Adolescents, and Girls in Rural Settings in the Americas which will be observed between 2024 and 2034.

The Declaration requires us to make progress on fundamental issues such as those mentioned above in order to construct a new form of coexistence based on urban-rural reciprocity in the countries of the Americas and around the world.

Our next endeavour is to work with the government of Panama and other strategic partners to request the United Nations to proclaim the Decade of Rural Women for all 192 UN Member States. We are convinced that there are rural women living in similar conditions and facing the same challenges, inequalities and structural violence in every country in the world. We believe that the only things that they need to improve their living conditions are equal opportunities and a life free of violence.

I would like to thank those who gave me the opportunity to attend today, as well as on other occasions, to talk about our reality.

I come from Pastaza in the heart of the Amazon – the lungs of humanity. We want the whole world to recognise this and devote resources to facilitating human potential through educational establishments; we want decisions to be made such that we can live in dignity.



Virginie LEPETIT

Thank you for that extremely moving testimony. Thank you for reminding us how much you are the guardians of life, of nature, seeds and biodiversity, and for reminding us how important it is for women in rural areas to have access to education, communications and information.

If you had to summarise your testimony in one word, what would be the main challenge?

Luz HARO

The main challenge is to ensure that the world recognises the contribution of today's and tomorrow's women, girls and adolescents. This means receiving the support of not just governments, but above all of the grassroots organisations on the ground, to channel resources and ensure that women can fulfil their true role without depending on the clientelism and populism to which governments subject us.

We women want to be citizens and recognised as such, because we bring something to the world. We need opportunities. We don't want the cities to be filled with poor people from rural areas. We are being forced to leave the countryside. We want to stay in our villages to be producers in a dignified manner, rather than be consumers in poor conditions in the cities.

On 23 June, we issued a statement calling on the OAS and the UN to help us. We invite you to join this great cause so that the UN listens to us and makes the Decade of Rural Women a reality around the world.



Virginie LEPETIT

I understand that your priority is the recognition of the work of rural women.

Luz HARO

Indeed: they need to be recognised and valued. We also need to ensure reciprocity between urban and rural areas, because urban populations must value the products we are responsible for producing. When you go into a supermarket, no one debates the prices you pay. On the other hand, when we want to sell our products, we are insulted, we are mistreated, and we can't sell at a fair price.



If women are not owners lands, they will not be able to access to credits, and they will not be able to continue to produce on their land.

Virginie LEPETIT

A previous FAO report indicated that only 15% of women in Latin America and the Caribbean own agricultural land. How can women gain access to the land? I suppose that is one of your struggles.

Luz HARO

My fight comes from the land. When I was a little girl, I was only able to go to primary school for four years. I started reading and learning what was being taught in schools and universities when I was 35. It took me another 35 years to reach your level. We work to raise the standard of living, so that we are not seen as inferior.

When it comes to land ownership and economic autonomy, all countries need to pass fairer laws. Indeed, if women do not own the land, they won't be able to access credit, and they won't be able to continue producing on their land. These rights must be differentiated for small farmers. In Ecuador, some 10% of producers are macroproducers. However, 90% of producers are small farmers working poor quality land, far from the markets. Governments don't allow us to sell our products fairly. We are asking for your support to channel funds to boost local women farmers, so that they can sell the fruits of their daily labour on the markets. Beyond the colour of our skin or our political and religious beliefs, we are women and we work from sunrise, we work barefoot. We don't even know what a private vehicle is: I am here because Agence française de développement invited me, and because God is almighty and has allowed me to come. This means I can share the story of my life with you and describe the realities of rural living, not to complain, but to ask for investment to improve our future.



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North Africa and the Middle East

Free media and the
protection of journalists
and whistleblowers

Virginie LEPETIT

We will now talk about transparency by welcoming Ayman MHANNA, Executive Director of the Samir Kassir Foundation, an association that promotes democratic culture in Lebanon. You are going to tell us about freedom of the press in North Africa and the Middle East, a freedom that is under threat there as it is everywhere else.



Ayman MHANNA

Executive Director of the Samir Kassir Foundation, Lebanon.

*Hello everyone,
Thank you very much for your invitation and, ladies, for your testimonies,*

The fight for freedom of expression is a fight that is very current. The cruel news we receive every day reminds us of this. Since 7 October 2023, 80 journalists have lost their lives in Palestine and Lebanon. The last two months have been the most deadly for journalists since crimes against them started being recorded by international organisations. The whole world is experiencing an unprecedented crisis in its relationship with information: information is manipulated, militarised and captured in algorithmic bubbles. The clear and serious consequences of this situation challenge the concept that we can live together, different but together, whether across nations or in the same country. The wars in Ukraine and Palestine, the pandemic, the recent elections in Argentina and the Netherlands, and those scheduled for 2024 for India, the European Parliament and the United States, are just some of the fields of play in this dystopian reality that is gradually taking hold.

It is against this background that the Samir Kassir Foundation works in Lebanon, and more generally in the Middle East and North Africa. It is in this context that we must consider our struggle. We all face challenges, but this is particularly the case in countries experiencing multiple crises: economic, social and political. This is the case in Lebanon, and in all the countries of the region.

I will name five key challenges:

- the challenge of impunity,
- the challenge of political and economic control,
- the challenge of the law,
- the challenge of the economic model,
- the challenge of manipulation.

According to UNESCO, 85% of crimes committed against journalists never lead to a full judicial process and conviction of the criminals. In the countries of our region, this figure rises to 99%. Impunity is the rule.

With regards to the first challenge, we should recall that according to UNESCO, 85% of crimes against journalists do not lead to a full court case and the conviction of the perpetrators. In the countries of our region, this figure rises to 99%. Impunity is the rule, and criminals are often in power, whether officially or otherwise. Reports published yesterday by AFP, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International showed that Israel knew that a team from AFP, Reuters and Al Jazeera had been deliberately targeted: but this crime will go unpunished. However, it is not just a question of impunity for crimes against journalists during times of war. My foundation is named after Samir Kassir, who was murdered in Lebanon in 2005. And on 12 December, we commemorate the killing of another great Lebanese journalist, Gebran Tuéni. In 2021, the Lebanese journalist and writer, Lokman Slim, was murdered. The situation is similar in Syria, which has been the most lethal country for journalists since 2012. It is also the case in Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. But it is not just impunity for criminals who kill journalists: it is also impunity for the policeman who violently attacks a reporter, impunity for militias who kidnap journalists, impunity for religious groups who attack and destroy news agency offices. Their names and faces are known, but justice has never dared to do its job. Our journalists operate in a climate of fear and self-censorship.

As regards political and economic control, I invite you to consult the Media Ownership Monitor. This database was initially launched by Reporters Without Borders but is now run by the Global Media Registry, a German NGO. The database lists the owners of major media outlets in over 20 countries. Over 80% of these outlets are directly controlled by politicians or businesspeople with direct links to political power. The independence of the media is profoundly compromised in this context, whether in terms of editorial independence or economic independence, as media owners are also those who control the advertising market.

As for the third challenge, the laws in our countries are either outdated, restrictive or vague, and often all three. In Lebanon, the most recent law on the audiovisual media was passed in 1994. A bill to update the law has been stalled in parliamentary committees since 2010. In the United Arab Emirates, a tweet that is considered to be contrary to the country's interests can lead to a 15-year prison term. In Egypt, the so-called anti-terrorist laws effectively prohibit any genuine investigation or questioning of the government's actions. In Tunisia, the democratic achievements made since 2011 are being taken apart one after the other.

The challenge of the economic model that applies to the media around the world is even more acute in these countries. The concept of public subsidy is either non-existent or detrimental. The advertising market, already affected by the economic crisis, is controlled by oligarchs. The support of donors is certainly welcome, but it remains inconsistent as it is linked to the fluctuations of political interests and what is in fashion. Efforts to make the independent media institutionally and financially sustainable require steady commitment and resources.

Faced with this situation, we are not giving up. Each of us has a role to play. We have a network of safe houses that offers refuge to dozens of journalists.

Finally, information manipulation is a major challenge in a part of the world where the main regional powers have launched sophisticated operations to influence public opinion. Israel, which has the unwavering support of the major social media platforms, censors content that is critical of Israeli government policy or is pro-Palestinian. Meanwhile, in a test conducted by 7amleh, an NGO based in Haifa, Meta approved 100% of 19 test advertisements advocating the murder and forced displacement of Palestinians. Iran, together with its satellite parties in Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen, controls cyber-armies that use social media to prepare the minds of people to accept and then justify the assassination of political opponents. Saudi Arabia also has cyber-armies that drown out those who dare to even hint at any criticism of the Crown Prince's policies. In this part of the world, spyware, often developed by Israel, is used in the most abusive and shameless ways against journalists, whistleblowers and Western heads of state.

Faced with this situation, we are not giving up. Each of us has a role to play. I have been the director of the Samir Kassir Foundation for nearly 16 years and we are confronting these challenges through a programme to monitor all violations in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. We have a network of safe houses that offers refuge to dozens of journalists and allows them to continue their work and plan for the future. We offer a programme of physical and digital security training adapted to the regional context. We also provide a programme of financial and technical support for the region's independent media that channels international funding and offers mentoring that is personalised to individual needs. Finally, we offer a research programme to consider the impact of the major issues of technology, artificial intelligence and algorithms on the media sector, and to understand audience perception of the main themes of media discourse.

Donors and our international partners also have an essential role to play; this is going through a change of attitude from the slightly paternalistic relationship between donors and beneficiaries to move towards a genuine partnership that meets the needs on the ground. The most important thing is to let journalists do journalism, not strategic communications. These are two noble but different professions. Combining the two damages journalists' credibility as it destroys trust with disastrous consequences. More appropriate types of funding, contributing more to institutional consolidation, must be favoured over short-term financing for the production of content, the theme of which is defined in advance by the donor in Brussels, Washington or London, and which changes as trends and priorities evolve. Consequently, what is needed is a volume of funding that will allow the objectives to be achieved. The annual budget for media development around the world is €600 million. Russia Today's total annual budget is nearly €300 million. Do we want to give ourselves the means to succeed in the fight to provide independent information, or do we just want to create the perception that we are working to confront a problem?

There must be coherence between media development policies and other support programmes for countries in the region. There is a contradiction between all the talk in favour of human rights and the €105 million agreement between the EU and Tunisia to keep potential migrants there. This agreement, negotiated despite the movement towards autocracy in Tunisia, sends out the wrong message. It should be



recalled that the United States, European Union, France, Canada and the Netherlands have spent \$324 million over six years to help the Lebanese security services improve their human rights performance: and we know the results of that. Signing arms contracts with dictatorships sends the wrong message. This is also the case when we use contradictory language towards Palestinians, Israelis and Ukrainians, or when we declare our willingness to accept migrants depending on the colour of their skin.

Finally, we must not forget the private sector: companies producing protective equipment for journalists need to improve. Over 90% of bullet-proof vests are designed for the male body. The private sector can make an important contribution to supporting independent media because it is not solely made up of companies allied with the ruling power. It includes thousands of small and large companies which show a genuine societal commitment. That's why our Foundation and its partner Equal Rights & Independent Media have set up an advertising agency in Lyon. The aim is to channel advertising to the region's independent media with the hope of broadening its field of action. Finally, we need a much stronger common front against the technology giants, whose business model is essentially incompatible with the principle of freedom of information. We won't win the battle against these giants with a bilateral agreement between Canada and Google or the EU and Facebook. The danger of confinement within our algorithmic bubbles is a global existential danger: the response must also be global. We must not lose this battle. I owe it to my children, who are two months and two years old. The society in which we live will not be the one we deserve if we are committed to the concept of human rights.

Thank you.





Virginie LEPETIT

Thank you very much. It was very hard to hear the facts you opened with about the journalists murdered in Lebanon. Despite this, the Lebanese press remains one of the richest in the region. We have seen the Syrian press disappear and the Algerian press is muzzled. What we are increasingly seeing in the region, in particular for Iran, is a press in exile. Is this a solution for Ukraine, for Russia? Can digital technology, the dangers of which you have signalled, be a solution by allowing people to remove themselves from a geographical location and the dangers associated with it?

Ayman MHANNA

Digital technology offers real potential: the main high-quality media in countries that are autocratic or in conflict is the media in exile. But it is not enough to produce high-quality journalistic content if we do not work together with the major social media platforms to change their business models. You can have the best media in exile, but if the information passes solely through algorithmic bubbles, the only people who will read the content are those who are already convinced by the message conveyed. That is what must be changed.

So my main call is for there to be an approach to negotiating with social media that goes beyond regional divides. In fact we have a common struggle. The struggles of the women who preceded me will be comprehensively challenged and destroyed if a dystopian reality takes hold through the manipulation of information networks, which will completely counter their efforts. The role we play allows us to defend each of the other rights: defending the right to freedom of expression is in fact defending our ability to evaluate all the other rights.

Virginie LEPETIT

If you had to sum up your testimony and the main challenge in a single word, what would it be?

Ayman MHANNA

That would be the word impunity, whether for those who commit crimes against journalists or for all those who, through their poor governance, corruption, naivety or collaboration with social media, have allowed things to get this far.



Source:
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmed_Mansoor

Virginie LEPETIT

You alluded to a 15-year prison sentence for sending a tweet in the United Arab Emirates, which is currently hosting COP28. I imagine you were referring to Ahmed Mansoor, a blogger and poet, who was put in prison for harming the State's interests by means of a tweet. Social media can be a space for free expression, but it can also be a dangerous space.



Ayman MHANNA

Especially when Google is planning to launch its biggest data centre in Saudi Arabia, and the regional offices of Facebook and X are both in Dubai, which creates a huge and welcome employment potential for engineers in the region. These companies have human rights offices and departments with which we cooperate closely, but how much weight do they carry compared with their colleagues on the business side? We now know that they are quite weak. All this brings us back to realpolitik. The migration crisis is real. But should the response be to sign agreements with dictators if they help keep migrants to the south of the Mediterranean Sea? The consequences of this policy will be paid for by the people of the region, and also by the European Union and its donors. There is a contradiction between Europe's desire to be a leader in standards and the realpolitik we see in the elections in Slovakia, the Netherlands and Italy. If the European Union wants to maintain its image as a leader that sets standards, it will have to respond to certain issues in a different way.



Source: 123rf.com (sdecoret) / Freepick.

Virginie LEPETIT

Thanks to all three of you.
Please now exchange places
with the next three speakers.
We welcome Ksenia
BOLCHAKOVA, journalist
and winner of the 2022
Albert Londres Prize,
who will talk to us
about Eastern Europe;
Magali LAFOURCADE,
Secretary-General of the
French National Consultative
Commission for Human Rights,
who will tell us about Western
Europe and North America;
and André-Franck AHOYO,
General Delegate of the
Identity Emergency Africa
Fund, for Sub-Saharan Africa.



For EASTERN EUROPE

Ksenia BOLCHAKOVA

*Journalist
and Albert-London Prize 2022*



For WESTERN EUROPE
and NORTH AMERICA

Magali LAFOURCADE

*Secretary-General
of the French National Consultative
Commission for Human Rights*



For SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

André-Franck AHOYO

*General Delegate of the Identity
Emergency Africa Fund*





Eastern Europe

War in Ukraine,
humanitarian crisis
and regional repercussions
for human rights

Virginie LEPETIT

Ksenia BOLCHAKOVA, you were awarded the 2022 Albert Londres Prize. You are a Franco-Russian investigative journalist working in France, and you have made a documentary about the Wagner Group. You are going to talk to us about the war in Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis.



Ksenia BOLCHAKOVA

Journalist and Albert-London Prize 2022

Good morning everyone. I would like to thank AFD for inviting me to speak,

During the initial preparatory exchanges with the agency's teams, I wondered how to approach the issue of the retreat of human rights in Ukraine and Russia in the context of this anachronistic war at the heart of Europe. It is a war which has already lasted nearly two years, and whose reported horrors increase every day. Appalled by the breaches of humanitarian rights and the tens of thousands of war crimes committed by Russian forces and their proxies, I have found it extremely difficult to take an overview. The reason for this is that, since 24 February 2022, I have been working exclusively on the subject as a documentary filmmaker. In addition to a film on the Wagner Group, I have made three other films, two on Ukraine and one on Russia. Becoming immersed in a world of countless casualties, investigating atrocious crimes, recording the words of victims and perpetrators: faced with so much tragedy, the retreat of human rights seemed almost secondary to me.

This is why I would like to thank AFD, because I was wrong in my assessment. I have realised that what is happening in Eastern Europe today is due in large part to the decline in human rights in Russia. This has been a fateful march that started as soon as Vladimir Putin rose to power in the country. Russia is my country of origin but I no longer recognise it, so transformed has it become since assuming the posture of an aggressor. I worked in Russia as a French media correspondent from 2010 to 2016. I covered the huge opposition demonstrations of the winter of 2011. I had hoped to see a democratisation of the system and of minds, but I was disappointed. From the start of his third term on 7 May 2012, the Russian president chose to repress all challenges and all fundamental and individual freedoms. He rewrites history, muzzles burgeoning civil society, injects billions of rubles into his propaganda and sends his police into action with their batons at every opposition rally. And when he created the infamous status of foreign agent, a synonym for an enemy of the people, for any NGO or individual collaborating with foreign institutions or not faithfully following the Kremlin's line, he enacted a definitive change from managed democracy to authoritarian regime.

I realized that much of what is happening in Eastern Europe today is due to the decline in human rights in Russia.

Putin has let the mask slip. Authoritarianism has transformed into fascism 2.0, where human rights no longer have any value.



Nigina Beroeva



Founded by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1993, Novaya Gazeta gained a reputation of hard-hitting journalism. Six of its journalists were killed, including Anna Politkovskaya in 2006.

At the time, we didn't see it, me most of all. Perhaps I simply preferred not to see it: we closed our eyes to the excesses that seemed to be occurring on the fringes, hoping that they would not become the rule. I think of myself as the man in the voice-over narration of the film *La Haine* who, as he falls from a 50-storey building, quietly whispers to himself: *"So far, so good. So far, so good. But how you fall doesn't matter. It's how you land!"* I so wanted to believe that everything would be all right that I turned a blind eye to what was already being prepared: a landing in the form of an invasion and total war. And not just against Ukraine, but against the West and its values, which Moscow is well and truly determined to fight, convinced that it must defend what it calls the Russian world, a geopolitical fantasy that brings together all the countries in which Russian speakers live. A world it believes to be threatened and which it intends to dominate, imposing its ultra-conservative values: faith, family, homeland. With his military aggression against Ukraine, Putin has let the mask slip. Authoritarianism has transformed into fascism 2.0, where human rights no longer have any value, being abused a little more every day, and where the space left for civil society has been eradicated. Belarus, already an ally of Russia, has totally submitted to these new rules, oppressing its own citizens and offering its territory as a rear base to Russian forces since 24 February 2022.

There is no longer an independent press in either of these countries. All media outlets have to use official, state-approved sources of information to write about the "special military operation in Ukraine". Coverage of the conflict has become virtually impossible, and any journalists not working for Kremlin-controlled media have had to go into exile. I'm thinking here of my friend Nigina Beroeva, who has moved 23 times. I'm thinking of colleagues at Novaya Gazeta, Echo of Moscow radio, Dozhd TV, the online newspaper Meduza, and all the others, those journalists of integrity and courage who somehow continue to report what is happening at home and in Ukraine, even though, more often than not, their work fails to penetrate the new iron curtain. The Russian regime has finalised its sovereign Internet project which will filter out all content considered to be dissenting. The regime has built a digital wall to prevent access to the websites of the media that has remained in the country. The use of VPNs is still tolerated, but for how long? In Russia in 2022, 4,900 websites were blocked every week. This figure has risen to 7,000 in the second year of the war. The intelligence services monitor everything and everyone. Clicking the like button for a publication written by a foreign agent can send you directly to prison. The right to independently inform and be informed has been definitively buried.

I have brought along the last issue of Novaya Gazeta, published on 23 December 2022. It's wrapped in plastic: you can't look through it, and it says that the editor of this newspaper is a foreign agent. Only those aged over 18 were allowed to read it.



Dmitri Muratov editor in chief of Novaya Gazeta Nobel Peace Prize (2021).



The publishing ban is nothing compared to the death threats journalists receive: over the past two years, about a dozen of my colleagues, believing themselves to be safe in exile abroad, have been poisoned by toxic agents. These assassination attempts bear the hallmark of the secret services. They poison those whom Dimitri Muratov, the editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, describes as the antidote to tyranny. In Russia, there is no longer any antidote to tyranny. All that is left are the fanatical cries of those who support the war and the complicit silence of those who no longer dare to speak out. This is the result of a years-long policy to systematically attack all human rights defenders and repress dissent.

The war has clearly accelerated the pace. The Kremlin has introduced new restrictions on the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The police systematically use force to disperse demonstrations against the war. Nearly 20,000 people have been arrested and face prosecution under a new law introduced in March 2022 that punishes "discrediting the Russian armed forces and disseminating deliberately false information". Criticising the war or even talking about it with a hint of reservation or irony is now likely to lead to a prison sentence. There have already been over 350 convictions under the new law. Among the most severe was that of a local elected representative, Alexei Gorinov, who was handed a seven-year prison term in July 2022 for criticising the war. Last December, the dissident Ilya Yashin was sentenced to eight years six months for talking on his YouTube channel about the massacre of civilians in Bucha by Russian forces. Yashin was a close associate of the opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, who was shot dead outside the Kremlin in 2015. Yashin was also the idealistic, incorruptible and determined leader of a youth movement who believed in the possibility of change during a period of demonstrations. Now he is incarcerated like all those who once carried our hopes, including the opposition figures Vladimir Kara-Murza and Alexei Navalny. The former is dying in prison due to a lack of essential care, having suffered acute kidney failure after being the victim of a poisoning attributed to the secret services. The latter has been in solitary confinement for over a year and suffers daily beatings and humiliation by Russian prison guards who excel in the art of breaching prisoners' rights.

Acts of torture have been committed in these prisons for years. Dozens are killed and hundreds maimed every year. This violence is institutionalised, sanctioned by the hierarchy, ritualised. It operates on the principle of reproduction, where yesterday's novice becomes tomorrow's perpetrator. The system is designed in such a way that to stop suffering, an individual has to inflict misery on others. In a country where a quarter of men have served a prison sentence, the consequences of such violence are extremely serious for the rest of society. When they are released, men repeat the actions they have learned in detention on their wives, children and relatives. Russia is currently one of the countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world. A country where domestic violence has been decriminalised, where a battered woman who called the police to save her from her violent husband was told by the call handler: "We'll come when there's a corpse." The woman in question died at the hands of her husband.

Yesterday's novice becomes tomorrow's perpetrator. The system is designed in such a way that to stop suffering.



Civilians are in danger from these killing machines that have brought the war home.

The war has not improved the situation. In May 2022, Vladimir Putin authorised the late commander of the Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, to recruit cannon fodder from prison, in breach of all the laws of a state in which the rule of law was already in its death throes. More than 50,000 criminals have been pardoned, on condition that they fight against Ukraine. Many died on their first day at the front due to a lack of training. As for those who have returned, they provide plenty of copy for the local media news pages. In August 2023 in Lipetsk, a former prisoner and Wagner mercenary returned home after several months in Ukraine. He hit his wife and her four-year-old daughter from her first marriage so hard that the girl died of her injuries. On 22 September 2023 in the Rostov region, a soldier newly returned from the front was arrested by the police. He had been drinking with a friend, but took a knife, stabbed him in the back several times and then violated him with it. In October 2023, another soldier returning from the war got into an argument with his sister, doused her with petrol and burned her alive. With this litany of horrors, you can only imagine the kind of crimes that these men would have been capable of committing in Ukraine. I have personally spoken to one of them, a soldier who fought in Bakhmut. He confided in me that he had killed 250 people in a single operation, civilians who had been discovered hiding in the basements of their buildings.

The cases I have described were picked up by the press. But how many women, how many mothers, how many children live in terror and have no way out? Calling the police would be considered a criticism of the war. No one dares take that step. Civilians are in danger from these killing machines that have brought the war home. As for the few soldiers who have tried to seek treatment, they have all been refused: there is no support or care for soldiers who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. These new veterans swell the ranks of several generations of traumatised men. Those who, before Ukraine, fought in Afghanistan and Chechnya and who, often in spite of themselves, have imbued the whole of Russian society with a violence that has become an intrinsic part of it.

Women are once again becoming subhuman in a society that is reconfiguring itself as patriarchal, patriotic, militaristic and vindictive, where the State now intrudes into our very beds.

In this context, women's rights are in their death throes. Last week, a ruling party Member of Parliament proposed banning women from higher education, because women who study have fewer children. The resurgence of an ultraconservative rhetoric is threatening all the gains made, such as abortion and the right to education, and women are once again becoming subhuman in a society that is reconfiguring itself as patriarchal, patriotic, militaristic and vindictive, where the State now intrudes into our very beds. A draft law proposes that the constitution should state that the only legal union is one between a man and a woman. After years of discrimination, representatives of the LGBTQ+ community are once again coming under attack. On 30 November, the Supreme Court of Russia banned the international LGBTQ+ movement for "extremism". This equates choosing a sexual orientation or gender identity to joining a terrorist organisation. This new condemnation of homosexuality marks a phenomenal historical about-turn and is characteristic of totalitarian states.

What is currently happening is a step backwards resembling the darkest days of the Stalinist repressions, which were also marked by a policy of deporting groups of people defined as enemies. History is repeating itself: since the start of the war, nearly 2,000 Ukrainian civilians have been taken to Russia by force and imprisoned. Human rights defenders are confronted by administrative dead-ends as they try to get them released. These civilians are a bargaining chip used by Russia as it seeks the release of prisoners of war. But they are civilians. And they are held in the toughest prisons and undergo forced programmes of re-education and Russification. They are forbidden to speak Ukrainian. They are subjected to mock executions. Their continued detention is a breach of all the Geneva Conventions and the laws of war.

This absolute horror, which we thought we would never again see in the heart of Europe, is also claiming younger, more vulnerable victims: to destroy Ukraine's future, Russia is deporting its children. According to Kyiv, nearly 20,000 Ukrainian minors have been deported, and only in very few cases have the Russian authorities sought to return these children to their legal guardians. International organisations have been refused proper access to these children by the Russian authorities. The return of children is only arranged on a case-by-case basis and is an extremely complex process. By the summer of 2023, just 361 children had returned to Ukraine, far fewer than those stolen. According to numerous testimonies, some of which I was personally able to gather, the children are subjected to ideological indoctrination. They are inculcated with a pro-Russian view of the world, a historical narrative that demeans Ukrainian identity. They are forbidden to speak their language. Some have been given Russian passports and some subsequently adopted.

More broadly, Russia's aggression has led to the breach of the human rights of countless Ukrainian children. Hundreds of children have been killed or injured, and millions deprived of their fundamental rights, in particular healthcare and education. The organised, premeditated violation of these children's rights constitutes a crime, one for which historic charges have been brought against Putin and his Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova. In March 2023, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants against them for the alleged war crime of deporting children from Ukraine. However, nothing has changed since that time. The Russians continue to separate families and deport children with absolute impunity. Urgent action is required to reunite these children with their families. Every effort must

be made to help the Ukrainian authorities identify those who knowingly perpetrate these violations, as they must be held accountable in order to hopefully bring justice to all these victims one day.

Thank you for your attention.

Virginie LEPETIT

After this comprehensive, terrible picture, could you give us one word that summarises your speech?



Ksenia BOLCHAKOVA

I think it would be the fight against impunity.

Virginie LEPETIT

It is difficult to know how the Russian people feel. Do they agree with what is happening?



Ksenia BOLCHAKOVA

It is extremely difficult to say what Russian society thinks. It is not monolithic. It is hard to estimate what proportion of the population is completely behind the government and supports the war, as there are no reliable opinion polls due to the prevailing repression. I was able to spend some time in Russia to make a documentary called "A people who march in step", the aim of which was to decipher the support mechanisms and understand why people did not take to the streets in their masses to demonstrate against the war. Several factors are involved: propaganda has played a very important role and explains the support of the regime by part of the population. But repression also plays a very significant role, with the implementation of a whole raft of legislation that explains why people choose to remain silent out of an instinct for survival.

What do the Russians think? Obviously, part of the population supports the government. A huge soft underbelly of people remains silent and is afraid to step out of line. And approximately 15% of the population is categorically against the regime.

Virginie LEPETIT

Thank you very much.



UKRAINE:
2 YEARS
STRONG

RUSSLAND
OHNE KRIEG

NO PUTIN
NO WAR

ПУТИН-УБИЙЦА
СОТЕН ТЫСЯЧ ЛЮДЕЙ
ПО ВСЕМУ МИРУ!

PUTIN IS



Western Europe and North America

Rights defenders,
environmental defenders
and the shrinking space
of civil society

Virginie LEPETIT

We will continue in Western Europe and North America with Magali LAFOURCADE, Secretary-General of the French National Consultative Commission for Human Rights (CNCDH). She will discuss the situation of environmental rights defenders against the background of a shrinking space for civil society.



Magali LAFOURCADE

*Secretary-General of the French National
Consultative Commission for Human Rights*



Good morning everyone,

We are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also the 25th anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which is extremely important because it establishes the status and commitments of States to protect these people. These ordinary citizens are fighting an ordinary battle, which is to highlight what is our common good, namely our rights and freedoms. However, they are confronted by extraordinary repression, which must absolutely be denounced. Defenders are individuals, groups and social entities who, individually or in conjunction with others, promote the protection and achievement of human rights and fundamental freedoms both nationally and internationally. However, extraordinarily severe attacks on these people are becoming common, even in the West.

Human rights have little meaning if they are not embodied by actors on the ground, namely the defenders. Human rights are not so much what the laws say, but rather what rights defenders actually do on a daily basis. It is because they are powerful, because they represent a threat to specific interests or States, because they speak out against these interests, that defenders are attacked, threatened and, in some cases, killed.

Defenders are also undermined by attacks on their environment and thus the civic space that guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of association. These freedoms are rights in themselves but are also the conduits to demand other things. According to the United Nations, they are essential for guaranteeing development and lasting peace. Restricting the civic space encourages actions against human rights and environmental defenders. And of course, this evolution has come about concurrently with the rise of populism and authoritarianism.

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Bartosz Staszewski

Some attacks target the defenders themselves, while others target organisations. Defenders are confronted by a logic of criminalisation.

These attacks are very diverse. The NGO Global Witness has recorded the murder of 1,733 environmental defenders since 2012, in other words, one killing every two days. Certain categories of defenders are targeted more than others, in particular women, who are also attacked because of their sex: their heads are superimposed onto degrading, pornographic images and even their children are threatened. Children, who are extremely active defenders and the bearers of a very powerful and significant political conscience, are systematically denigrated, including in France: take for example Emmanuel Macron's words to a young man who spoke to him about inaction on the climate. Indigenous populations are another category of defenders who are particularly targeted.

Environmental defenders, the defenders of migrant rights and the defenders of women's and LGBTQIA+ rights are especially targeted in Western Europe and North America. I am thinking about Poland with its LGBT-free zones of course. The Polish president asserted that LGBT people were not people, but an ideology. He made attempts to dehumanise and incite hatred and fear on several occasions. By the end of 2019, 80 local authorities in Poland had declared LGBT-free zones. One activist, Bartosz Staszewski, attempted an artistic action to show all the LGBT-free zones: he received death threats. In 2019, another activist displayed posters on which the Virgin was surrounded by a rainbow halo. She was charged with offending religious sensibilities and faces two years in prison.

Some attacks target the defenders themselves, while others target organisations. Defenders are confronted by a logic of criminalisation. In Poland, the abortion rights campaigner Justyna Wydrzyńska gave an abortion pill to a distressed pregnant young woman and was sentenced to eight months' community service. An increase in judicial harassment is also evident, and I would like to tell you about the case of Indigo Rumbelow, a young activist for Just Stop Oil in England. After she had displayed a placard in public, the anti-terrorist security forces visited her home at six in the morning, stage-managing the raid, searching her house and taking her into custody. I also would like to tell you about an extremely disturbing situation in Canada involving environmental defenders who have tried to stop the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline on land that they own. Cooperation between the private company involved and the government has resulted in a number of raids since 2019, with the arbitrary arrest and detention of over 80 people who opposed the construction; court cases are scheduled for early 2024. In addition to these arbitrary detentions, buildings have also been burnt down and ceremonial spaces desecrated. Also relevant are the techniques used by the police in Germany: they have resorted to using extremely painful wrist grips to remove climate activists who sit down and form human chains. United Nations Special Rapporteurs have denounced this technique as an act of torture committed by the forces of law and order.

The use of anti-terrorism laws and pandemic legislation must also be highlighted. These laws are being used in ways in which they were not intended to thwart the actions of defenders and criminalise them. There is the example of COP21 in France, when activists were placed under house arrest by means of anti-terrorism laws, and similarly in Poland for COP24. In Slovenia, anti-Covid legislation has been misused to prevent activists from participating in environmental impact studies. Added to this are surveillance software, stigmatisation and smears: the terms eco-terrorists,



"Khmer verts" and eco-totalitarians have been used by many politicians to describe environmental defenders. There was also the banning of the Soulèvements de la Terre group in France, with this movement being described in an extremely disparaging manner. The order for the group to be dissolved was ultimately annulled by the Conseil d'Etat.

There are also very frequent attacks against organisations; a vast arsenal of possibilities exists. The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law has recorded the introduction of 120 laws to restrict the spaces occupied by civil society organisations in more than 60 countries between 2012 and 2015. This trend towards restricting civic space has accelerated, and not only in Russia. Half of the legislative restrictions concern the general legal framework for NGO activities, a third concern international funding and 20% directly target the freedoms of association and assembly. The main technique is to identify "foreign agents" in order to

tighten registration requirements, limit access to funding from donors and introduce heavy administrative charges or punitive taxes. These restrictions are not confined to authoritarian regimes: they can be seen in many democracies where populism is rife. We should also mention gagging orders (of Greenpeace for example), taking down networks to weaken communications and laws on foreign agents, as in Hungary or adopted recently by Georgia in 2023.

Despite all of these issues, there is still some good news. International mechanisms have been extensively mobilised. Special rapporteurs on environmental and human rights defenders produce extremely accurate reports, with early warning mechanisms. The international community is aware of the trend and includes it in all Universal Periodic Reviews before the Human Rights Council. Treaty bodies are mobilising, and so is the Council of Europe.

As for civil society, it is remarkably inventive: hashtags are created to confront issues (#BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo), in this way making sure a cause is on the political agenda. Civil society benefits from the power of expertise: COP28 illustrated the extent to which NGOs can deploy financial and technical expertise, with enormous intelligence and capacity. The fight against SLAPPs, or gagging orders, is a good example of the mobilisation of civil society: a coalition has formed to draw attention to what the industries that initiate court proceedings are trying to gag and provoke a Streisand effect, in other words shining a spotlight on the very thing that attempts are being made to suppress.

In conclusion, the CNCDH issued its opinion on human rights defenders on 30 November. This opinion includes a list of very strong recommendations. I will focus on just one, which concerns Model Laws to protect defenders. These have been drawn up with the support of United Nations Special Rapporteurs. They are intended to be applied by all States that want to acquire this legislative text; they can be adapted into national action plans for the better protection of defenders.

Thank you for your attention. If you would like to know more about defenders, we have a podcast called UNiTerre with Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders, which introduces the United Nation's mechanisms for protecting environmental defenders.

Despite all of these issues, there is still some good news. International mechanisms have been extensively mobilised. [...] Civil society, for its part, is remarkably inventive.



Virginie LEPETIT

Thank you. If you had to sum up your testimony in a single word, what would it be?

Magali LAFOURCADE

It would be coherence. States are asked to be coherent between what they do inside their borders and what they promote outside them. In the West, many States are sermonisers. They absolutely must themselves apply what they promote to others.



Virginie LEPETIT

The Patriot Act in the United States has broadened the concept of terrorism. Some twenty American States have passed laws that introduce penalties for blocking infrastructure. How can you defend the environment and be present in the public sphere in the United States?

Magali LAFOURCADE

There has been a shift in the levers of action, especially among climate defenders, towards civil disobedience. That is a bit frightening. Let's not forget: defenders are peaceful, and civil disobedience must be peaceful to remain within the definition. A workshop was held this summer to bring together European activists under threat for their acts of civil disobedience. Exactly the same mechanisms as in the United States are being introduced: since Covid, countries have introduced excessive criminalisation measures and there has been illegitimate police violence. At the same time, activists are determined to instigate a debate about life, hope and the future generations, even though they have very little media influence. Civil disobedience is actually an effective way to attract attention, and all the more so as it is a tactic that is as old as the hills. However, this supposes being able to oppose the penalties and plead the illegitimacy of the law in court. But this is just theory: if you get your wrists broken on the way and end up disabled, that discourages all goodwill.





Sub-Saharan Africa

human rights,
between
fantasies and realities

Virginie LEPETIT

Our final witness is André-Franck AHOYO, General Delegate of the Urgence Identité Africa Fund. In your speech you will talk about relativism and the extremely harmful effect that it can have on the fight for human rights.



André-Franck AHOYO

General Delegate of the Identity Emergency Africa Fund



*Good morning everyone,
I would like to thank the AFD teams for preparing this event,*

I don't want there to be any ambiguity. Today, there is a convergence of many issues that have led people to talk about the end of human rights and claim that they are not suited to the African continent. But I am not one of those people, quite the contrary. The end of human rights is no more real than "the end of history".

I would like to present three points for your consideration. The first is the question of relativism, which examines if there is a universality of human rights or whether the issue of these rights is essentially a Western concept: this is the objection raised by those opposed to human rights on the African continent. I don't think this objection should be brushed aside: the arguments put forward by those in favour of this relativism must be taken very seriously as they try to draw on African traditions to demonstrate the existence and pervasiveness of relativism. How can this be quickly demonstrated? Firstly, it is the fact that human rights are part of an anthropocentric approach to the world: a vision centred on the human being, and therefore an individualistic view of man as an autonomous being. This vision is in contradiction with most African societies, which place greater emphasis on collective rights and obligations, the importance of which may be greater than that attributed to individual rights. This point is also proven by that famous tradition of existence in southern Africa: this is ubuntu, a term made well known by Nelson Mandela which means "I am because we are, and we are because I am". In the framework of this concept, individual rights cannot be defended. On the contrary, Africans are part of a society, a community, and this community must be taken into account to allow progress.

Many actions converge to talk about the end of human rights and show us that they would not be adapted to the African continent. The end of human rights is no more real than "the end of History".

Furthermore, certain rights are not considered relevant in our societies. In this way, there are still many cases in Africa where women cannot inherit land. In some countries, a single woman cannot register the birth of their child. My organisation works precisely on the rights of the child: the World Bank estimates that there are currently over 500 million people on the African continent who cannot prove their identity, either because they were not registered at birth or because they have lost their identity documents in the constant conflicts or intra-African or transcontinental migration. In religious terms, think of the example of Boko Haram, whose name can be translated as: "Western education is a sin". An extremist trend has developed in some Islamic communities that is now preventing the realisation of human rights. According to this trend, women and children should not go to school.

Furthermore, some consider that developing countries cannot afford human rights, as the tasks of building a state, consolidating the nation and economic development are unfinished and authoritarianism would be a more effective way of promoting development and economic growth. In this respect, we can see today the fascination that many African countries have for the Asian dragons and the way in which they have evolved. I can give you examples of countries considered to be models of economic development in Africa, such as Rwanda or Benin, countries that are experiencing impressive economic development, but where there is authoritarianism that constrains human rights.



Source: freepik.com (EyeEm)



My second point should be something upon which we can all agree: it is that human rights derive from Reason. In all human societies, including African societies, the concepts of equality, freedom and human dignity are very strong. There are no societies in which these concepts are less important than others. If human rights are prohibited, the consequences would be dramatic for the lives of our people. This truth can be seen every day, especially when it comes to enjoying fundamental rights, in particular social rights, education, healthcare and social protection. The consequences of the loss of these rights can be seen in terms of infant mortality and maternal morbidity. It can also be seen in respect of civil and political rights.

This brings me back to the challenge of inclusion, particularly for those who are fighting for freedom of the press and freedom of opinion: the absence of these rights does not promote inclusion and equality. Societies that are not inclusive cannot move forward. This is a conceptualised approach to human rights: it should be considered that social deprivation, poverty and economic exploitation are just as harmful as political oppression and racial persecution. This requires a much deeper approach to human rights and development.

If we accept a dilution of human rights [...] according to cultural and socio-economic contexts, this means that we will have abdicated, thus proving right all these oppressive, obscurantist and conservative powers.

My third point is this: some people talk about the unsuitability or inapplicability of human rights, particularly when referring to the rights of Indigenous peoples or the rights of sexual minorities. Some African countries currently criminalise certain sexual orientations, in particular Uganda and Tanzania. So the question is: are these human rights so unreasonable? Is the fact of having a different sexual orientation unreasonable? Can the right to life be challenged? Do we have to accept being reduced to slavery? Should we be assaulted, arbitrarily arrested, imprisoned or executed? I do not think anyone can argue in favour of limiting these rights anywhere in the world. If we concede a dilution of human rights, or if we accept the possibility of accommodating rights depending on the cultural and socio-economic contexts, then this means we will have capitulated, thus vindicating all those oppressive, obscurantist and conservative powers. They will have been given a justification to defend what is morally indefensible.

I would like to conclude by quoting René Cassin, a great defender of human rights. He said: "There will never be peace on this planet as long as human rights are being violated in any part of the world."

Thank you very much.



Virginie LEPETIT

Thank you for that extremely clear presentation, which reiterated the universality of human rights and the fact that there is no contradiction between development and human rights. On the contrary, they go hand in hand.

I would like to ask you the same question as our previous speakers: can you sum up your testimony in a word?

André-Franck AHOYO

For me, it would be the challenge of otherness. I don't think you can say it boils down to man's inhumanity to man. We are all rational creatures, and we know what is good and what is bad. If we move in a direction that contradicts our values and culture and the concepts of dignity, freedom and equality, we do it consciously, and for often unavowed purposes. We are currently seeing the rise of authoritarianism on the African continent. All authoritarian regimes are acclaimed and idolised, and this puts me in an uncomfortable position. Are these really the examples our young people should see? Africa has the youngest population in the world, with over 400 million young people between the ages of 15 and 35. These are practical issues for which answers are required. I think an event like this, with all the testimonies that we have heard from every continent, can teach us a lot. I was very interested to hear what Ms LUZ had to say about the situation in Latin America, which is similar to that in Africa in some respects, particularly with regards to women's rights. Indeed, women and children are often the most vulnerable populations. The realisation of children's rights is dependent on the behaviour of adults.

Virginie LEPETIT

You mentioned the fascination with the Asian dragons. Another vicious circle is emerging: in seeking to fight terrorism, many African states have turned to the Wagner group, which we heard about a little earlier. Isn't that jumping from the frying pan into the fire? How can we move away from solutions that consist of combatting violence with violence?



André-Franck AHOYO

The only way out of these situations is through education. The illiteracy rate in our countries remains very high, and people cannot access education. Indeed, they don't have the capacity to reflect and act in full knowledge of the facts. It can be seen that this is the case for children, women and other minorities. For me, the priority is education. As soon as we raise people's social level, they will be able to judge and accept what is good for them and what is not good.

7



Audience discussion



Virginie LEPETIT

You have heard about the state of the world, which is extremely sombre. We now have time for questions and answers from the floor and via the Internet.

From the floor

Good morning, I was very pleased to hear about the issue of exemplarity. I am always a little frustrated by the fact that the organisations you represent do not talk about the social responsibility of the governance of organisations; a method was drawn up in 2010 with the support of the ILO and translated into ISO 26000. It would be of great help in terms of exemplarity if you were to take an interest in your governance and practise this standard.



Luz HARO

I worked my way up from the bottom and it took a lot of effort to get where I am today. At the age of 13 or 14, I refused to marry a 50-year-old man even though I couldn't read or write. I left home to try to ensure a better future for my brothers and sisters and make sure they could finish primary school. I did it, I'm glad I did it, and for this I thank God. Later, I went back to school at the age of 20 to finish my primary education while working to feed my family. I got married and, at the age of 35, I decided to see what you could learn at middle and high school and university. I decided to continue working for my family, but also for ordinary people, all while continuing my academic studies. It took me a while to understand that I also had to do something for my fellow women, young women and girls in my region. These are organisational processes that start at the bottom.

From 1988, I started working on setting up schools for women leaders, because we have to work together, strengthen the links and then construct the training courses ourselves. These schools have made it possible for women who don't know how to read or write, but who have talent, a big heart, and who can speak and listen, to be part of training processes throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. These training processes teach self-esteem, economic rights, leadership and so on. The objective is to ensure that women from the most humble backgrounds can achieve full citizenship, within the framework of a logic of shared responsibility. We want to train women in the countryside, so that they can have children in better conditions, with dignity, and so that they can advocate for governments to develop public policies that better serve rural areas. If we don't have access to the decision-making areas, we will be subject to the thinking of others.

I invite those who govern, those who work in international cooperation and those at grassroots level to work together to move forward, to allow women to become better citizens, better wives and better mothers.

The goal is to ensure that the most humble women achieve full citizenship. [...] Without access to decision-making spaces, we will be subject to the thoughts of others.



Question Internet

The right to own land is a fundamental right. How can we make sure that women and young people can access the right of ownership?

Jyotsna MOHAN

Unfortunately in my region this does not usually happen, as land is passed down to the sons. Women have been deprived of these rights. Furthermore, over 70% of women working in agriculture are unpaid. It is therefore important to implement policies to allow them to benefit from their property rights. Women actually have good agricultural knowledge, and this must be preserved. Many children work in the fields in these regions, even though it is prohibited by law. It is important to make sure that they receive an education before working on the land, and that their situation as unpaid workers is taken into account. It is also important for women and children to have access to land ownership rights. Our society is very male-dominated. It is therefore necessary to lobby governments, in particular through the mass mobilisation of women and young people, in order for them to gain access to land ownership.

Virginie LEPETIT

Thank you. Once again, this entails access to education for all.





Arturo CORTÉS

Thank you to the speakers for your testimonies, and a big thank you to AFD for organising this event. I work for Forus, an international network of civil society organisations. I have some questions for Ms HARO and Ms MOHAN.

A huge thank you, Luz, for sharing your story with us and for reminding us of the importance of women, young women and girls in all aspects of our societies. I have a few questions for you, specifically about Latin America. What have been the changes in the continent? Now that there are many left-wing governments that claim to be progressive, what changes and what political will can be seen in these countries, beyond giving gifts to the poorest communities? What actual changes have there been in these communities? Have promises been kept?

I would like to ask Jyotsna MOHAN the same question about India, because I think they are quite similar cases. I am thinking about the Modi government, which enjoys enormous popularity. Has it kept its promises? Have rural areas revived? Is there a political commitment?

I have a final question for all of you: what practical actions can civil society take to counter disinformation, fake news, narratives against human rights and hate speech? It sometimes seems as if these stories absolutely dominate online. What can we do? What is the plan of action?



Luz HARO

It's a difficult question, because it puts us in the position of having to reflect what the world has seen through social media and networks. In respect of governments, I have never had a political or partisan ideology. When I was a grassroots leader, they asked if I was left or right-wing, but I replied that my struggle was to reduce inequality, ensuring peace and respect for women and rural life. I am opposed to abuse against the most vulnerable. So journalists put me in the "left-wing" category. At another time, in a meeting of ministers during the Rafael Correa era, there was a lot of talk about communism and socialism, and I was asked to explain my point of view. I told them I had come up from the bottom and I didn't have a theory. I started my fight when I was a grassroots leader but I had to go to the town so that someone could write the letters I wanted to send to the authorities for me. I demanded roads, drinking water, justice and infrastructure. These are my priorities.

Obviously, I asked for things from the Correa government: infrastructure, healthcare, education. Correa decided to close schools in the most remote communities in order to establish large universities. But if schools with only one teacher are closed, children have to move to more populated towns, and parents have to leave their communities to be closer to their children. The campaign was ultimately abandoned. So there have been good things and bad things.

As far as Evo Morales is concerned, my point of view is the same. I met him at an international event. He said something that went straight to my heart: we have to be grassroots actors to, one day, be part of the discussion and put forward changes for



our countries. He was right: we need to break down fears and move forward. Decision makers must take into account the grassroots, and the latter must remain independent of governments. I believe that when someone achieves a position of political power they must socialise for their peers and share the best ideas to improve the quality of life. If those who govern are to act for everyone, they must never forget the grassroots, regardless of their political persuasion. Illiteracy was eradicated in Chile in 1937. In Ecuador, the illiteracy rate in the most remote communities is still 17%, irrespective of who is in government. History will judge the actions of each government. I have seen many people thank the government for having changed things, while others rain down hate that does great harm to our peoples and countries.

Jyotsna MOHAN

The government in my country is very populist. They have worked hard on agriculture, introducing a crop insurance scheme. Smallholders receive 18,000 rupees a year for their crops. The government runs programmes which are combined with direct foreign investment to directly benefit farmers. The effect is to cut out intermediaries and allow direct dealings with small farmers. I can't say whether these government initiatives offer any benefits, because I don't have any data to show this.

Virginie LEPETIT

This is the same government that wanted to introduce agrarian reform and liberalise the market.



Jyotsna MOHAN

Indeed: they have started the liberalisation process. But they have also introduced minimum prices for farmers. On the one hand, they are implementing programmes to make agriculture an independent, autonomous sector, but on the other, they are liberalising the sector, creating huge problems for farmers that lead to strikes. So there are many contradictions. I don't have the data to prove that these programmes genuinely help, but there has been a lot of anger among farmers.



Internet question

1. Greetings from the DRC. I hope that human rights do not mean that Western habits and customs are imposed on the world. Taking the case of Uganda's position on homosexuality, there is the impression that human rights correspond to what is European.
2. I share your opinion, Mr AHOYO, on education in Africa. I would like to know what strategy can be adopted to resolve this problem.

André-Franck AHOYO

I will start by responding to the first question: it seems to me that it is spurious to consider that human rights are a Western concept that is not applicable or transferable to our continent. A quoted example is the fact that we live in a world where States considered to be great promoters of human rights have gone to war in the name of these rights. Some people thus tend to consider human rights as a Trojan horse that aims to impose Western culture, Western precepts and Western values on the African continent. This argument, behind which dictatorial States hide, must be rejected.

When it comes to introducing strategies for education, let's take the case of children's rights. It can be seen that in implementing children's rights, there is an emphasis on the parents. However, parents sometimes fail, or the civil registry system breaks down, and children's rights are not registered. I think we need to refocus the debate on raising the child's own awareness by explaining why it is important for them to be identified. It means that they will be able to receive a birth certificate which in turn will allow them to exist legally and thus have some control over their destiny. We therefore need to review education programmes to ensure that children are aware of their rights from an early age.

Virginie LEPETIT

Magali Lafourcade, you want to come back in about the universality of human rights.



Magali LAFOURCADE

It is very easy to understand universality when you meet defenders from around the world, because you realise that they speak the same language when they discuss rights and freedoms. This means that there is no one on this planet who does not claim recognition of their human dignity. That is universality. When we are told that human rights are a Western concept, thinking about the declarations of the United States in 1776 and France in 1789, not to mention the English, who considered the subject much earlier, this is a misunderstanding of the genealogy of human rights, because very ancient texts exist. I'm thinking of the Manden charter, which dates back



to the 12th century, in what is now Mali, and prohibited slavery. All the tragedies of humanity have led to the definition of a very small number of rights and freedoms that are the common foundation of humanity. These rights and freedoms are founded in the human experience of tragedies, in the knowledge that no continent has been spared. Of course, there are instrumentalisations, but this foundation is our common language: universality is the fact that everyone wants recognition of their human dignity.

Christelle KALHOULÉ

I come from Burkina Faso, and I'm a member of Forus. Congratulations to the panelists and AFD for organising this forum. Every time I attend gatherings such as this, young people tell me that they hope I will come back with concrete solutions, not just words and ideas. Ideas change, but fundamentally, the challenges remain the same, and people don't see their situations evolving. This morning's observations are very bleak: human rights are clearly in retreat and human rights defenders are increasingly at risk. Authoritarianism is on the rise. However, when I look at surveys in my country, it appears that people are in favour of democracy and human rights. These surveys are conducted in the local languages and allow the voice of the people to be heard. Unfortunately, this is a voice that is not often acknowledged, and the way things are done in everyday life can sometimes cause confusion among local people with regards to human rights, even if everyone aspires to them.

Looking at our forum since arriving yesterday: we are among friends here. What real changes can we bring about? When we're together, we speak more or less the same language. We have donors, but what about the main players, namely those in power? How can we create spaces where they can hear some of these messages, beyond what we do at country level? I think these strategies need to be multiplied in order to overcome all these challenges. My concern is this: what strategy can be put in place in countries where it seems that authoritarianism is rising? What kind of solidarity can be activated to overcome these ever-increasing challenges?



Ksenia BOLCHAKOVA

I don't work to defend human rights: I'm a journalist. But it is anger that I feel today. I want to see more political will and reactions from those in power. I'm ready to work for much stronger responses. When Russia attacked the Donbas in 2014, there was no reaction, and neither was there when Russia annexed Crimea. This has led to turning a blind eye to human rights violations and territorial annexations, which are becoming increasingly serious. If we don't have the political courage to bang a fist on the table, the situation will go from bad to worse. I see this in relation to our recent experience with Russia, which has transformed itself into a kind of monstrous state. And I think it is a pattern that may be repeated in other regions of the world. We spoke earlier of repeated coups d'état in African countries, and of juntas coming to power. Authoritarianism is at our door and we need to show political commitment.

To answer the question about the fight against disinformation, let me stress that, as journalists, we work a lot on media education projects with young people. Increasingly governments are being called upon to respond to acts of disinformation orchestrated



by other states. There are increasing numbers of troll farms, not just in Russia but also in India. Western governments, who act as guarantors of human rights, the right to information and journalists' duty to inform, often do not attribute these disinformation operations to the governments behind them. However, this link must be made.

Jyotsna MOHAN

The SDGs were adopted in 2015. We are now halfway to their implementation by 2030, but we are heading for failure. We don't think we can achieve the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region before 2065! And when it comes to gender issues in particular, we are more than 200 years away from achieving the SDG targets. In this context, political will is very important. There is a lot of talk about the responsibility of governments, but how can we make them accountable? I know we have a crucial role to play here, but I would like governments to take part in these forums, so that they would listen to us. I think communication is essential, as is political will, because the current governments don't want to talk about SDG 16 and are seeking to change the narrative about democracy. This can lead to military coups when the army considers that democracy is not working. It would be interesting to invite other stakeholders to a future event.



Ayman MHANNA

The importance of media education must be noted, especially for people aged forty and over. There are many programmes that are easy to implement in universities and schools. But a range of studies show that it is often our mothers or our uncles who circulate the information they have read on instant messaging platforms. This is because they have less understanding of how the mechanisms of technology and information distribution work. These are people who are much harder to target because they are not at school or university. Designing media education for older people is essential.

I would also like to highlight an excellent initiative by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), namely the Journalism Trust Initiative. In journalism, there is no equivalent to the ISO when we talk about standards. The initiative is a fairly simple system for answering questions on the transparency of the methods used to manage funding and of the internal management, and on the rules on discrimination within the organisation, and so on. The idea is that it will be much easier to judge the credibility of an organisation than to research the credibility of each piece of information. If a media outlet is open to this mechanism by being extremely transparent about its processes, funding and owners, it is more likely to be credible. Negotiation has started with media networks: Microsoft has adopted it, but we have to admit that nobody uses Bing. Hopefully, Google and Meta will follow suit. The objective is to ensure that a news site that has been certified by JTI through an independent audit system has a better chance of appearing in searches than a site created just the day before by the Iranians, Russians, etc. and that has the aim of spreading disinformation using their troll farms to increase visibility. If a site is not transparent, it will have less chance of being visible. This is an initiative we can all continue to support, while we wait for a change of political will, with the aim of once again making democracy a radical, attractive idea.

Virginie LEPETIT

Once again making democracy a radical, attractive idea, promoting access to education, challenging those in power to show real political will, and ensuring the transparency of the media and tools to promote the media that really work. That is what I take from our discussions. Thanks to all six of you for your extremely powerful, poignant testimonies. Thank you to AFD for this morning.



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From an
anthropocentric
to an **ecocentric**
approach
to human rights





Daniel BASTARD

*Asia-Pacific Director,
Courier international*

Let's pick up the thread of today's conference. I am Daniel Bastard, the Asia-Pacific Director of Courier international. I have also worked for Reporters Without Borders, a civil society organisation involved in development.

Before starting, I would like to remind those following us online that they can ask questions. Please don't hesitate, we will use the questions in the course of the afternoon. Following on from this morning's overview of human rights in different regions of the world, this afternoon we move from an anthropocentric approach to human rights to a more ecocentric one. The objective is to see how several concepts articulate together: human rights, the right to a healthy environment and the rights of nature. We will endeavour to determine how these three aspects can fit together, whether there is any capillary action between them, and how they feed each other.

I would like to ask each speaker to conclude their presentations by giving us two key words that summarise the priorities of the issues we are discussing today. We will present these as a word cloud at the end of the day.

Two round tables are scheduled for this afternoon. The **1st round table** will serve to set the framework of the ecocentric approach that we are trying to discern. The aim is to identify the characteristics of the emergence of the rights of nature that we are analysing today.



Round Table 1

The global ecological crisis
and human rights

1

Les droits humains comme levier de la transition écologique

Daniel BASTARD

First of all, Jérémie Gilbert, from the University of Roehampton in London, will discuss the issue of human rights as a lever for ecological transition. This theme will be the subject of a working paper that AFD will publish in 2024.



Jérémie GILBERT

Professor of Human Rights, University of Roehampton, London

I have had the opportunity of working with AFD on a project that will result in the publication of a report in a few months' time. The subject was to determine the extent to which human rights can support the emergence of a right not only to development but, moreover, a right to ecological development. Not only does environmental protection contribute to the realisation of human rights, but the protection of human rights also plays a role in preserving the environment and presents significant routes for ecological transition.

As a lawyer specialising in the fundamental rights of Indigenous peoples, and having had the privilege of working with many different peoples around the world, I was rapidly confronted with the limits of human rights and its approach to nature. As some of the people I have worked with have commented, the human rights approach to nature, which generally focuses on property rights, is inadequate and does not incorporate the much more relational approach between Indigenous peoples and their land. This observation encourages us to ask about how the law approaches nature. It is often done from the angle of ownership and exploitation. The message from Indigenous peoples shows that their relationship is not based on ownership, but is rather a cultural and spiritual relationship. Through my interest in human rights, I want to explore this relationship, and this is what I want to share with you.

I would like to suggest a number of ways to think about how human rights could become a vehicle to establish a right that protects a more harmonious relationship with nature. In a significant move, the United Nations General Assembly recognised the right to a healthy environment in 2022. As humans, we all absolutely need a healthy

international law incorporates the concept that not only do humans have the right to live in a healthy environment, but also that the environment has the right to be healthy.

environment in which to exist. It has taken the international system a very long time to make the connection between human rights and a healthy environment. The conventional approach to nature has been one of ownership, exploitation and the preservation of nature for the benefit of humans. With the recognition of a right to a healthy environment, international law incorporates the concept that not only do humans have the right to live in a healthy environment, but also that the environment has the right to be healthy.

What does this mean in real terms? It is difficult to cover all the rights involved. The current ecological crisis is not just about the climate, it also concerns the rapid loss of biodiversity and extreme levels of pollution. Faced with these challenges, the recognition of a right to a healthy environment invites a complete reinterpretation of human rights in order to incorporate an ecological approach to basic rights. To offer a first significant example of this new approach to an ecological human right, let's start with the right to food, which was discussed at length at the start of the day. The situations in India and Latin America were mentioned. The importance of farmers was underlined, as well as the danger that the dominant approach of agribusiness represents.

International treaties proclaim everyone's right to food. Over the years, UN bodies have mainly approached this right as a right of access to nourishment. The inclusion of the right to a healthy environment into the interpretation of the right to food adds a further ecological value to this right. Recognition of the right to a healthy environment implies recognition of the right to healthy food, in other words food that does not put our lives at risk. This also means that food must not contribute to global warming or the destruction of biodiversity, as this would be a direct breach of the right to a healthy environment. As mentioned by the previous speakers, agricultural production is currently dominated by an extremely powerful agribusiness sector, which generally resorts to productivist processes that destroy ecosystems in the name of the need to feed the population.



Source: © Freepik (kriserdmann).

Agricultural production is today dominated by a sector agri-food who in the name of the necessity to feed population destroy ecosystems.

It was in the face of such a paradox, and confronted by the dominance of agribusiness giants, that the United Nations Declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas was adopted in 2018. Although this declaration unfortunately garnered relatively little attention, it is very significant because it emphasises the importance of developing an agriculture that supports the right to healthy, ecological food. On the same subject, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has even suggested a right to agroecology. This is an illustration of not only the transformation of the right to food into a more ecological right, but also more generally what the integration of the right to a healthy environment could mean for the interpretation of many basic rights. In the same way as the right to food, other existing human rights are evolving to include a different relationship with nature. Consider all our recognised rights such as the right to water, the right to housing, the right to health, etc., from the perspective of their implications for our relationship with nature. For example, the right to health means the right to access nature to allow us to feel good physically and mentally. The right to housing is also the right to a healthy home that does not contribute to destroying the planet. Generally speaking, many of our fundamental rights have a significant ecological aspect that can guide progress towards an ecological transition. The takeaway message is that we can further use human rights to combat the dramatic impacts of the triple ecological crisis. The majority of human rights are negatively affected by this triple ecological crisis. On a more positive note, the international regulatory framework for human rights highlights numerous routes to ensure an effective, sustainable, just and equitable ecological transition.

Human rights are just as important in our relationship with the planet if we look at them from the angle of inequality. The ecological crisis not only accentuates existing discrimination, but also contributes to its proliferation. As many speakers have pointed out this morning, women are the direct victims of the ecological crisis. The list of the peoples who have been forgotten in the energy transition is long. Global warming increases the pressure on small farmers, Indigenous peoples, minorities, children and other marginalised groups. There has not been much mention of migrants this morning but we all know what to expect over the next few years. A huge number of people will be forced into migration due to a range of causes linked to the ecological crisis. International law is currently inadequate when it comes to managing these movements. It is already struggling to manage the flow of refugees from conflicts. The migration crisis will only add to this difficulty. Some islands will disappear in a relatively short time. No one knows where the inhabitants of these islands will go as they will not have refugee status. Human rights will thus have to evolve to incorporate the right to survive by escaping a persecution created by society, which is the cause of climate change. In general, the ecological crisis, and the necessary ecological transition, raise numerous questions about equality in terms of both the consequences of the crisis and access to the means to respond to it.

This underlines another important element of a human rights-based ecological transition by highlighting the freedom of expression and the right of citizens to participate in decisions concerning the transition.

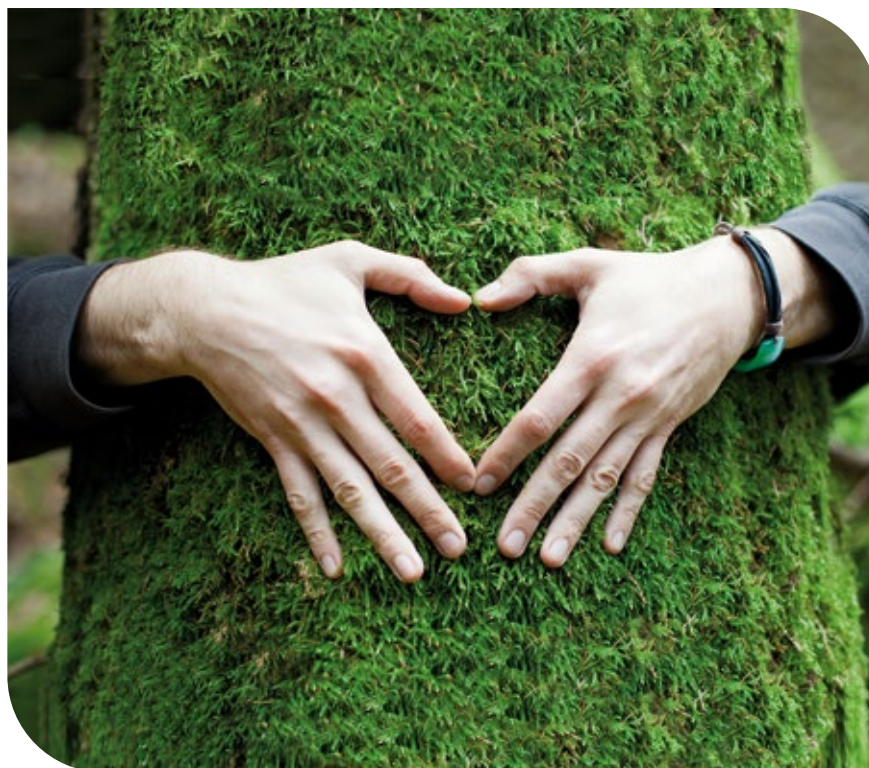
Another thing to consider is the role of human rights in the issue of climate justice. It is currently very difficult for citizens to access climate justice, and, in this respect, human rights courts have become one of the few legal conduits to allow individuals to demand justice when States do not respect their climate commitments. There have been numerous cases around the world in recent years in which human rights have been used to force States to meet their commitments under the 2015 Paris Agreement. The application of human rights also invites us to consider an exit from oil. Indeed, the continued exploitation of this fossil fuel will ultimately endanger our right to life. I am not optimistic that COP28 in Dubai will issue a clear statement of the need to move away from oil. The only current opportunity in this direction is linked to human rights, which represents one of the few ways to push the boundaries. This morning we also discussed the right to a non-toxic environment in light of the intensive use of pesticides. Furthermore, a human rights-based approach reinforces the rights to participate, protest and express different opinions on the ecological crisis given the general situation of a restriction of civil liberties, as described this morning. This underlines another important element of a human rights-based ecological transition by highlighting the freedom of expression and the right of citizens to participate in decisions concerning the transition.

I do not have the time here to share a comprehensive catalogue of all the potential contributions that human rights can make to defining the guidelines for a just and equitable ecological transition; however, this analysis will soon be published in AFD research. Nevertheless, my message is that integrating human rights principles into environmental policies can help reduce the impact of the ecological crisis on vulnerable communities and protect the rights of current and future generations, serving as a compass to guide the necessary ecological transition of our economies.



The Inter-American Court of Human Rights emphasised that nature has fundamental rights in the same way as humans. This is a remarkable ruling because it challenges an overly anthropocentric approach to human rights.

In conclusion, and to further leverage the possibilities opened up by a human rights-based approach to our relationship with nature, we should consider an extremely important ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights⁹ that emphasises that while many of our human rights are linked to a healthy environment, there are also rights inherent in nature, independent of human interest. This ruling opens up the possibility of using human rights to introduce a new subject of law – nature. The decision concerns the rights of Indigenous people living in Argentina, and the court emphasised that nature has fundamental rights in the same way as humans. This is a remarkable ruling because it challenges an overly anthropocentric approach to human rights, instead stressing a synergy between human rights and the rights of nature. Human rights are in reality much more ecocentric because nature is part of us, and we are part of nature – and nature rightly has as many fundamental rights as us.

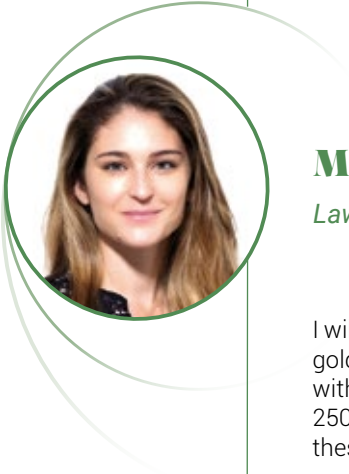


Source: ©Freepik (kriserdmann).

⁹ Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Indigenous Communities of the Lhaka Honhat Association v. Argentina, judgment of 6 February 2020, available in Spanish at: https://corteidh.or.cr/ver_expediente.cfm?nId_expediente=276&lang=en

2

The rights of nature Background and perspectives



Marine CALMET

Lawyer and President of the NGO Wild Legal

I will start with a question. What do the following have in common: gigantic open-pit gold mines in the middle of Amazonia, millions of hectares of monocultures sprayed with pesticides and factory ships that criss-cross the oceans and can catch up to 250 tonnes of fish a day that are frozen directly on board? The common factor of all these activities is that they are perfectly legal, and that's exactly the problem!

All these activities, and many others that systematically plunder and destroy nature, are the face of an over-industrialised, extractivist society, based on the excessive exploitation of natural resources that far exceeds the capacities of our ecosystems to renew themselves. This methodical, formalised plundering is motivated by economic arguments, encouraged by the dominant political rhetoric and tolerated by a legal system that is incapable of considering the planet's limits. It is clear that the current legal system is structurally incapable of responding to the need to protect the living world because it is dispersed across different codes and laws. We divide our environmental policies by defining natural entities such as the forest, sea and coast, and activities such as fishing, agriculture and shipping, as if they were completely separate in our world. This limited approach is incompatible with the fact that natural environments are closely linked and interdependent. The pressures exerted by certain human activities today have a domino effect on the biological balance of our ecosystems tomorrow.

The emergence of humanity has been conditional on the stability of our natural environments. Their collapse threatens not only the most fundamental human rights, but also healthy democracy and peace in the world.

Given this situation, drawing up sustainable solutions clearly involves seeking out a model of society that is suitable for both humans and non-humans. This would define what the philosopher Michel Serres has called the "natural contract" that should put an end to this war against nature.

New legal principles are emerging that attempt to establish cross-cutting social standards that respect the biological functioning of living organisms. It is in this context that the concept of the rights of nature has been devised. This is both a new form of environmental ethics and a set of legal rules and principles based on the

Drawing up sustainable solutions clearly involves seeking out a model of society that is suitable for both humans and non-humans.

It is about legally justifying a model in which the human being is not [...] at the top of the pyramid of species, but is integrated among the members of the community of natural entities.



Christopher Stone

paradigm by which nature and all its constituent elements are holders of fundamental rights. It is a matter of legally justifying a model in which human beings are not, as in anthropocentrism, at the top of the pyramid of species, but rather are integrated as members of the community of natural entities, finding their place among living things.

The recognition of the rights of nature was theorised in the 1972 book "Should Trees Have Standing?" by the American public law professor Christopher Stone. Even all those years ago, this book raised the question of affording nature and ecosystems a legal personality and intrinsic basic rights to guarantee their protection. In his book, Stone describes the evolution of law over the centuries. He reiterates that the status of subjects as holders of basic rights is not a state of nature and describes the slow evolutions that have led to the gradual enlargement of our society (and of the categories of beings of which it is composed). In particular, Stone refers to the condition of foreigners, slaves and women, and the discrimination suffered for the comforts of the dominant category. The latter clearly seek to maintain a status quo to their advantage, invoking pseudo-scientific assertions to back up an ideology that is often racist or patriarchal. Stone's book explains how our culturally anthropocentric view of the world changes our relationship with non-humans by depriving them of rights and representation in our political models.

The worldwide movement for the rights of nature has grown rapidly since the 2000s, particularly in South America. It has been enriched by various philosophies linked to Indigenous peoples' world views. The current emergence of the rights of nature is multifaceted and closely linked to the cultural context in which it develops. There are several schools of the rights of nature around the world. One of these recognises, in a general manner, basic rights for the whole of nature. This concept has found fertile ground in Ecuador where the culture features the Pachamama (a cosmological "Mother Earth" figure in Andean tradition). A new constitution was adopted in 2008 that recognises the rights of nature and allows courts to consider these rights. This has led to the cancellation of several mining projects in areas where they were completely incompatible with the fundamental rights and needs of nature and overtly breached the "ecological tolerance thresholds" of these environments (a legal principle established by Ecuadorian judges). This was the case, for example, in a 2021 legal ruling on a mining permit that threatened the Los Cedros forest. The area is now the subject of a new planning programme that complies with the essential needs of nature (drawn up by local people, elected representatives and scientific experts).

This is a step that has also been taken in several other countries in South America and Africa. In Uganda, the rights of nature were recognised by a law passed in 2019 that was also transposed into other local regulations on the protection of sacred sites. The town of Curridabat in Costa Rica has introduced similar innovations, as Mr Edgar Mora will describe later today.

Other legal strategies diverge from this global recognition of the right of nature, instead aiming to give fundamental rights to specific environments such as forests, rivers, mountains, ecosystems and specific sites in response to the sacred nature of these areas for the humans who live there. In Bangladesh, after a major public debate,



this movement led to the recognition of the fundamental rights of rivers, and in particular the Turag River. A body was established to represent all the country's watercourses. This is also the case in New Zealand for the Whanganui River, and in the United States with the Snake River Declaration of Rights for the lands of the Nimípuu people.

The movement is also making progress in Europe. This is particularly the case in Spain, where the Mar Menor lagoon has been granted legal personality and is now represented by a body made up of guardians who speak on its behalf and in its interest.

Specific natural entities can also have their rights recognised. This is the case of the recognition of the rights of nature in the Loyalty Islands (province of New Caledonia, a French overseas collectivity), in particular the rights of turtles and sharks, as will be later presented by the researcher Mr Victor David.

A structure thus exists: there is recognition at a global level of the rights of nature in its entirety as a community of life, as well as recognition of the rights of nature at more specific levels.

The movement is spreading around the world. I cannot list all the territories concerned, as the growth is exponential, but often the spread is linked to a questioning of the colonial models that exist in these territories or, as we often see in the West, to mobilisations to protect the natural environment. These movements are led by resistance figures who fight against industrial projects and organise to highlight the injustice of certain current laws, asserting that these laws are no longer acceptable because they condemn both us as humans, and also the environment in which we live.

We will publish a paper on the subject of the rights of nature with AFD in 2024. The objective is to provide development actors with tools relating to the rights of nature.

Thank you very much.

**Daniel BASTARD**

In conceptual terms, this afternoon we are talking about ecocentrism, but I think I saw the term bioperspectivism on a slide. What's behind this concept?

Marine CALMET

I use the term bioperspectivism to imply that it is not a matter of focusing on a specific thing. On the contrary, all the richness of reflection comes from the fact that we can relax the focus and consider a perspective that is not that of the human being, but rather that of all natural entities that make up the environment.

**Daniel BASTARD**

Can you suggest two words that sum up the priorities to be highlighted today?

Marine CALMET

Empathy and humus.

**Daniel BASTARD**

What about you, Jérémie?

Jérémie GILBERT

I am sure that we all agree that we are talking about the decolonisation of the law. Decolonisation in the sense that nature has rights. Also an approach to human rights that includes an ecological right, the fact that we are in a relationship with nature, which involves a profound human right.

Daniel BASTARD

We have not had the opportunity to talk about a right to civic space. Could you tell us a little bit more about this concept in the context of bioperspectivism?



Jérémie GILBERT

For example, I am working on the law for rivers in England. All the specialists interested in the subject consider that all the doors are closed. There is a rejection by the media as well as by the government. The government considers itself sovereign and does not like that local people are trying to regain control of their environment. The civic space is very closed down and the subject can't even be discussed. I see this in England, but I imagine it is the same in France, where the state is very centralised. I don't see how the French government can allow all the current initiatives to develop. I am thinking in particular about the initiative to establish a parliament for the Loire.

Access to civic space is an issue that will hinder the development of the right of nature. This access has been considerably restricted over the last five years. It is not now possible to protest on the streets to criticise the government's inaction on climate change without breaking the law. This was impossible to imagine five years ago and it is a change that is happening in all countries. Today, 50% of rights defenders are environmental defenders. And these defenders are being killed for protecting their land. Since a Global Witness report in 2012, the number of killings of land and environmental defenders has increased eightfold. This acceleration is incredible. Many populations no longer have the right to demonstrate freely when it comes to the environment. An increasing number of attacks are justified by the need to protect the economy, since the operations involved are legal. Civic space closes very quickly if you have a different opinion.



Jérémie GILBERT

With Wild Legal, we saw that, at the level of the French government, the idea of a new law based on the recognition of the fundamental rights of nature was not yet on the agenda – to put it in their terms – so we have considered other strategies based on working at a local level. It is a matter of making sure that people who see the failure of the current laws can also make use of the law, while composing new legal responses. For example, we have chosen to work with nature reserves – areas that have their own model of governance and can therefore innovate. In France, for example, we work with local water commissions. These are places and spaces where a form of freedom still exists. It is possible to initiate new discussions and new debates. In France today, the managers of ecosystems are realising that they do not have the appropriate tools to cope with drought and climate change. They know that the law as it stands is insufficient. So they want to pilot new methods of intervention. As jurists and lawyers, we want to work with these people and informally recreate spaces for discussion, parliaments for rivers, assemblies for mountains, and so on, with the aim of making sure that citizens regain a place and rediscover trust in democracy.

This **2nd round table** will allow us to draw lessons from seven specific cases of local projects and initiatives.

We will analyse how the concepts of human rights, the right to a healthy environment and the right of nature can be articulated in practical terms. We will consider several continents, from national examples such as Colombia, Sierra Leone and Congo, to more local initiatives such as Curridabat in Costa Rica and the Loyalty Islands in New Caledonia, and testimonies from civil society representatives in Bangladesh, Sierra Leone and Cameroon.



Daniel BASTARD

*Asia-Pacific Director,
Courrier international*



**Juan Carlos
LOSADA VARGAS**

*Member of the Chamber
of Representatives, Congress
of the Republic of Colombia*



**Eleanor
THOMPSON**

*Deputy Director
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**David
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Laureate of the Marianne
Initiative for Human
Rights Defenders*



Edgar MORA

*Minister of Public Education
for Costa Rica (2018-2019),
Mayor of Curridabat
(2007-2018)*



Victor DAVID

*Researcher on environmental
rights and sustainable
development, French National
Research Institute for
Sustainable Development*

Round Table 2

Focus on local projects
and initiatives

1

Public policy concerning the right to a healthy environment

The example of Colombia



Juan Carlos LOSADA VARGAS

*Member of the Chamber of Representatives,
Congress of the Republic of Colombia*



International environmental law has been very separate from human rights up to the present, but Latin America now provides us with an excellent example of how these two considerations can be effectively combined. I'm talking about the Escazú Agreement, the first international treaty on this subject that is binding on the countries that ratify it. It very precisely combines the defence of nature with the defence of human rights. Colombia is not yet a party to this agreement. The Constitutional Court must recognise that the process by which it was ratified by the Colombian Congress was correct. Ten countries in the region are already parties to the Escazú treaty, which is based on three fundamental pillars:

- The transparency of environmental information;
- Access to environmental justice;
- The participation of communities in territorial decision making, for example when an extraction project is planned on their territory.

Under the agreement, Indigenous populations must be able to express their opinion on whether a project should go ahead or not. I see this as a major step forward for our region, as Latin America is currently, perhaps along with Africa, the region with the greatest amount of socio-environmental conflict on the planet. Colombia has the highest number of disputes of this type in the world. Citizen participation must be organised to deal with these conflicts, which in Colombia, unfortunately result in deaths. The latest report by Global Witness shows that 40% of the global total of murdered environmental and land defenders come from Colombia. Of the 177 environmental defence leaders killed around the world in 2022, 60 were Colombians. This is the sign of extreme, unspeakable violence, which is difficult for us to discuss without emotion. The three countries with the highest numbers of violent deaths among environmental defenders are in Latin America. Colombia leads Brazil and Mexico; in the latter country more than 30 environmental leaders were murdered in 2022.

The latest Global Witness report showed that 40% of environmental and land defenders murdered worldwide are from Colombia.

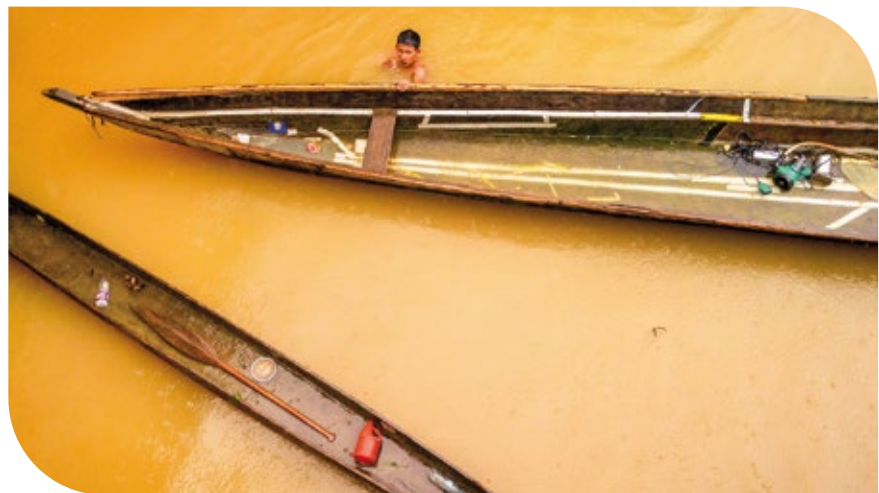


In Latin America,
land defenders
live under
constant threat
of death.

This subject is no joking matter in Latin America: land defenders live under constant threat of death. A treaty such as the Escazú Agreement is extremely important; it allows genuine access to justice, facilitates community participation and makes it possible to question the transparency of the economic interests that are gaining a foothold in communities across our countries. The Agreement deserves to be re-produced in other regions of the world in order to establish a kind of international governance in this matter, under the auspices of the United Nations. This is something that does not exist today.

The constitution adopted by Colombia in 1991 can be called environmental as it comprises more than 26 articles dedicated to the protection of nature. It has made the creation of a national environmental system possible – this aims to defend the interests of the nation and future Colombian generations. Of course, the system is not perfect, but it is in place. A number of adjustments will have to be made, in particular with regard to the manner in which the members of the system of governance are elected in the regions. Currently they may be co-opted by politicians or the armed forces in the territory.

The 1991 constitution also established the Constitutional Court, which represents the first line of defence for nature. It was this court that established an ecosystem as a "subject" of the rights of nature for the first time, namely the Atrato river in the department of Chocó. For us as environmental defenders, this was a truly poetic decision! It incorporates an ecoperspectivist view and a great deal of synergy between nature and human beings in the environment. The ruling gave the State, and in particular the Presidency of the Republic, a clear mandate to promote the necessary policies to protect the Atrato river, a veritable reservoir of biodiversity. Colombia has the highest level of biodiversity in the world, identical to that of Brazil, in a territory five times smaller. Colombia alone accounts for more than 10% of the planet's biodiversity. It was absolutely essential to be able to defend this biodiversity.



An indigenous man, belonging to the Emberá-Wounaan tribe, in the muddy water of the Atrato River.
Source: Alamy Banque D'Images (Jan Sochor).

The new government has achieved results because it has been able to focus the defence of the Amazon region on a participatory dialogue with communities. [...] It is with citizens that we will save this planet [...] not with laws voted at the central level and then imposed.

Following this decision, the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Justice made the Amazon region a subject of law. The Colombian State has been obliged to initiate very specific actions to defend it. These actions reduced deforestation in 2022 – by 30% in the country as a whole, 35% in the Amazon region and nearly 13% in Colombian national parks. These successes can be attributed to the mandate issued by the Constitutional Court to the State to defend the Amazon region as a subject of law.

This policy has proved effective because the way we defend our territory has changed. Previous governments had a very militaristic vision of the fight against deforestation. They often resorted to imprisoning members of Indigenous communities. The new government has achieved results because it has been able to focus the defence of the Amazon region on a participatory dialogue with communities, based on agreements to protect this magnificent forest, which now constitutes possibly the most important ecosystem on the planet.

In conclusion, a vision of territorial defence without involving the communities serves no purpose. The State must prioritise agreements with communities. It is with the citizens that we will save the planet, taking into account individuals' territories and ways of life, rather than through laws that are passed centrally and then imposed. It is with the communities. Of the 60 land defenders killed in Colombia, half were from Indigenous communities, which is a genuine source of shame for Colombia.

Thank you very much.



Source: Felling of trees on a plot in Colombia / <https://commons.wikimedia.org> (Matt Zimmerma).



Daniel BASTARD

Can I ask you for two words to describe what you think are the priorities for the day?

Juan Carlos LOSADA VARGAS

Participation and organisation. Colombian territory is very disorganised and needs to be better coordinated.



Daniel BASTARD

The Constitutional Court has recognised the Amazon region as a subject of law, but what kind of practical action can the Colombian State take to protect the Amazon?

Juan Carlos LOSADA VARGAS

As the Court recognised the Amazon region as a legal personality, the President of the Republic was obliged to establish a *Compes*, a funded public policy, because you can't expect results in this area without resources. There is also international cooperation on defending the Amazon region. The British, Germans and Norwegians are mobilising significant funds to defend this region of Colombia. In the context of global warming, it is essential for the countries of the North to mobilise to help countries in the region implement environmental policies. However, the initiative to set up a Loss and Damage Fund launched at COP28 in Dubai is risible, given that under the current adaptation fund, countries such as France, the UK and the United States don't come close to providing the funding promised under the Paris Agreement. What use is it to continue to set up funds if the countries that should pay the historic debt of global warming fail to do so? International cooperation seems absolutely essential to us. Colombia is a poor country and will not have the resources to sustain an ambitious policy over an extended period. It is time for the countries of the North, which have the main responsibility for the tragedy that the planet is currently experiencing, to dedicate resources that poor countries cannot mobilise.

Daniel BASTARD

It is certainly important to remind the countries of the North of their responsibility to the world as a whole.

2

Land law and grassroots legal empowerment

The example of Sierra Leone



Eleanor THOMPSON

Deputy Director of Namati



Juan Carlos has perfectly introduced my contribution by describing the importance of community-centred approaches to decision making. In Sierra Leone, we approach the issue not in ecocentric or anthropocentric terms, but by considering that the earth belongs to three categories of people: those who came before, the ancestors; those who are here now and those who are yet to be born. This concept includes the idea that the land and the environment, while belonging to human beings, are not their property. It underlines the value of the environment as a means of livelihood and a cultural asset.

In Sierra Leone, we [...consider] that the land belongs to three categories of people: those who were here before us, the ancestors, those who are here now and those who are yet to be born.

Although land is one of Sierra Leone's greatest assets, it has not really benefited the people, especially rural communities. Of the country's 5.4 million hectares of arable land, around 75% remains uncultivated and 80% of the food consumed in Sierra Leone (including rice, the staple) is imported, meaning the country suffers from food insecurity.

Furthermore, rural communities continue to suffer injustices in terms of land tenure rights as the result of obsolete laws. Even though women have equal rights under customary law, their access to property has been restricted. Some communities suffer from a lack of decision-making or negotiating power, particularly when dealing with land investors. Moreover, there is significant corruption in the administration in relation to land acquisition. In 2012, as part of a unilateral agreement concluded behind closed doors, the traditional authorities signed a commitment with an oil palm company for an option to acquire over 30,000 hectares of land in a chiefdom in southern Sierra Leone, but did not seek the opinion of the landowners. This area represents the entire territory of the chiefdom, including residential areas, all water resources, etc.

Namati, the NGO with which I work, takes a legal empowerment approach for communities. Our lawyers work with communities to help them understand the land laws and the processes involved in acquiring land. We helped the community of the southern chiefdom understand their rights, enabling them to negotiate a new lease and reduce the subject of the agreement from 30,000 to 2,300 hectares, while including environmental and social protections that benefitted the community.

Our lawyers work with communities to help them understand the land laws and the processes involved in acquiring land.

For some years, the government of Sierra Leone seems to have focused all its efforts on the pursuit of development at all costs with disregard of the rights of individuals and communities and environmental protection. There is no difference to the development patterns we see at different levels: community, national and global. Almost all major mining and industrial development operations in Sierra Leone are run by large multinational corporations. This feature of the economy is nothing new, it originated during the colonial and slave trade periods. The model is even more pronounced at community level because those who bear the brunt of environmental harm and land loss have almost no role to play in creating or implementing the rules and systems that are meant to protect them. However, development should not necessarily be at odds with human rights.

The video People-Rising: Beside the Water was shown. This video tells the story of how Ms. Jalloh and others combined the power of the law with the power of organization to cancel a lease they never agreed to, and stop the destruction of 75,000 acres of rainforest.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I53mUMoiEso>.

The experiences of the communities that I mentioned earlier, and those of women such as Ms Jalloh who appears in the film, led to the adoption of the Customary Land Rights Act, which guarantees greater land tenure rights, especially for women. Land users and landowners from all regions of the country contributed to regional consultations on the law. They wrote a letter to the President of Sierra Leone, and as you saw in the film, they went to Parliament in huge numbers to directly ask their MPs to pass the bill.



Securing land rights for farmers in Sierra Leone.

Source: <https://www.fao.org/in-action/securing-land-tenure-rights-sierra-leone/fr/>



Communities have the right to free, prior and informed consent for all industrial projects in their territory.

Every provision of the Customary Land Rights Act draws on lessons taken from the existing system, based on specific cases. For example, the law requires free, prior and informed consent for all land investments, whatever the sector, without excluding certain domains. Communities have the right to free, prior and informed consent for all industrial projects in their territory. To our knowledge, there is no legal regime anywhere in the world that grants such robust rights to communities. The law reinforces constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination and ensures that men and women have equal rights to land under customary law, while prohibiting laws or practices that discriminate against women in relation to land. It provides for a minimum percentage of women – who represent the largest share of land users in Sierra Leone – in all land administration structures throughout the country.

The new law is not just about preserving customary rights or land rights. It also helps protect the livelihoods and environments of communities by banning industrial development in ecologically sensitive areas.

However, the implementation of this law is still in its infancy. Realistically, it will take decades for people and communities to fully benefit from the new rights. Experience has shown that a progressive legal framework is only one of the factors that will ultimately influence the realisation and implementation of these rights and the improvement of land governance in Sierra Leone. Efforts will have to be made to push along the application of these rights. This will require the continuing collaboration of multiple stakeholders, as already mentioned by previous speakers. In all the legislative processes I have witnessed in Sierra Leone, I have never seen one where all the relevant stakeholders were involved like in this case: government, civil society, traditional authorities and the private sector. All the players involved worked together to shape the law. This cooperation is evident in the legislative outcome, and translates in practice through a collaboration that has continued after the enactment and during the implementation phases of the law.

One of the biggest challenges in implementing this law is the level of knowledge among the actors, including communities, ministries, government agencies, the private sector and civil society. They need to know about the laws in order to use them or enforce them. Civil society, and especially community-based actors, play a crucial role in raising awareness of the new laws, which need to be accessible in languages and ways that everyone can understand.

While these laws aim to make decision making on land issues more inclusive and democratic, it is also important to combat corruption and chaos in land administration.

One of the last essential tests in relation to the implementation of this law will be whether large mining and agribusiness companies take it into account or continue with business as usual, and whether they make sure to obtain free, prior and informed written consent from customary landowners before acquiring land for all types

of investment. Civil society is already engaging on this front, but more needs to be done. Namati recently launched a land investment checklist in response to requests from companies and communities. Other members of civil society are calling on companies and donors to make financial contributions to ensure that communities can continue to work and become involved in these issues.

Sierra Leone now has the opportunity to become a global leader and promoter of community-led, bottom-up, rights-respecting sustainable development. It is a challenge, but we know how to meet it.

Daniel BASTARD

What are the two priorities that come to mind in respect of the theme you have presented today?



Eleanor THOMPSON

The first term would be a community-centred approach. Everything has to start from the bottom up. When this happens, traditional authorities, governments and even the private sector are able to get more done. The same applies to investors. When communities evolve in a context of land tenure security, their investments are themselves secure, since everyone knows what they can expect and what they can obtain. Ensuring community participation and making sure that decision making, laws, policies and practices come from the grassroots is really key.

For the second term, I would say the collaboration of stakeholders, which is essential, and which allows convincing results to be achieved in terms of laws and policies and their subsequent implementation.

3

Free, prior and informed consent for Indigenous peoples

The example of Bangladesh



David HEMBROM

Regional Director, Caritas Bangladesh



Many decisions are marked by corruption and are taken without the consent of the populations concerned.

I am proud to be here with you to bring you some information about free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) in Bangladesh.

Our country in South Asia became independent in 1971 after the war of liberation against Pakistan. Previously, we had been a British colony until 1947. The population density in Bangladesh is high.

It is relevant to take Bangladesh's context into account when discussing the issue of consent. There are frequent population displacements in our country that are more or less accepted by the Indigenous peoples. Many decisions are marked by corruption and are taken without the consent of the populations concerned. I belong to the Santal community in Bangladesh and we were displaced from our land without any respect for free, prior and informed consent. Prior consent is often only possible if NGOs, journalists and civil society mobilise. Most citizens are unaware of the principle. However, free, prior and informed consent has been introduced in various pilot schemes, although not comprehensively. I will describe two cases to illustrate the context.

The first case concerns the Indigenous leader, Ms Bably. In 2021, I facilitated a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in one of the *punjis* (villages of Khasi Indigenous people) in the Sylhet region. Among the participants was Ms Bably, one of the Indigenous leaders. During the exchanges, we received a message that officials from the Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD), together with police officers and other individuals had entered Doluchara punji to plant trees, claiming that the land belonged to the forest department. There was no prior information, nor was consent sought from the people present. By the time we reached the village, Ms Bably had been contacted by the police and informed that a complaint had been filed against her for obstructing a government action. But she had not been there at all on that day. This is a fairly common scenario in Bangladesh.



In fact, indigenous peoples were not consulted in the establishment and implementation of these projects. They were only given a legal notice to vacate the premises.

Another example is the Sustainable Forests and Livelihoods (SUFAL) project funded by the World Bank in Modhupur in the Mymensingh region, where the Garo Indigenous people make up the majority of the population. The aim of this project was to improve the collaborative management of forests and increase the benefits for communities dependent on the forest. It should be mentioned that the land and forests are the main source of subsistence for the Indigenous Garo people. The Collaborative Forest Management Committees (CFMCs), Forest Conservation Village (FCV) and Village Conservation Forums (VCFs) were intended to be formed in observance of the rights to free, prior and informed consent. In fact, the Bangladesh Forest Department involved controversial Indigenous leaders in their plan. There was insufficient consultation of the majority of Indigenous people. A study entitled "No attributability, no

accountability: a case study of participatory forest management in Bangladesh" was published in February 2022. This document reveals that FPIC rights have been violated and Indigenous peoples negatively affected.

Numerous projects have emerged concerning the creation of ecoparks, national parks and eco-tourism sites, particularly around forests. Unfortunately, the majority of these projects are located on the lands of Indigenous peoples in the Mymensingh and Sylhet regions. The Indigenous peoples have not been consulted in the planning and implementation of these projects. They were merely served with a legal notice to quit the land. The government ignores the protests of these populations.

There used to be a quota of Indigenous students for higher education in Bangladesh, in particular for admission to general, medical and engineering universities and the public services. This was abolished in 2018, simply by a notice published in the government gazette without any consultation of the Indigenous peoples. The decision was taken in response to a series of protests around the country.

Another issue in respect of FPIC are the recurring breaches of the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950 (East Bengal Act). This law aims to restrict the disposal of Indigenous people's land. However, the government's Assistant Commissioner for Land (AC-Land) approves applications without consulting Indigenous landowners. As a consequence, Indigenous peoples are losing land and land is being seized.

In general terms, the actions undertaken by the government illustrate its differentiated attitude. Many areas of land belonging to Indigenous peoples fall under the jurisdiction of the "Ministry of Forests", even though Indigenous people have lived there since time immemorial. This is the case in the Mymensingh and Sylhet regions. However, the situation is different in the Dinajpur district where Indigenous people also live on forest land. The government does not generally press for the expulsion of Indigenous people from Dinajpur. No ecoparks, ecotourism initiatives, national parks or forest reserves have been established in the Dinajpur region. Thus the scenario differs from one sector to another. A land commission exists for the Chittagong Hill Tracts to settle land disputes. There is no land commission for the Indigenous peoples of the plains.

Moreover, there has been some expropriation of Indigenous populations in areas close to the ocean. The system of autonomous administration put in place is not recognised and the government does not afford the demands of Indigenous peoples due attention, including the request by women for seats on local governance bodies, such as the union council or sub-district councils. Consequently, the principle of free, prior and informed consent is frequently violated.

In this context, Caritas is making people in Bangladesh aware of their rights and encouraging them to assert them. However, we face difficulties with the government when we criticise it. I hope this information will be useful in identifying ways forward in order to better defend Indigenous populations and ensure their recognition by the government in Bangladesh, which is not the case today. Once this has been achieved, the principle of prior informed consent can be applied.

Daniel BASTARD

Can you give us two words that you consider priorities in the context of Bangladesh to promote the rights of Indigenous people?



David HEMBROM

Constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples seems to me to be the most pressing thing, along with raising the awareness of populations of their rights.



Source: freepik.com (EyeEm)

4

The example of the Paysage Forestier Nord-Congo project

Republic of Congo



Alain NONOUKA-GOMAT

Chief Water and Forest Engineer and Coordinator of the North Congo Forestry Landscape Project (PPFNC), Ministry of Forest Economy



This landscape approach incorporates the three pillars of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental. On the social level, this project provides for the involvement of the population.

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to AFD who afforded me the honour of inviting me here. The subject of my presentation is an innovative development project that started in 2020 and will run for four years.

My presentation has a direct link to human rights and development since the PPFNC is characterised by its landscape approach. This landscape approach incorporates the three pillars of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental. In social terms, the project sets out the involvement of local people.

The project is mainly funded by AFD, but also by the French Facility for Global Environment (Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial ou FFEM) and forestry companies such as CIB, IFO, as well as WCS, which is also a technical partner.

The project has four components. The first relates to biodiversity and ecological corridors. This is implemented by WCS. A second component relates to local development. The third component is sustainable forest management and the fourth is essentially linked to integrated land management, while ensuring the area's socio-economic development.

The project extends over an area of nine and a half million hectares in northern Congo in the Sangha and Likouala departments and the northern part of the Cuvette-Ouest department. The area has significant assets with a total of 19 forest concessions and several protected areas.

It is very important to underline a second issue: the Republic of Congo is part of the Congo Basin, the world's second largest ecological lung. This is a very significant area in terms of biodiversity and must be preserved.

Several pilot projects are under way within the scope of the second component in relation to local development. Some twenty projects are involved, mostly in the area which I have just described.



We are faced by the challenge of getting local people involved. Before discussing this, I should say that there are various mechanisms in place in Congo and a legal framework is currently being established to regulate certain issues – in the case in question relating to the involvement of local people and communities, including Indigenous peoples. The recent Law 33-2020 of 8 July 2020 governs the forest code in Congo. This law introduces new concepts such as the CLPA (“Communautés locales et populations autochtones”, or Local Communities and Indigenous Populations) which aims to take these populations increasingly into consideration, such that they are able to express themselves rather than simply have projects imposed on them.

The second concept is FPIC, namely free, prior and informed consent. As you are aware, at a given point in the process, it is a matter of involving these populations so that they can intervene, offer their points of view and make their opinions known right to the end of the decision-making chain.

A total of 20 pilot projects have been launched, including 14 in 2023. They were chosen according to a range of criteria, right down to the selection of the villages, which had to be located in community development areas (“Séries de développement communautaires” or SDC), situated within managed forest concessions. This assumes that forestry companies operating in these areas have introduced management plans. Selections were then made with the involvement of local people, consultation councils and village committees, in order to identify households that met the conditions that would allow them to benefit from the pilot projects.

We have also used the concept of positive discrimination, as there is a requirement to respect a proportion of 50% women and 50% representatives of Indigenous peoples in order to avoid overall discrimination.

Beneficiaries have signed a charter of environmental and social commitment that introduces a prohibition of deforestation, respect for vulnerable groups and a ban on child labour.

The complaint and conflict management mechanism (“Mécanisme de gestion des plaintes et des conflits” or MGPC) is also very important. This tool enables people who encounter problems to report them. We have recruited facilitators to manage the pilot projects for each forest management unit (“Unité forestière d’aménagement” or UFA). We have also set up focal points to address all the problems that these populations may encounter with a view to trying to resolve them. If this is not possible on a local basis, the issues are passed on to the contacts for each UFA.

In relation to taking into account the customary rights of CLPAs, the project respects the prevailing law in Congo, which essentially promotes and protects Indigenous populations. This law dates back to 2011 and emphasises the protection of these populations. A department in the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and the Promotion of Indigenous Peoples deals directly with the problems of local people and Indigenous populations. This innovation illustrates the dynamic in place to ensure a greater consideration of these people.

The selections [of the pilot projects] have been made with the involvement of local people, consultation councils and village committees.

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The project seeks to prepare local actors to adopt the methodology developed for the pilot projects. Ultimately, the objective is for them to take over the task of mobilising local development funds generated by forest taxation.

We organised a workshop to which we invited all actors and stakeholders to allow a joint evaluation of the PPFNC proposal to provide them with the tools to manage local development funds. The experience led to a number of recommendations. All the participating partners considered this an outstanding idea and concurred that the PPFNC had produced something very positive.

In structural terms, these 20 pilot projects mainly concern the cacao, manioc and NTFP (non-timber forest products) sectors (including honey, black pepper and Marantaceae leaves). The pilot projects are being carried out in the two target departments, Sangha and Likouala. There are seven projects in Sangha and 13 in Likouala. The principle was simple: we signed subsidy agreements with local people, in this case the Indigenous and Bantu peoples, in the proportions I have indicated. These agreements allow a more or less legalised framework to be created. The pilot projects are undertaken by the people who benefit from them.

It has been a very fine experience, completely innovative in our country. It is about people taking responsibility. The aim is to combat poverty and precariousness. We provide these populations with the various tools and support they need so that they can ultimately take charge of themselves, without having to change their dietary customs.



This is a very beautiful experiment, totally innovative in our country. It consists of the populations themselves taking charge.



We have also introduced financial incentives to encourage good practices. The pilot projects are revitalising local life by creating and formalising agricultural groups that can market produce. We also expect an increase in the income of beneficiaries. These projects come within the scope of a local development strategy that prioritises "zero deforestation".

The projects are for vulnerable populations and aim to ensure their food security and establish activities with connections to markets.

More broadly, the PPFNC enables the development of decision-making tools and strengthens the capacities of institutional beneficiaries. The project reports directly to the Ministry of Forest Economy. The project provides an innovative framework for technical, methodological and financial support to further the preservation of biodiversity. The ultimate goal is to preserve biodiversity and maintain the ecological continuum while developing the area's socio-economic character.

Thank you.

Daniel BASTARD

To conclude your talk, what do you consider to be the two priorities for the future?

Alain NONOUKA-GOMAT

The first priority, while considering the project's global objective, must be to preserve biodiversity while ensuring socio-economic development. That summarises what I have been saying. Secondly, I call for less talk and more action.

Daniel BASTARD

It seems to me that this is a very good conclusion to this first part of the round table. We are starting to get a clearer view of how human rights, the rights of nature and the right to a healthy environment are intimately linked. Thank you for your contributions. I would like to invite the next three speakers to join us.

5

Urban planning, environment and nature: the pollinator citizens

The example of Curridabat, Costa Rica

Daniel BASTARD

Curridabat, in Costa Rica, has reorganised its entire urban plan around its non-human inhabitants, which seems extremely poetic to me while being extremely political. I would like to invite Edgar Mora to explain what this is all about.



Edgar MORA

*Minister of Public Education for Costa Rica (2018-2019),
Mayor of Curridabat (2007-2018)*

Good afternoon,

I would like to thank Agence française de développement for inviting me to this conference. I am here to tell you about "Urban planning, environment and nature: the pollinator citizens, the example of Curridabat in Costa Rica".

I will start by referring to a record of public notices from a newly-founded Latin American town dating back over 470 years ago.

"[...] in 1552, Tomás López Medel, an official of the Guatemalan Audiencia, ordered Indigenous people to be gathered into defined spaces, each of which would have 'a church, laid-out streets and a square' ". Tomás López Medel had observed that the Indigenous people grew crops inside their villages. He forbade them to continue this practice by ordering the following: "Do not sow any corn in the town. Everything must be very clean. There must be no trees. If there are, cut them down."

We have heard and perhaps repeated the cliché that the problems of cities in the Global South are due to a lack of planning.

However, contrary to this claim, our towns and villages, whatever their size, were planned very precisely by the colonial powers, with an attention to detail, but without taking into account sustainability, inclusion or resilience. I think that this is one of the reasons why the layouts of Latin American cities have now reached their limits. They

We used the pollination system as a model of prosperity and granted citizenship to pollinators.

do not offer the possibility of a healthy growth that respects human rights and allows a fairer relationship with nature. The public notice that I described bears witness to the obstacles that the "Orderly City" created to the symbiotic relationship between nature and Indigenous communities. It also shows that towns have a political dimension and this quality is evident in their design and reflects all humanity's actions and power dynamics.

Towns have served to create subordination, as we have seen, but the scenario originally established can be updated by other agendas, at least up to a point, and as long as towns remain places where people live and if there is an intention to transform.

In my city, Curridabat, we believe that the most significant change we can make to the Orderly City to bring it into the 21st century is to redefine the urban as a multi-dimensional container of experiences with many more forms of citizenship than those conceived of by the colonial power. Indeed, this power built hyper-humanised habitats to prevent contact with nature and limited the capacity and power of the many inhabitants to transform the city.

What do we do in Curridabat?

Ciudad Dulce, our urban planning programme, aims to create the conditions to improve the quality of life of all the territory's inhabitants, both human and non-human. We used the pollination system as a model of prosperity and granted citizenship to pollinators. In this way, we wanted to raise awareness and encourage action to prevent the city from interrupting the landscape, instead successfully harmonising the built environment with nature.



Source: pexels (phil-mitchell).

For centuries, hummingbirds and women did not peacefully visit the streets due to the lack of two things: security and flora.

Why do we include pollinators in this new concept of citizenship?

Although we don't generally notice, the streets are actually pollination corridors along which the pollinators travel every day when they move through the urban environment. Thus the fractal structure of towns fosters an alliance between hummingbirds and women. For both types of urban dweller, it is beneficial that towns have flowering bushes that provide nectar to the hummingbirds and security to women. For centuries, hummingbirds and women did not peacefully visit the streets due to the lack of two things: security and flora.

Citizens and local authorities can reveal an infinite number of links which I call "invisible alliances"; these are unveiled and reinforced over time. These alliances have the potential to transform the urban space into a platform of capabilities and values guided by what citizens need, not by the supply side, which is usually co-opted by political and economic bureaucracies and corporations that know how to convert their interests into a priority for all. According to this logic, the lifeblood of towns consists of these needs, and for quality needs to exist, new citizenships must be formed.

Now think of a hummingbird that was born and grew up in Curridabat, my home town. Think of Frankie, a hummingbird who lives on my patio and from there travels all around the neighbourhood. His itinerary, actions and vicissitudes represent a vertebra of innovative suggestions. Frankie goes to the public square and also visits other squares: the private courtyards of Curridabat.

For Frankie, the separation between public and private space is literally meaningless: he passes through this legal distinction as if it did not exist. For Frankie, the shape of our neighbourhood is that of an archipelago of squares from which life emerges.

On the contrary, for me it is just an energy network of private properties and buildings. From an economic point of view, for Frankie, if this archipelago were to record its gross domestic product, its main source of income would be pollination. The archipelago's economy would be based on its ecosystem services.

Frankie flies between all the islands of this archipelago completely naturally, since this is the nature into which he was born and the nature in which he operates as a biological being. He sees the street and thinks it natural. He sees the wall and thinks it natural. For Frankie, a line upon which washing hangs is as natural as the branch of a tree. In Frankie's eyes, our town is nature itself, a biological organism.

Frankie suggests that we perceive ourselves, as human beings, as an integral part of nature, and consider that this also applies to our constructions. This is a completely radical request from a political point of view. It is about defining the biological functionality that our towns will have in the future, beyond their very configuration.

If Frankie is a biologically functional inhabitant who brings value to the town instead of taking it away, and who suggests how to analyse the town, how to channel energies, then he must be considered a citizen, like other pollinators, and their experiences must be taken into account to rethink the evolution of the town. Curridabat considers that the form of the town should be governed as if it were nature, contrary to what is usually done.

This is the most controversial part of the paradigm. Indeed, the success of a town proposing this type of change is determined by the ability of its citizens to achieve emerging, unexpected results that are superior to the usual results, even if these are satisfactory. In other words, for the town to act as nature, its society must learn to manage what happens, and not be content with considering what is defined ex ante. This calls into question the relevance of strategic plans and projects as key development instruments.

Our learning shows us today that nature, habitat, governance and feelings are the four tributaries that feed the main current through which the experiences of everyone and everything must be in a constant state of exchange and oxygenation to create a precious habitat and sensible destiny for the future of everything that lives on the planet.

Thank you for your attention.



Source: City of Curridabat / <https://bit.ly/49m9Blu>

Daniel BASTARD

Can you give us two words that describe what you consider to be two priorities?



Edgar MORA

In short, I would say the design determines the result.



Daniel BASTARD

To what extent can that introduced in Curridabat be replicated? What do you think are the necessary conditions in order to transpose this model to another location?

Edgar MORA

Our model is completely replicable in other locations, irrespective of their size. All that is required is the will to transcend the materiality. In the case of the Global South, this materiality comes from colonisation and reflects the importance given to layout. It is a matter of establishing methods for designing places and public policies that take into account other values derived from the conception of nature. Everything designed by nature obviously has a configuration, but according to its own rhythms and scales and these must be taken into account. All the public policies that we call the Ciudad Dulce, the gentle city, are based on our belief that pollination brings prosperity. We draw inspiration from it to transform the habitat. We do not just apply classic methodologies, we combine them. I think that the most important innovative element here is to make two distinct mechanisms work together in harmony in public administration. One launches traditional projects that offer unexpected results and the second is responsible for taking advantage of these results by analysing them to produce a new theory of place that is in turn inserted into the implementation process.

It is a matter of using emerging results as if they were produced by nature, even if they appear spontaneously. This is undoubtedly the most difficult thing to implement, as towns must be prepared to maximise the use of autonomy. Because without autonomy, it is impossible. That is why this type of programme in which there is an opportunity to enhance nature in the spaces in which we live must be produced where people live, rather than where the State has decided. The state apparatus is in fact a legal fiction that does not have a connection to anyone. I prefer to talk about a government that is linked to everyone and everything. Our model means nothing is missed and everything that comes up spontaneously can be utilised. Of course, it is a big culture shock for us who have to put an end to the colonial model. It is a case of no longer thinking in terms of the initial project, but rather of living as a function of what is happening, which is the reverse of what has been done in Latin America for 500 years. In their original cultures, Indigenous communities did not have the concept of a project. In contrast, they had developed strong capabilities to deal with what was happening.

Daniel BASTARD

Focusing not on the project but on the reality of what you are experiencing can indeed be an asset. Thank you very much.

6

Internally displaced persons and environmental migrants

The example of Cameroon



Estelle EWOULE-LOBEM

*Secretary General of Action for Protection of Internally Displaced Persons and Environmental Migrants in Africa (APADIME),
Laureate of the Marianne Initiative for Human Rights Defenders*



Wangari Maathai

The Congo Basin is today rightly considered as the Earth's second lung after the Amazon region

My talk is about the forests of the Congo Basin, and given the time constraints, I will try to get straight to the point. I stand before you today as an activist who is inspired by the courage of my compatriot Met Ali-Ngom, who is here today, the bravery of Simone de Beauvoir when she launched the feminist movement, and the passion of Wangari Maathai, to whom I pay special tribute.

I come from Cameroon and I am the co-founder of Action for Protection of Internally Displaced Persons and Environmental Migrants in Africa, better known by its acronym APADIME. I represent a new form of women's activism that promotes the values of sustainable development, environmental protection, anti-racism and the protection of human rights, in particular for the Indigenous peoples of the Congo Basin in Africa.

The Congo Basin is today rightly considered as the Earth's second lung after the Amazon region, about which my colleagues spoke at length. We have the same problems, the same issues, the same challenges and concerns. The Congo Basin represents an area of over 300 million hectares. A form of collaborative management was put in place for the Congo Basin forests between the late 1970s and early 1980s with the support of foreign donors such as AFD and the European Union. The vast forests have been divided into five zones. In particular we work in the Tridom region which covers Cameroon, Gabon and Congo. The forest and wildlife diversity of this region make it a very important area for conservation and carbon sequestration.

The issues facing the peoples of the Congo Basin are linked to the creation of protected areas in this vast region. Indigenous peoples have been considered the guardians of these forests for many years, just as they are in the Amazon. They live from hunting, fishing and gathering, and their cultural values are entwined with the forest. Stating this brings up things from the past for me, because for years I kept my Indigenous side to myself. Indeed, Pygmy blood runs in my veins, and in Cameroon, being Pygmy means you are the equivalent of a sub-human. Being called Pygmy is



Facing this increased vulnerability due to the creation of protected areas, Indigenous populations have been relocated far from their bases and their numbers have declined.

considered an insult. I was so ashamed of this origin that I had to hide it. Today, however, I am proud of my roots and proud to assert that I belong to the forest peoples of the Congo Basin. I am proud to defend their rights and to fight against the degradation and violation of our land in the forests of the Congo Basin.

When protected areas were created in the forests of the Congo Basin, no account was taken of the fact that people lived in these forests, as is the case in the Amazon region. Everything was decided by those in power, and the subsequent economic revolution led to concession contracts being signed by major forestry companies. However, these companies did not take into account the rights of Indigenous populations on the ground and did not respect the commitments of the concession contracts they had signed with the State.

I co-founded APADIME some ten years ago. Our work is focused on three themes. In respect of human rights considerations, which are inseparable from the environment, we decided to work on environmental crime in the Congo Basin, tackling pockets of vulnerability where organised crime is rampant and violates the rights of Indigenous peoples. Organised crime is growing rapidly in the forests of the Congo Basin, with serious impacts on the rights of Indigenous peoples. Organised environmental crime mainly concerns illegal logging, the illegal exploitation of timber and protected essential oils, the trafficking of protected species, and illegal mining, especially of gold and diamonds which are much sought after by foreigners in our villages and where we operate.

Facing this increased vulnerability due to the creation of protected areas, Indigenous populations have been relocated far from their bases and their numbers have declined. In addition to this human-made vulnerability, there is also vulnerability related to climate change, deforestation by large timber companies and gangs of criminals who have moved into the forests of the Congo Basin. We are at the intersect of corruption, environmental crime, financial crime and the disorganisation of national institutions in Cameroon, where very violent crime is rampant.

But we are not working alone in the Congo Basin. APADIME has been fortunate in being able to form a network with various actors in the Tridom region, Gabon and the DRC, where the situation is much more serious than in Cameroon. We work with the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). Its resilience fund supports us in the field, trains us in security issues and coordinates our work to assist in the fight against organised crime and preserve the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities in Cameroon. In Cameroon, we don't speak of an Indigenous people, but rather of an Indigenous population. The preamble to Cameroon's constitution prefers this term and links their rights to those of ethnic minorities.

With my colleague Alain Bashizi, who unfortunately could not be here today, we are taking action to try to disrupt criminals operating in the Congo Basin. Local leaders are under constant pressure in the areas in which we operate. Criminal gangs exploit extreme poverty. They use poverty to manipulate and exploit the Indigenous popu-





Source: Pygmy woman / 123rf.com (surz)

They use poverty to manipulate and exploit the Indigenous population, who are ignorant of the law.

lation, who are ignorant of the law. Governments sign conventions and introduce legislation, but there is no follow up. Those who live in the forests do not even know that laws exist. They may carry out activities that they don't know are punishable by law. But they are the ones who are arrested, the first to be targeted as incapable of defending the forests, although in fact they have protected and preserved them for years. This is the real problem posed by criminal organisations that exploit poverty to make money and completely disregard the rights of local populations.

We are trying to improve the resilience of these populations with GI-TOC by introducing income-generating activities, mainly with women, because they are the primary victims of this chain of organised crime. In the Dja reserve where I work, which is the largest wildlife reserve in the area, you find women carrying sacks filled with protected species. They don't really think about the consequences of their actions and are regularly arrested by ecoguards. Criminals take advantage of ignorance and poverty to manipulate these people while staying in the background and never being harassed if arrests are made.

We collaborate with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and follow their strategic lines of work. Of the four existing lines, APADIME and its partners in the DRC and Gabon work on the "three Ps", in other words protection, prevention and promotion. With regards to prevention, we try to disrupt crime by raising community leaders' awareness and making them understand the risks they run by working for these criminal gangs. We explain the potential prison sentences set out by the State. We are trying to spread the word at this level as much as possible in order to disrupt the criminal system that is gaining ground. Our objective is to instil fear in the population to reduce the penetration of criminal gangs in the villages.

In terms of protection, we identify and train community leaders and encourage them to collaborate with ecoguards, actors who promote and protect human rights and the local authorities. We work a lot with the municipal authorities because we are not alone. Our aim is to organise the resilience of these populations in our States.

Finally, in terms of promotion, we want to create strong networks, as has been achieved through the Global Initiative which has facilitated contact with certain actors in Latin America. The objective is to share good practice and disseminate information as much as possible in our African lands.

Our activities lead us through the forests to train and inform the population and share experiences. We want to ensure that the knowledge of these populations is considered an opportunity to combat organised crime in the forests of the Congo Basin.

Thank you.



Daniel BASTARD

Thank you very much. In the same way as all our other speakers, I would like to ask you for two words that you think are priorities for immediate application.

Estelle EWOULE-LOBE

The first word is resilience: resilience in the face of the system, which is extremely violent, but also in the face of climate change. Resilience in the face of donors such as AFD, who find it difficult to fund high-impact local initiatives and resilience in the face of the universal system which disregards the rights of Indigenous people when it comes to making major decisions, as is the case today in Dubai.

The second word would be transparency, transparency by our governments when they introduce forestry laws and when they grant concessions to foreign logging companies to exploit timber resources. We need transparency around the obligations inherent in these concession contracts, otherwise it is impossible for us to claim and then defend our rights. Transparency also concerns the donors who fund the actions carried out in our lands. It is essential to put in place a monitoring system to allow us to understand what you are funding through the development projects that you deploy in our corrupt African countries.

Daniel BASTARD

Corruption is something that is quite universal.

7

Official recognition of the rights of nature

The example of the Loyalty Islands, New Caledonia



Victor DAVID

*Researcher on environmental rights and sustainable development,
French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development*

**For the Kanaks,
there is no
difference
between
humans and
their environment.**

It is traditional in New Caledonia Kanaky that, when you are invited to speak, you respect a certain custom, as we say faire la coutume. Sometimes, you offer a customary gift. This gift is generally made by the people who are being hosted to the people acting as hosts. It therefore falls to me to offer a customary thank you to AFD, our hosts today, and I would like to say a big thank you in particular to Farid, Sarah and Aurélie, who have so admirably organised my participation in this wonderful conference. Thank you to everyone here, whether in person or by videoconference. Thanks also to this morning's speakers, who moved us with their testimonies of both extreme sadness and extreme courage. I am one of the last speakers on this afternoon's round table, and it is well known that the best always comes last!

The aim of my talk is to describe an event that occurred this year from three different angles: firstly, the creation of a new category of subject of law known as a natural legal entity, which was made possible in New Caledonia in the context of decolonisation, a subject to which I will return later; secondly, the Kanak perception of the environment, which also played a role; and, more generally, reflections on the rights of nature, on which I have been working for the last ten years or so, having started in New Zealand.

New Caledonia is an archipelago in the South Pacific, east of Australia, with New Zealand to the south, located in the region known as Melanesia. The Indigenous people, the Kanaks, have lived here for some 3,000 years.

Why recognise elements of nature as subjects of law? Marine Calmet described the genesis of the movement for the rights of nature. For the Kanaks, there is no difference between humans and their environment. They are the sea, they are the earth. I am a researcher at IRD and Loyalty Islands Province asked me to assist in writing its environmental law. This work led to the creation of the Environmental Code for Loyalty Islands Province. This is the fruit of an encounter between researcher and civil society.

The province's representatives wanted an environmental code that reflected their way of seeing the world rather than a cut-and-paste copy of the French Environmental Code

The population of Loyalty Islands Province is 98% Kanak. The province's representatives wanted an environmental code that reflected their way of seeing the world rather than a cut-and-paste copy of the French Environmental Code, since, I would remind you, we are still a French territory in New Caledonia.

The code is an official recognition of the rights of nature. In positive law, certain elements of nature have now acquired the status of subjects of law. The code was published in the Official Journal on 18 July 2023. These are not mere citizens' declarations, theoretical simulations or simply expressions of the desire of citizens' collectives and NGOs. It is genuinely a matter of a right acquired by elements of nature, as has happened elsewhere, but this time in France.

I don't know to what extent this recognition will be permanent because it is a ruling by a sub-state regional authority. A judge could consider that the provision breaches a certain number of French legal rules in the hierarchy of norms and decide to annul it. Consequently, this addition to the law remains fragile, although it does have the merit of having existed for six months, even if we are still in the period in which legal appeals could be made.

What does this legal provision say? In application of the unitary principle of life, the text indicates that elements of nature, living species and natural sites are recognised as natural entities, subjects of law. They are recognised as having fundamental rights. They have no obligations, and each natural entity that is a subject of law has an interest to act, exercised on its own behalf. Thus elements of nature are recognised as having the attributes of subjects of law, whether they are living organisms or eco-systems. Experiences in different countries around the world were taken into account to offer the most viable solutions to the Province.



Peninsula in the Ouvéa lagoon – The shark pass.
Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

A living being, even if not a physical, human or collective person, is not an object either. So we had to invent a new legal category "A natural entity".

For the first time in New Caledonia and the South Pacific, sharks and sea turtles have been offered protection; they are the first species chosen by the Loyalty Islands Province. These are iconic species not only for the Kanaks, but for all Oceanian peoples, including in Polynesia, because of their special relationship with certain natural elements. We had to start somewhere. It was not possible to draw up a list of 100 species. We have started with sharks and turtles, but other items may be added to the list in future regulations.

A natural entity that is a subject of law possesses rights. This is its first attribute. I deliberately use the term "natural entity" because my research has shown me that the concept of a legal person poses very many problems, including conflict with human rights. In other words, a number of jurists and the legal doctrine have for decades, indeed centuries, considered that only humans or groups of humans can be legal persons. We did not want sharks and turtles to be legal persons, because they are not human. On the other hand, they are no longer objects. The law distinguishes between objects and subjects. But a living being, even if not a physical, human or collective person, is not an object either. So we had to invent a new legal category, which we did.

The text of the Loyalty Islands Code incorporates Kanak and Indigenous thinking. In Kanak custom, turtles are eaten on certain ritual occasions. Conferring the status of legal entities to sharks and turtles could not mean the end of a ritual or symbol. This symbol had to be preserved. As an exemption in exceptional cases, the harvesting of turtles can thus be authorised. This is an important point to take into account if this evolution is to be replicated in other regions, including your own.

An important element to consider when creating a natural legal entity is the human aspect. It is a matter of determining who will speak on behalf of sharks, turtles and other elements of nature. The Islands Province, after studying practices from other locations, has chosen to appoint six spokespersons, three of whom are put forward by customary area councils, in other words Indigenous people. Consequently Indigenous people play a key role in the system.

This development, to which we have contributed, has been made possible in the context of the decolonisation of New Caledonia. Authorities and institutions resulted from the 1998 Nouméa Accord, which I understand is moving towards its conclusion. Neither French nor European law applies in New Caledonia. New Caledonia is now sufficiently autonomous within the French Republic to be able to take a number of decisions of its own, particularly with regards to the environment. Thus the organisation allows it.

Furthermore, the three provinces of New Caledonia have legal competence for environmental matters. Three environmental codes are in place, to the displeasure of the Minister of the Interior. New Caledonia is organised according to a federal model, with three environmental codes, three economic investment codes and so on. This is how a federal system works.



A final element of the system is essential to create natural and legal entities and to recognise a certain number of elements of nature as subjects of law, namely the Kanak perception of the environment and the unitary principle of life.

We understand the Kanak attitude to the surrounding world because for Kanaks, every living thing can convey the sacred nature of a person from their entourage. Every element is always someone's ancestor. In this concept, identity is the source of a person's existence. In this world view, destroying nature means humans destroying themselves. This dimension remains practically anthropocentric

Another observation by ethnologists, people of good will, is that Kanaks have a friendly relationship with plants. We're used to having friendly relations with our dogs and cats, but the Kanaks stroke their yams. That is how you have to understand it. There exists a kind of respectful friendship between the Kanak farmer and the yam plants. Growth is encouraged with careful attention and by talking and singing to the plants.

The unitary principle of life is key. It means that humans and nature are one. There is therefore nothing to prevent the recognition of rights to elements of nature, since nature is human and human is nature. Nature is a sovereign organ and the word sovereign is important because it means that there is nothing above it, and certainly not humans. Humans do not come above nature.

In our research we relied on a number of works that launched the rights of nature movement some fifty years ago – Christopher Stone's proposal dates back to 1972. We are now part of an approach by which nature is no longer considered in a patrimonial manner. Nature is not a communal thing, nor does it belong to anyone. Nature is nature.

The beliefs and visions of Indigenous peoples are also increasingly taken into account, and the taboo of the legal personification of nature was discarded some years ago. What seemed unthinkable a few years ago – the term comes from Christopher Stone himself – is now part of positive law.

I refer you to the United Nations site called Harmony With Nature (<http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/>) which lists all the countries in the world that have adopted legal or para-legal texts that recognise elements of nature as subjects of law.

Legal personality or the fact of recognising elements of nature as legal entities is not a miracle solution, but an avenue we are exploring as researchers. Loyalty Islands Province considered this a suitable solution, and we have implemented it. This move requires the will to cross the threshold, but it is only a psychological threshold that prevents us from considering elements that are not human entities as legal entities. To achieve this, a new category of subjects of law has to be created, that of natural legal entities.

the fact of recognising elements of nature as legal entities is not a miracle solution, but an avenue we are exploring as researchers.

I consider that humans are wolves to sharks; and actually that humans are wolves to wolves. We now need rights for nature.



This is work that I am continuing to pursue as a researcher. We have launched a similar project in Martinique on a dying lagoon, Les Salines, together with citizens' groups. I have also been leading another project since last year called Mermed, which involves recognising the Mediterranean Sea as a subject of law. Why not? We can take it to the logical extreme! This project is at the stage of a feasibility study of scientific research to determine whether what is applicable to sharks, rivers and lakes could also apply to the Mediterranean Sea. This is my current project.

You will have understood that, when you work on the rights of nature, you have to be a committed researcher. The rights of nature are obvious to me. For example, in New Caledonia, following fatal attacks by sharks, one of the provinces with a non-Kanak majority has been harvesting sharks for some months, in other words killing them. Between 500 and 600 sharks have been killed since the beginning of 2023 in response to four fatal attacks on humans. I consider that humans are wolves to sharks; and actually that humans are wolves to wolves. When humans were wolves to other humans, human rights were needed. We now need rights for nature.

Thank you.

Daniel BASTARD

In two words, what are the two priorities you would like to see implemented?

Victor DAVID

I am ready for this exercise since everyone else had to do it before me! The first word I would suggest is harmony, in relation to the United Nations programme on harmony with nature. This term links with the concept of the unitary principle of life, which is a matter of harmony between humans and nature. In a context of decolonisation, it is also a question of harmony between Indigenous peoples and those who have descended from colonisation or another history. We need harmony in this world of wars and violence.

The second term I would like to contribute is open-mindedness. What we have done in the Loyalty Islands could not have been accomplished without a minimum of open-mindedness, tolerance and decolonisation, particularly of minds, because we think along the lines of Aristotle, Greco-Roman law, the *summa divisio*, and so on. We need to go beyond all that and decolonise the law.

Human rights
and the
accountability
of the community
of development actors

Strengthening the integration of human rights standards and principles in development cooperation:

"Towards an accountability framework for a human rights-based approach to development"

Daniel BASTARD

Carol RASK, from the Danish Institute for Human Rights, has worked in coordination with AFD to develop a tool which she will now present to us.



Carol RASK

*Chief Adviser and Team Leader
of Human Rights and Sustainable Development,
Americas at the Danish Institute for Human Rights*

We have had some very rich discussions during the day. We have heard sombre stories, but all these testimonies have underlined the importance of integrating human rights into sustainable development. My presentation concerns a mechanism to evaluate the level of integration of a human rights-based approach in cooperation projects relating to sustainable development. It is the fruit of work conducted in conjunction with AFD and in partnership with other agencies.

Today we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration as well as the 25th anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. There is another important anniversary that we haven't yet celebrated: the 20th anniversary of the UN Statement of Common Understanding on a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), adopted in 2003. According to this approach, all development programmes should have the aim of realising human rights, and human rights principles and standards should inform the way we collaborate in development. We have heard many examples today of the importance of respecting people's rights to participation and consultation in the framework of development processes and the importance of ensuring that marginalised groups are reached by our development actions. The third objective of

Research conducted by our institute a few years ago highlighted that nearly 92% of the 169 SDG targets are related to human rights.

the 2003 UN approach is that all sustainable development programmes must contribute to building the capacity of duty-bearers and rights-holders to know and claim their rights. In this way, we can further contribute to the realisation of human rights through development programmes.

Many States have committed to integrating human rights into sustainable development, notably in the current framework of the UN's 2030 Agenda. This agenda emphasises the responsibility of signatory States to respect, protect and promote the human rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various international human rights treaties. What is most interesting for us here is that this Agenda must now be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the obligations of States under international law.

There are many commitments and the research carried out by our institute a few years ago highlighted that nearly 92% of the 169 SDG targets have a link to human rights. In this way, we have a number of commitments from UN Member States and a global framework for understanding what the human rights-based approach is, a framework upon which we can base our work.

Over the last year, we have been cooperating with AFD to develop a mechanism that measures the degree of integration of human rights into development cooperation projects. Prior to this, we had wanted to understand what development agencies were doing to measure the integration of the human rights-based approach.

**OBJECTIFS
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT
DURABLE**



Source: © PNUD <https://www.facebook.com/PNUD/>



With regards to the process we have undertaken for this project, we held an initial joint meeting in April as a general introduction and presentation to each other. From June, we conducted a series of interviews with a number of development agencies and ministries in order to understand how they measure the degree of integration of their human rights-based approach. We then organised meetings with these stakeholders in September and October to discuss what form the evaluation framework could take. Above all, we wanted to create a practical, useful framework for development agencies. This is why we involved them closely, together with the ministries. This allowed us to gather a wide range of comments, including from French civil society, which proved very useful. We have also benefitted from the contribution of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs; this has given us food for thought.

We are now in a position to present a tool.

But before that, I would like to give you an update on the conclusions we reached with stakeholders on the situation of development agencies with regard to their commitments to take into account the human rights-based approach. We interviewed the following institutional actors on the subject:

- the European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships
- LuxDev (Luxembourg)
- NORAD (Norway)
- The Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- DANIDA (Denmark)
- BMZ and GIZ (Germany)
- SDC (Switzerland)
- AFD (France)
- FCO (UK)
- World Bank (Human Rights, Inclusion and Empowerment Umbrella Trust Fund)
- the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)

On this subject.

We have published a briefing note on these discussions. They primarily concern European development agencies and foreign ministries that work on development cooperation and human rights. In respect of the general conclusions drawn from our stakeholder interviews: it can be noted that the majority have legal and strategic commitments to a human rights-based approach (HRBA). A number of organisations have also developed specific tools and resources. Some of them have also carried out a very wide-ranging evaluation of the integration of a HRBA into their development cooperation policy, as was the case in Finland recently for example.

Overall,
we found a lack
of accountability
and the need
to strengthen [...] more systematic
evaluation of
AFDH across
all programmes
and projects.

However, we noticed that, even if there were policies, the proactive engagement of some organisations to HRBA varied. New approaches have been adopted and, in some cases, HRBA has been sidelined. Many described, after several years, the challenges of implementing HRBA commitments in practice. Surprisingly, many highlighted that there were several different understandings of what HRBA means, even within the same agency.

As for those organisations that were already measuring the degree of integration of HRBA, one ministry has developed a system for rating each programme according to the level of human rights consideration. This was relatively new. Furthermore, two other organisations are examining how they can more effectively report on these commitments.

In general, we found a lack of accountability and the need to strengthen the more systematic monitoring and evaluation of HRBA across programmes and projects within the various organisations.

More specifically, we noted that although one organisation had already developed a framework, there was currently no standardised way of assessing the degree to which development cooperation respects and promotes the realisation of human rights in a systematic way. We found that where there were compulsory human rights assessments, it was mostly in relation to the "do no harm" principle. However, there is no systematic, compulsory evaluation of projects' contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights, or of their objectives to do more for the realisation of human rights and to help States meet their obligations.

These discussions provided us with a wealth of experience and lessons learned, from which we drew inspiration to develop the pilot version of the tool that I will now present to you.

We call this human rights accountability mechanism a "HRBA Check" (Human Rights Based Approach). It is essentially a mechanism designed to improve the quality of human rights implementation in development cooperation projects. We hope it will provide a more systematic framework for reporting the progress or regression of the integration of HRBA. We also hope that the Check will help ensure accountability for some of the legal and political commitments that development agencies and Member States have actually made with regard to human rights and HRBA.

Who is the tool for? We have designed the tool so that it can be used by any sustainable development actor interested in further integrating human rights into development projects and programmes. It can thus be used by development agencies, civil society organisations, multilateral development organisations and even national human rights institutions. It is therefore really an open document to be used by those wanting to promote the integration of human rights in development cooperation.

Those of you who know the gender equality markers or other OECD DAC markers will recognise the tool's general framework. We have specifically drawn on the OECD DAC system with 0, 1 and 2 scores to facilitate the use of the Check as a marker. We propose the following three levels to differentiate the degree of human rights integration:

We took inspiration from the OECD DAC level 0, 1, 2 system, in order to facilitate the use of the "Check" as a marker.

- **Zero level Do no human rights harm:** we consider this the base level. No project should be doing any human rights harm. This level mainly involves assessing and mitigating risks and ensuring that the funded activity does not have any negative human rights impacts. This is the absolute minimum

- **Progressive level The human rights:** which aims to integrate human rights standards and norms into the intervention process. In this way, the principles of participation, accountability, transparency, legality, equality and non-discrimination are integrated into the project development process.

- **Transformative level The human rights:** is the highest ambition. This is what the UN Common Understanding of 2003 pushes us to adopt. For this level, the principal objective of the programme or project is the realisation of human rights and there is real work on the structural barriers to achieving these rights.

That is the overall measurement system of the HRBA Check. But what does it actually measure? Again, we have followed the OECD's DAC system to make the tool compatible for those who want to use this type of marker. We consider an analysis, checking whether the project or programme has been developed on the basis of a contextual analysis of human rights and the risks relating to the violation of these rights. We analyse the project's objective to find out whether or not it respects human rights, and if beyond that it contributes to their advancement by supporting governments to meet their human rights obligations. We also examine the project indicators to see if there are any that allow us to monitor human rights risks. We also look at the project's planned activities to see if they contribute to the realisation and respect of human rights, in line with the contextual analysis, the project objectives and its indicators. Finally, we assess the extent to which human rights indicators are integrated into programme monitoring and evaluation processes. These are our five criteria to measure the degree to which human rights are integrated into the project or programme.

In terms of how to use the HRBA Check, we propose that development projects should be classified depending on whether a clear majority of the criteria within each level is met. In this context, we propose that the minimum level should be a project that does no human rights harm and includes a contextual analysis of the subject. In this way, we suggest to development agencies that want to consider projects that are human rights blind that these will not be financed. In particular, we have integrated what we call the "Comply and Explain" principle into the assessment. There is no "one size fits all" approach: when reviewing projects and programmes, if a project does not meet the indicators and standards, then instead of simply refusing to finance it, or classifying it in category 0 or 1, the project promoter must explain why the human rights criteria cannot be met. The project then undergoes an objective evaluation to see if it can be improved.

For a level 2 project, the highest level, we recognise that in some contexts it is not possible to immediately favour a transformative approach in terms of human rights. We encourage a more systematic assessment of what is possible, with a view to encouraging those working with partners and communities to determine how far the integration of human rights can go in the context of their project with a particular partner. It is thus about recognising the importance of context.

We want to help those working with partners or directly within a project to explore the possibilities that exist, to better understand what AFDH involves and to discuss what can be undertaken in a particular situation.

I will very quickly go through the checklist itself to give you an idea of what it looks like. The check is based on various criteria with boxes to tick for what needs to be checked. We want to help those working with partners or directly in the scope of a development project to explore existing possibilities, better understand what a human rights-based approach implies and to discuss what is possible in a particular context. The criteria for Human Rights Progressive and Human Rights Transformative projects are of course different, with the second level being the most ambitious and demanding.

How can the data generated from the analysis conducted by the HRBA Check be used? The first way it can be utilised is to assess funding levels. It is possible to evaluate, for example, as one development agency is currently doing, how many projects only tick the "do no harm" box, how many transformative projects are funded, and the amounts invested. Some agencies could, if they wish, establish targets in order to define a trajectory. I should emphasise, however, that the HRBA Check is not intended to be used solely for financial purposes. It can also be used as a framework for discussions within teams and institutions about projects and programmes in order to produce a common, shared analysis. We also understand from our interviews that some agencies are obliged to report the extent to which they are integrating human rights to their oversight structures. The HRBA Check can be used for this purpose.

The HRBA Check also provides a number of guidelines on how it can be used. One of the very clear recommendations given to us by many development agencies and ministries concerned the use of markers to monitor projects – and not just when they are being formulated. These markers can be used to assess the project's transformative human rights dimension throughout its implementation.

Aest to create capacity among partners to use this assessment tool. While some are very comfortable with the subject of human rights, others do not invest sufficiently in this area, and it is important to equip them with the capacity to understand the human rights-based approach and explore how it can be used in their context. Again, the aim is to integrate evaluation criteria from the earliest stages of preparation and throughout the project cycle.

We have developed a pilot version of the tool, and we are very interested in working with development actors who wish to test it and give us feedback on how it works and what improvements could be made, even if it means changing it into something completely different if that is what is necessary. We consider this tool as a source of inspiration for improved accountability in the international cooperation sector on human rights and sustainable development.



Daniel BASTARD

Thank you very much. As you said, this mechanism is a common good that anyone, here or online, can make their own. That is the key message of your presentation. As with all the other speakers, can I ask you to select two words that come to mind and that would be priorities in the implementation of human rights in sustainable development?

Carol RASK

The discussions we have had over the last two days have been extremely inspiring. This sharing of experiences shows the harm we can do to human rights if we do not integrate them into our sustainable development projects from the start. These testimonies give a clear insight into the benefits of this approach. Sharing and discussing experiences within teams, departments and between institutions is therefore essential to measure the extent to which projects can integrate the principles of human rights, but also to assess the capacity to go further that is available to us on issues of discrimination or accountability.

It is also essential to invest in building capacities and resources to enable actors to use assessment tools.

Representatives
of civil society
networks contribute
**Their opinions
about HRBA**



Jan Robert SUESSER

Vice-president of Coordination Sud



The issue of human rights is central to the members of Coordination SUD, [...] as humanitarian aid and development aid are directly linked to effective access to rights.

I would like to thank AFD for inviting French civil society organisations to speak at this point in the conference. Coordination Sud, for those of you who don't know, brings together 180 civil society organisations. These organisations are active in both the humanitarian and development fields.

The issue of human rights is central to Coordination Sud members in the wide range of objectives that they pursue. It is central as humanitarian and development aid are directly linked to effective access to rights, whether this access is the result of a precise legal framework or, more generally, corresponds to the legitimacy of the promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and later major declarations.

What are we talking about? Access to the means of subsistence, of course. But also responses to precariousness in terms of employment, housing, health, education and citizenship by means of peace, freedom of expression, freedom of association, women's rights, the recognition of young people and so on. So many issues to which development must respond.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), so often referred to in this conference, contribute to responding to these issues, each one associated with the rights covered by the UDHR and the complementary frameworks linked to the new challenges for rights in relation to the depletion of natural resources and accelerated climate disturbances, which we know are existential threats for the human species and its individual members. Thus, while the issue of development has long been seen as an issue for the South, with the SDGs, it can be seen how it is also a global issue, a systemic issue.

When we talk about human rights, we talk about public policies that are expected to lead to cohesion in our societies, which are complex and diverse everywhere. The same questions apply in southern countries, not just in the North. Are individual and collective needs and aspirations central to development objectives? Do policies and projects really take into account a development that leaves no one behind? Can there be a response in contexts where civil and political rights do not apply?

Today, everywhere, democracy can only be legitimate if populations see that it advances access to their fundamental rights, in what has become a global imperative.

If I have begun my contribution from this angle, it is because there are two ways of considering development policies. There is the one that puts everything in competition with everything else, of everyone with everyone else. This is the dominant frame of mind. And then there is the other way, the one that guides our civil society organisations. The one that swears by the cooperation of everyone with everyone. The one that is aware of the centrality of the relations between civil society and institutions.



The need for institutions that rely on civil societies to construct effective access to rights, civil societies that can count on institutions to drive societies forward. The one that knows that rights are linked (and which specialists say are interdependent). The one that relies on citizen participation to positively manage immediate interests, which are often divergent, in order to make collective progress. And, as we are in a country of the North, I would add it's the one that is aware that tensions in northern societies are the result of global policies that have affected the countries of the South for a long time.

AFD's general approaches and projects contain a number of civil society approaches. This is apparent both in the funding offered specifically to civil society and in more general projects. We should all be very glad about this, and hope that ODA funding increases.

With that clearly stated, one subject is a cause of concern for Coordination Sud that we think should be considered in today's collective reflection. It is not the rights themselves, but their effective implementation.

While Coordination Sud was delighted with the advances introduced by the content of the 2021 law on French development aid policy over the next five years, it is clear to us that too many positions promoted by the authorities fall outside its scope or are not guided by its spirit. As a result, Coordination Sud has been obliged to question the French authorities on crucial issues for beneficiary countries in relation to French development funding.

I will briefly give three examples that illustrate how we need ongoing, open and constructive discussion so that the direction indicated by the human rights compass is not downplayed, bypassed or even ignored. What I have heard today from a number of you indicates that you are asking yourselves this question about the compass, not just about France, but more generally about the North.

The fight against the funding of terrorism, while a thoroughly legitimate current objective, in our opinion has unduly influenced the effectiveness of development work undertaken by civil society organisations in the field. It has meant that we have had to record the identities of every funding beneficiary, of whatever kind, from the first euro. Our organisations have not managed to gain acknowledgement that such a procedure is impossible to implement and that we are faced with a nonsensical dilemma. Either we do what is asked of us, and our relations with our beneficiaries

Without anything to explain a reduced need for ODA, the abandonment of 0.7% was announced and the debate on financing development shifted [...] focus on the contribution of private finance.

deteriorate for several reasons. Or we have to give up these projects or activities. We requested the opinion of the Conseil d'Etat, which unfortunately had the effect of raising tensions in our relations with the authorities, although it led to a ruling that enabled us to reopen a dialogue. The French State still seems to be persisting with procedures that no other European Union funder requires. We consider that this risks penalising populations who are legitimate beneficiaries. This subject illustrates the tension between the requirement for effective fundamental human rights, which is at the very heart of this conference today, and the way in which the authorities ask operators to apply administrative regulations.

The relationship between the financing of official development assistance and objectives external to this policy is another difficulty that arises from political authority. The 2021 law quite rightly explicitly rejected managing migration. However, this subject is again being considered by the French Parliament and discussions at EU level. We know that the Secretary of State of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs is clearly opposed to this conditionality, which we welcome, but will she be heard?

On the subject of aid conditionalities that we consider to be illegitimate, there are also the suspensions of funding for NGOs operating in Burkina Faso and Niger. These were decided at the highest political level, notably because of a lack of civil society criticism of coups d'état. De facto demands that NGOs should take a position risk creating difficulties for them in implementing their core mandate: supporting vulnerable populations in gaining effective access to their rights. It is thus in the name of the primacy of this access that we are seeking to loosen the Gordian knot.

Finally, the third subject is **the issue of the unique place of ODA in facilitating access to fundamental rights**. The 2021 law announced the welcome continuation of an increase in funding that started in 2019. In the same vein, it was announced that efforts would be made to reach the iconic level of international commitment, 0.7% of GNI, by 2025. Although this achievement must now be considered merely a stage... it remains a necessary step forward. This growth in public aid is all the more crucial as many of the investments that contribute to the cohesion of societies rely on public funding which is often irreplaceable (in the true sense of there being no alternative).

However, with no explanation of the reduced need for ODA, it has been announced that the 0.7% figure is to be abandoned and the debate on development funding has shifted. The government now states that the focus should be on the contribution of private finance to investment linked to development and that the mobilisation of ODA must be part of this framework. Evidently, the centrality of the human rights compass attached to ODA is being erased.

There are two ways of taking what I have just expressed through these three examples. There is the opinion that considers the criticism unfounded, negative and even aggressive. Let me say specifically that this is not the case. That is not the intention, it is not the way in which Coordination Sud carries out its mission. What I would like us to remember is that thinking about development, development aid, official development assistance... cannot be done without the centrality of the human rights framework, a very comprehensive framework, a very demanding framework, an essential framework for reconciling action and the achievement of objectives based on the values that our societies claim, that they must protect, that they must drive forward.



Before concluding, I would like to share a final comment with you. While there may be reasons to examine a specific subject through approaches that do not involve human rights, we maintain that just, sustainable development never advances without these other approaches being questioned by human rights, all human rights.

I sincerely thank AFD for holding this conference which bears witness to the importance it attributes to human rights in its activities.

Thank you for your attention.

Daniel BASTARD

You can't escape the now customary question about which two words express two priorities for you.

Jan Robert SUESSER

Inclusive society, in the sense of a society of all rights for everyone. This contrasts with other concepts of what a society can be, namely those that seek to recognise the objective of effective access to rights solely for their own nationals and not for all, or those that are content with an "equal opportunities" approach that in fact makes each individual responsible for obtaining opportunities by their own means. These two approaches are not our idea of what inclusive societies are.



Raphaël CHENUIL-HAZAN

*Founder and President of the French Human Rights Platform (PDH),
Director of ECPM-Together Against the Death Penalty*



Narges MOHAMMADI

**Narges
MOHAMMADI
is in prison
for having fought
against the
death penalty
for the last 20 years
and campaigning
for the rights
of Iranian women
under the slogan
"Woman! Life!
Freedom!"**

First of all, I would like to thank AFD, in particular Farid, Sarah and all the teams for this conference, for today's discussions and for yesterday's small group debates, which were just as interesting and very rich. More broadly, I offer my thanks to AFD for having undertaken a genuine in-depth reflection on practices in the development sector in recent years, to ensure that the rights-based approach becomes a reflex and that it permeates the actions of all those involved in international solidarity, whether through individual organisations, the State or AFD. Extremely important work has been done to educate AFD staff through training and internal awareness-raising sessions.

I would also like to say that I have felt a lot of emotion over these two days of debates when listening to so many powerful testimonies, illustrated by the real-life experiences and struggles of women and men on the ground who we call human rights defenders, whether they are the allied rural women of Latin America, who touched me deeply this morning, African lawyers, or actors committed to opposing the agribusiness model in Asia, India and Indonesia. I am also thinking today of my friends Fatia Maulidiyanti and Haris Azhar, two partners who risk being sentenced to up to four years in jail in Jakarta on 17 December simply for defamation. They spoke out about the collusion of Indonesia's political authorities with mining companies and highlighted corruption and military operations in West Papua. I am thinking about LGBTQI+ activists facing the most difficult situations around the world. And I really welcome the presence of my friend Alice Nkom, an exceptional lawyer, who is the greatest representative and the best example. I am thinking about the Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese and Saudi journalists who work under the most difficult conditions to keep the world informed, as the Director of the Samir Kassir Foundation emphasised this morning in his most fascinating contribution. Finally, I'm thinking of Narges Mohammadi, who in a few days will receive the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo. She won't be there to accept it in person though, as she is in prison where she has spent 15 of the last 20 years. Her children and husband, who live in France where they have refugee status, it is important to note, will receive the award on her behalf. She is in prison for having fought against the death penalty for the last 20 years and campaigning for the rights of Iranian women under the slogan "Woman! Life! Freedom!"

I note that at no point during our debates has mention been made of China, the country which is at the heart of contemporary economic cooperation, at the heart of global trade, whether by means of the famous Belt and Road Initiative, or on the basis of bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements. However, China is the country that epitomises all the abuses committed against human rights defenders around the world. Against trade unionists, community representatives, lawyers, ethnic minorities, environmental defenders, among others. In 2019, I asked AFD about a publication in the *Études et savoirs* collection on the Belt and Road Initiative, which, in some thirty

It would be an understatement to say that AFD has changed its practices, something that I welcome. We are part of a new dynamic.

pages, did not once mention human rights. This was despite the fact that the study was precisely intended to allow AFD actors to better understand China. This perfectly illustrated the separation at that time between purely developmental thinking and the much-discussed rights-based approach. I won't go back to the project in 2017 for which a loan was made to China to build a coal plant in Xinjiang, with absolutely no consultation of NGOs. It would be an understatement to say that AFD has changed its practices, something that I welcome. We are part of a new dynamic. My organisation, Plateforme Droits de l'Homme (PDH), like Coordination Sud, is a preferred interlocutor with the authorities. PDH represents 30 French human rights NGOs that are active internationally. We do as much as we can to raise the issue of rights wherever possible.

In recent years, we have worked closely with the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and AFD. I co-chaired a working group within the National Council for Development and International Solidarity (CNDSI) on the shrinking spaces for civil society and drafted a Report to offer broad guidelines on the subject¹⁰. PDH published a follow-up report¹¹, available on our website, on the narrowing of the civic space, leading on from recommendations made to the State and all its components, the Ministry and AFD. I think this remains a relevant tool for making progress in the future. We also collaborated with the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs in 2019 on drafting the Human Rights and Development strategy, led by the Directorate-General for Global Affairs.

The rights-based approach was born out of the failure of the development policies of the 1980s and 1990s. We have moved on from the MDGs to the SDGs, and now we can no longer conceive of development without a rights-based approach. It's obvious. Human rights must no longer be considered as minor, peripheral issues, but must rather be at the heart of public policies. In addition to the work on the shrinking space for civil society, I also want to underline the existence of what some call a backlash against human rights in recent years, and against women's rights and LGBT rights in particular, in many countries, including in Europe.

This brings me to our recommendations.

It is PDH's ambition to work effectively on helping and supporting the human rights sector by strengthening the synergy between human rights and development. First of all, we attach great importance to AFD's integration of human rights into its strategic plan. AFD is drawing up its next strategy document. Human rights did not appear at all in the previous 2018-2022 Strategy. They were never mentioned. I strongly urge AFD to incorporate human rights into all levels of its next strategy.

I also call on the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and AFD to draw up a global strategy for human rights, obviously integrating the already existing Human Rights and Development strategy, as well as incorporating all components of all other rights. I would also encourage them to systematise the appointment of governance and human rights correspondents in embassies and local AFD offices. This recommendation comes directly from the CNDSI report. I also invite you to draw up a roadmap and guidelines for rights defenders in coordination with CSOs.

¹⁰ https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/cndsi-societe-civile-ang_cle82e13d-1.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.plateformedh.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Rapport-2023.pdf> (in French).



To deploy a genuine human rights policy within AFD, a holistic approach must be adopted that goes beyond the human rights-based approach and incorporates a global vision that also takes into account fundamental rights and civil and political rights. With the transfer of the oversight of governance projects to AFD in 2016, human rights and the concern for good governance and democracy must be AFD's entire responsibility in its operationalisation.

It will also be a matter of asserting the strength of human rights before public opinion. This could be achieved, for example, by creating a human rights centre which would be a welcoming place of exchange for NGOs and rights defenders who are at risk.

Finally, the last major recommendation for us relates to securing and increasing funding for human rights. Before me, Jan Robert said that the 0.7% must pervade issues relating to human rights, in particular by taking into account the flexibility and specific features of actors in the sector.

I call on both the AFD and philanthropic support to significantly increase funding for human rights all around the world. There must be an emphasis on unrestricted, unaffected flexibility in order to deploy funding that combines the strategic complementarity of local and international NGOs; to support human rights NGOs with core funding to overcome the fragilities and specific features of NGOs in the sector; and to fund the relocation of human rights NGOs that are in danger, supporting the deployment of their operations from abroad. I also call on foundations to play their part in financing and move away from a very French-speaking vision. English-speaking foundations have taken an inclusive view of human rights issues for a long time. I think French-speaking foundations must make the leap and integrate human rights into their strategic plans.

Human rights must no longer be considered as minor, peripheral issues, but rather must be at the heart of public policies.

Thank you very much.

I call on AFD and philanthropists to significantly increase funding for human rights worldwide, with an emphasis on flexibility.



Daniel BASTARD

Thank you. Before we move to the closing session, what are your two priorities in terms of human rights and sustainable development, further to the recommendations you have just set out?

Raphaël CHENUIL-HAZAN

I am the Director of the NGO ECPM-Together Against the Death Penalty, and for me, the word together is fundamental, because it is together that we will achieve things, and behind the word there is the idea of action, complementarity and working in synergy. As for the second word, I can't decide between transparency and flexibility. Flexibility especially in terms of resources. I support Carol's position on this subject.

Daniel BASTARD

I would also like to say that while Narges Mohammadi is in prison in Iran, she symbolises a fundamental struggle for us too.





Conclusion and closing

Daniel BASTARD

We will conclude by inviting representatives of international civil society to speak.



Mavalow Christelle KALHOUE

President of Forus International



Good evening everyone,

The hall is still full at this time of day, that's impressive. That means that there have been excellent opportunities for sharing and exchanging ideas. I am the President of Forus and I am originally from Burkina Faso. I mainly work in the Sahel region and I am also the president of the permanent secretariat of NGOs in Burkina Faso (Secrétariat Permanent des ONG du Burkina Faso or SPONG).

As we come to the end of this highly informative conference, I would like to introduce myself as a representative of Forus, a vast worldwide network with over 22,000 members that has a collective vision for the future. This meeting emphasises the crucial importance of linking human rights to sustainable development. In celebrating the significant anniversaries of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, together we recognise the urgency of our mission.

Today's discussions, illuminated by testimonies from around the world, have revealed the diversity of human rights issues, ranging from the challenges of agriculture in Asia to the protection of rights in Africa and Europe. These stories have strengthened our understanding of the interconnected challenges that we face together. Our sessions have explored the role of human rights in the ecological transition and the emerging rights of nature. The debates have shown that commitment to human rights and the environment is not only essential, but also possible.

This day confirms that sustainable development needs an integrated approach that respects the diversity of human rights and is conscious of the importance of our natural environment.

Allow me to share with you the reality of the region from which I come, the Sahel. In June 2023, there were 13.3 million forcibly displaced people in the West and Central Africa region, a figure that has doubled since 2018. The current context does not suggest that there will be any immediate improvement in the future. Despite its rich,

This meeting emphasises the crucial importance of linking human rights to sustainable development.

Civil society reflects the hopes and needs of communities and must be a central partner in policy-making.

varied potential, the region is still characterised by general instability, whether in terms of its politics, security or community issues. Other factors, such as the impact of climate change, are exacerbating food insecurity and poverty. This has been said so many times today. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, in the central Sahel region, a humanitarian and security crisis is persisting and becoming more complex, causing massive population displacements to urban centres. Democracy, as a universal principle of governance, is being called into question. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are under severe pressure due to security reasons. Long-standing partnerships are being seriously tested and questioned in some quarters. In this part of Africa, people feel that the crisis in the Sahel has been and still is invisible, indeed neglected, and that the area is being held hostage, resulting in additional pressure on civil society actors and humanitarian workers.

The situation is certainly difficult, but not desperate, as very resilient populations are fighting every day and want to rediscover a dignified, stable and prosperous life. According to an overview of Burkina Faso's humanitarian needs, one in five people in the country is internally displaced, that is to say approximately two million people. Some 3.7 million people need humanitarian aid but only 30% of the funding requirements are met. Also significant is the fact that 23.88% of educational infrastructures are unusable.

As we reflect on how far we have come, we can see that on a global level, the last few years have been marked by unprecedented challenges that have devastated much of the progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as has been said on several occasions. The path we now choose, at this time of interlinked crises, will shape the future of our planet and its inhabitants.

Allow me to recall some of the major considerations that must be at the heart of our actions.

Inclusive participation and dialogue

In light of the growing challenges confronting us, it is essential to have a sustained, reinforced dialogue and more inclusive participation. Civil society must be integrated at every decision-making level. It is imperative that governments commit to supporting a favourable environment for civil society by adopting policies such as those recommended by the OECD. This approach must transcend symbolism and implement practical actions that facilitate the participation of civil society in all political processes and at all levels. We are witnessing a shrinking of the civic space, accentuated by digitisation. This necessitates the increased protection of both digital rights and the civic space itself. We are thus calling for an effective participation of civil society that goes beyond simple consultation to ensure that the community's voices are heard and incorporated into global forums. Civil society reflects the hopes and needs of communities. It must be a central partner in drawing up policies. Disregarding the contribution of civil society amounts to ignoring the real needs of the people we serve.



Donor countries will have to commit to providing more and better official development assistance.

The coherence of sustainable development policies

We talked about this subject this morning. We must make every effort to improve the coordination of the various policies. Civil society is an essential ally that can identify gaps and recognise opportunities for synergy, in particular to help harmonise climate action with development objectives.

Continuing contribution of global development partners

Combatting poverty, inequality and the impacts of climate change requires robust regional and international cooperation. Reducing official development assistance for geopolitical reasons would seriously affect those in emergency situations, such as the people of the region which I am from, where climate change and conflict are already seriously threatening livelihoods, food security, education and public health. It is thus essential to recognise the crucial role of local leadership and civil society organisations. They are essential for analysing contexts, identifying needs and defining priorities; they act independently of inter-state political dynamics and focus on the needs of the most vulnerable. In a context of challenges to democracy and the restriction of civic space, international partners must contribute to fighting inequality and the effects of climate change in a significant and constant manner.

Official development assistance must be seen not as a diplomatic lever but as a fundamental commitment to its objectives. Civil society organisations are key partners for humanitarian and sustainable development programmes. They play a decisive role in transforming fundamental rights, sustainable development and global solidarity into a concrete reality rather than just simple ideals.

Rethinking development funding to respect human rights and the principles of development effectiveness

It is imperative to increase spending and restructure our systems to construct resilient societies that meet the needs of communities and protect ecosystems. Donor countries will have to commit to providing more and better official development assistance – and we have heard the word “flexibility” – while preserving the integrity of the aid and observing human rights and the principles of development effectiveness. Recent events in the central Sahel region should inspire the necessary reflection and reforms.

Investment in capacity building

Continuous capacity building is crucial. Governments should establish annual national targets for building the capacity of different groups, including civil society, and produce regular reports.

I would like to end with a call for unity and action, and to say that together we can transform human rights and sustainable development into a tangible reality.

In conclusion, the transformative change that we are targeting requires solidarity, courage and boldness. France and the European Union are the key actors in this transformation, defending the fundamental values of human rights and actively supporting the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

Our commitment to ourselves is essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda, with a particular attention to local actions.

I would like to end with a call for unity and action, and to say that together we can transform human rights and sustainable development into a tangible reality. Forus, in collaboration with civil society, is committed to making this vision a reality.

*Thank you for your consistent commitment to this cause.
Together, we can make a significant difference.*

Daniel BASTARD

Thank you very much for this powerful presentation.



Population displacement in Africa.
Source: <https://www.iom.int/fr>

Words
of the future



Andraina MAHATANASOA

*Young leader and human rights defender
from Madagascar*

**I am happy
because children
are not always
taken seriously,
especially girls,
and even less
so in Madagascar.
However, AFD
has given me
the opportunity
to be heard**

Good afternoon to everyone,

I come from Madagascar and I am 17 years old. I am a children's rights activist. Yesterday AFD invited me to describe the difficulties experienced by children in Madagascar, and today I am contributing to closing the conference.

I come from a poor family and being here with you today is beyond all my expectations. I am happy because children are not always taken seriously, especially girls, and even less so in Madagascar. However, AFD has given me the opportunity to be heard along with the children in Madagascar who I represent and who are the agents of change.

In Madagascar, many children are not respected. I fight for equality between girls and boys and I am active in the struggle against gender-based violence. Where I come from, there is a saying that sending a girl to school is like throwing money out of the window. Girls do not have inheritance rights. Many of them are victims of rape and sexual exploitation, have early pregnancies, die from abortion, or do not dare go to school because of harassment. They are mocked when they menstruate. They are the victims of violence from their parents and teachers, and also from foreigners, including French nationals travelling to Madagascar or via the Internet.

The right to express opinions was mentioned this morning. The elections for the President of the Republic were held last month in Madagascar but all opposition rallies and demonstrations were banned.

I want to stress the importance of education and everyone's right to a quality education. As our friend from Africa reported this morning, the illiteracy rate in Madagascar is also high. It is often thought that you have to study abroad to succeed, or study at a French school. Nobody believes that the education system in Madagascar is effective, not even the President who has just been re-elected.

I also really liked the idea of leadership and citizenship training schools for women in Latin America.

I have been impressed today by the number of actors and actions to defend rights around the world. This energises me and encourages me to continue to raise awareness about rights in my country and to do advocacy work.



At my school, many of my friends say that none of this matters, that human rights are things for rich people, for White people, for those who can afford them.

Rights are universal and development cannot be undertaken without respect for these rights, in particular children's rights. At my school, many of my friends say that none of this matters, that human rights are things for rich people, for White people, for those who can afford them. They don't even trust me. I tell them the opposite, that rights are for everyone, that we can only be happy if our rights are respected, that nothing can improve and the country cannot develop without rights. I am sad to hear that, despite all these actions, rights are in retreat around the world.

I don't know all the programmes and I have learned that very many promises and commitments have been made through national plans, led by strategic partners, through global programmes, risk analyses, normative frameworks and other things I don't understand very well, that billions of euros are being spent to defend rights. Billions of euros, especially for Madagascar, one of the poorest countries in the world. I think that's strange, because despite everything, rights are in retreat. I know that the situation would be worse without these efforts, but when I heard that the SDGs would only be achieved in 200 years' time, I thought that we certainly needed to find more effective actions. Perhaps we need to consider new solutions and get closer to the most vulnerable people, increasing the number of simple, low-cost measures to change everyday life and convince those who do not respect our rights.

I am an actor for local change and every day I try to convince people who don't care about respecting children's rights, I encourage individuals to report abuse. I can see some small changes in behaviour, which may lead to big changes in the future.

I also think that more people who are unconvinced should be invited to conferences like these. We must not keep things to ourselves. This would allow their arguments to be heard and for them to be converted to the fight for rights.

And finally, one word that I will take away from this conference is impunity. In Madagascar today, most people know their rights. The law exists, but it is not applied. We do not have confidence in the justice system because there is too much impunity, too much corruption. If we report someone, we know we won't have enough money to be taken seriously. We know that those accused will be able to make the case go away by paying or settling out of court, or simply because they are protected. We're afraid of the police. We know that many people in the justice system are corrupt. We must also make justice accessible to children and put an end to any tolerance of violence against our rights.

I want to tell everyone that there can be no realisation of children's rights without adults, and no realisation of human rights without children.

My final feeling today is one of hope. Yes, the fact of having been invited to this conference is a unique opportunity and instils confidence in me. I hope it will open doors for me in Madagascar, such as the possibility of going to Parliament with my group of young delegates to defend our rights. My thoughts are of all the defenders and journalists about whom we spoke this morning, murdered or imprisoned in war zones and elsewhere. For them too, we must not give up and must continue our fight.

I want to tell everyone that there can be no realisation of children's rights without adults, and no realisation of human rights without children.

Thank you all.

Daniel BASTARD

Thank you for your determination, courage and humour.



Source: www.freepik.com (user25996429).



Zidane SATIGNON KUESSI

Young leader and rights defender from Benin

Good evening,

I am a student on the Master 2 Public Law course at Université Paris-Saclay, following the research and competitive examination pathway. I arrived in France on 5 September 2022 as the result of a scholarship awarded by the French government.

It is an immense honour and a great responsibility for me to stand before you today to discuss this key topic, the Words of the Future. This is the theme I have been assigned, but I would reformulate it to "the words of the present and their resonance in the future". Can we talk about the future without talking about the present?

We are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the anniversary of the rights of defenders, two essential pillars for the protection and promotion of human rights around the world.

During yesterday's workshops organised as part of this conference, I had the opportunity to stress the rights-based approach by highlighting the crucial importance of children and young people in this process. Our education, protection and self-determination are the foundations for a future that respects human rights.

The recommendations from this workshop must be reiterated.

To all children and young people, we say: let's continue to raise awareness, advocate and dedicate ourselves to our communities, because our voice is a force for change. In the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations two days ago at the COP28 currently taking place in Dubai: "Your voice, your activism, your mobilisation are more necessary than ever".

We urge governments to prioritise children's rights in national policies; to invest in inclusive, quality education for all; and to establish mechanisms to offer protection against violence.

To our technical and financial partners, including Agence française de développement, to whom I owe the honour of being here, we emphasise the importance of considering children and young people as full partners. Incorporate our voices into the design and implementation of your projects and support the initiatives of youth organisations on the ground.

This is a good time to remind Agence française de développement not to overlook the recommendations and various points raised during these two days of discussions in its strategy document, which is currently being drawn up.

As was underlined this morning, a collective mobilisation is indispensable, with each stakeholder playing their own essential role.

To all children and youth, we say: let us continue to raise awareness, advocate and engage in our communities because our voice is a force for change.

The words of the future take shape thanks to our actions in the present. They are a call for collective action and a continuing commitment to human rights, as well as an anticipation of the challenges to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The words of the future take shape thanks to our actions in the present. They are a call for collective action and a continuing commitment to human rights, as well as an anticipation of the challenges to come. Within the scope of the celebration of the UDHR, it is essential to raise certain additional questions that need to be addressed, as is obvious from this afternoon's contributions.

The inclusion of the right to a healthy environment, recognised by the United Nations General Assembly as a fundamental and universal right in 2022 must find its place in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights drawn up in 1948. Similarly, future generations deserve appropriate recognition, in this way combining the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the current realities of humanity.

The commitment to human rights, without ignoring nature of course, must be anchored in our societies, woven into the very foundations of our institutions and daily interactions. This requires a long-term vision that concentrates on children and young people and provides them with the tools to become the rights defenders of tomorrow, because they are already, for the most part, the defenders of today.

It is imperative to recognise that our world is changing very quickly. Technological advances, environmental challenges and sociopolitical dynamics are constantly redefining our societies. In this context, it is crucial to anticipate future needs in human rights, because unfortunately, current challenges and problems often take a back seat. President Jacques Chirac was right in 2002 when he said: "Our house is burning while we look the other way". We continue to look the other way.

Children and young people are at the heart of this evolution. Their voices, ideas and aspirations are invaluable assets in shaping a future in which human rights are respected, protected and promoted. Therefore, we need to invest in human rights education from the youngest ages to guarantee a future of respect and equality. We need to provide children and young people with the knowledge, skills and platforms to become conscious, committed and responsible actors in the society of tomorrow.

In celebrating these significant anniversaries, we commit ourselves to advancing human rights for the generations to come. It is a call to action to guarantee that the words of the future are those of dignity, justice and freedom for all, without distinction.

Now is the time to emphasise that the human rights marker presented must take into account children and young people, their needs and expectations. This must be remembered, as the measurement system does not name them. It implicitly highlights people in vulnerable situations.

We are the architects of the future. Let's commit to shaping a world where human rights are universally respected and where the voices of children and young people are not only heard but taken into account in shaping this future.

I would like to end with a quote by Frantz Fanon, who said that "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it." This quote resonates powerfully today as we are confronted by crucial choices for shaping the future of human rights. Let's look around us. We live in a time of rapid change, where there

are many contemporary challenges, from environmental upheavals to technological advances along with global socio-political tensions. In this turmoil, children and young people, our future generations, are the protagonists of an era of constant evolution.

By quoting Frantz Fanon, we are questioning ourselves, and more particularly questioning the current generation about the path that it is choosing. Are we going to fulfil this mission, working together to ensure a world where everyone's rights are respected and protected? Or are we going to betray this responsibility by turning away in the face of pressing challenges?

Thank you for your kind attention.

Daniel BASTARD

Thank you Zidane for your clear-sightedness and the relevance of your words. Thank you too for your inspiration.



Daniel BASTARD

I would like to invite Thomas Melonio to join us to close the conference.



Thomas MELONIO

Executive Director, Innovation, Research and Strategy, AFD

Closing

The task facing me is difficult, if not impossible, since it involves summarising or concluding this conference. But in reality, Andraina and Zidane, you've done my job because you have illustrated, I believe, the rather delicate path we have been following since yesterday, between a form of defiance, sadness and anguish in the face of the scale of the challenges, and then moments of hope, where we have seen the energy, talent and determination that enable us to move in this universe where we, the friends of human rights, are sailing into the wind. The challenges continue to grow every day yet I don't believe that this should be considered as an indication of despair or inaction. I welcome the presence in this room of all those who have come from far and have brought us their experience, their vision, their message, and sometimes their questions. I have heard a wide range of speeches that expressed anything but discouragement despite the difficulties.

Reference has been made to the anniversary or commemoration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which speaks of a common ideal to be achieved. And if we are talking about an ideal to be achieved, it is because we are not there yet, but to return to the sailing metaphor, we know that, somewhere, there is a destination or continent that we are trying to reach. In any case, the journey itself has value, and I am happy to see today that there are actors who are ready to continue to commit themselves. This is very important for us, AFD, in a development universe where, as has been said, we could be content with aiming for either economic growth or environmental progress. The idea of proposing a global concept that rests on a human rights-based approach admittedly does not meet with unanimous approval nor with consensus. Without the energy that you bring, without your mobilisation, there would be a real risk of missing the mark.

In addition to this temptation to be discouraged, I have also noticed a Sisyphean attitude in the room. We are constantly pushing a boulder that may roll back down the mountain tomorrow. But it is the road we have to travel. Camus said that you have to imagine Sisyphus as happy. The struggle itself has its own impact, its own value and, I believe, brings something to society, even if there will never be an end to the fight for human rights, in the same way as there will never be an end to educating a population. We need this fight, this policy. I would say that in human rights, getting to Eden may always be out of reach, but that does not mean we shouldn't continue to try.

I was very pleased to see that young people and civil society found their place today and got some very important messages across.

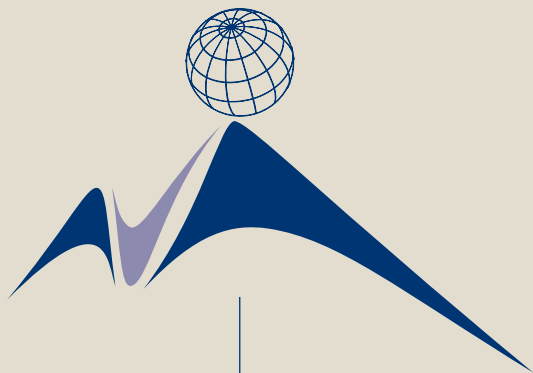


AFD has been very happy to welcome you here today to talk about human rights. This does not mean that it is just us, that we will resolve everything or that we are responsible for everything. However, for a development agency and development bank, it is very important to understand how we can best position ourselves and be effective. It is not a question of choosing one right over others, but rather of knowing, in a given context, how to support the actors who carry the dynamic. Nor is it a matter of imposing our agenda, but of finding defenders of women, LGBT people, the environment, political rights and social rights, defenders who are fighting a battle and whom we can support.

I noticed a Sisyphus aspect in the room. We keep pushing a rock that might fall back down the mountain tomorrow. Camus also said that we should imagine Sisyphus happy.

We are a development agency, but we are also a development bank. We have been questioned – and this is something we need to take into account in our thinking – on the integration of a human rights-based approach, not just in our portfolio of support for NGOs, although of course this is important, but more generally in the funding of infrastructure, water, electricity and rural development. This is a message that applies to AFD and to development banks more generally. We have a very significant network of development banks all around the world, in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe. I believe that we can share the messages that you have conveyed today beyond AFD, to all those financial institutions that have probably not considered their primary mission to be the defence of human rights because they were created around an ethos of economic growth. Today, however, in a very clear and pertinent way, it can be seen that all public policies are designed to integrate human rights dimensions. Initially, the SDGs were driven by governments and embraced relatively broad areas. Did we pay enough attention to human rights in the initial years of the SDGs? Probably not. The current situation bears witness to progress, although this is limited. However, it also shows that certain areas have been neglected. Today's conference has provided a very useful reminder of this point.

Over and above this questioning, which I, and I believe all my colleagues at AFD, have received very positively, I would simply like to thank the participants for the energy and hope they have contributed. On a more formal note, I would like to offer thanks, and I invite you to join me in this, to all the colleagues involved in organising yesterday and today's event. I see Farid and Sarah in the front row, and also Aurélie, Delphine and Sylvie are in the room. I would like to thank all the technical teams. There have been over 200 of us in the room throughout the day. I know this has made things a little difficult in some respects. We may have been victims of our own success, but that is proof of the very strong interest in what we have been discussing.



We have also welcomed over 1,200 people online. These have included organisations that defend children's rights, not all of whom could make the trip to Paris, but who were able to follow the proceedings. While it was valuable to discuss issues mainly with adults, it was also important to include those directly affected from all over the world in our discussions, those who will shape the world of tomorrow.

My final thanks go to all the participants. We have heard many voices from civil society in the South. Sometimes our debates are a little too centred on the donors. But we have managed to avoid this pitfall. My very sincere thanks to all those who travelled long distances. This wasn't the first human rights conference and doubtless it won't be the last. In the future, we will make every effort to be increasingly practical and functional. We have glimpsed very many solutions today and many questions have been asked on the subject of funding. Of course we will be here and at your service in the coming years.

Thank you everyone.



Biography of the speakers



Marie-Hélène LOISON

Deputy Executive Director AFD

Marie-Hélène LOISON has been Deputy Director General of AFD since 2021, after having been Deputy Director of Operations of AFD from 2018 to 2021. She is a graduate of the Paris Institute of Political Studies and the School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C. She began her career in 1996 in export finance at Société Générale Paris. In 2000, she joined Proparco, AFD's subsidiary in charge of private sector financing, to work on structuring financing in the agribusiness, tourism and health sectors. She then joined the private equity division, as an investment manager and then as head of the division in 2008. In 2011, she was appointed Deputy CEO of Proparco. In 2015, she joined AFD as Director Middle East and North Africa and was appointed Deputy Director of Operations in 2018.



Nada AL-NASHIF

United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

Appointed United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2019, Nada Al-Nashif has over 30 years of experience within the UN as an economist and development practitioner. Ms. Al-Nashif served as Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences at UNESCO (Paris), as Regional Director of the International Labour Organization's Regional Office for Arab States (Beirut) and at the United Nations Development Programme in various headquarters and field assignments. She holds a B.A. in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Oxford University and a Master's in Public Policy from Harvard University.



Delphine BORIONE

Human Rights Ambassador, French Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Delphine Borione is the French Ambassador for Human Rights, in charge of the international dimension of the Holocaust, spoliations and the duty of memory.

She has held numerous bilateral and multilateral positions in political, sustainable development and economic, cultural and educational cooperation. Delphine Borione was the Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations Organizations in Rome (FAO, WFP and IFAD) from 2017 to 2020. She was previously Senior Deputy Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), in charge

of social and civil affairs as well as Director of Cultural Policy and French, Ambassador of France to Kosovo, Cultural advisor and head of the Cooperation and Cultural Action Department of the French Embassy in Italy. She worked at the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) where she was in charge of civil administration.

She spent 7 years with the United Nations World Food Programme in Rome. Delphine Borione was also in charge of environmental issues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where she participated in the negotiation of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992.



Mavalow Christelle KALHOULE

President Forus International

Mavalow Christelle Kalhoule is the president of Forus, the global network of national NGO platforms, Mavalow Christelle Kalhoule, who has wide experience in promoting and supporting the work of civil society, is also President of SPONG, the Burkina Faso national NGO platform. She is engaged in the promotion of individual and collective liberties across West Africa, notably in the Sahel region, where she focuses on the defense of human rights, the protection of women and children, as well as climate justice. She is also Regional Director of Children Believe for West Africa since 2018.



Jonathan VAN MEERBEECK

*Head of Human Rights Sector,
General Directorate International Partnerships (INTPA),
European Commission*

Jonathan Van Meerbeeck is Team Leader for Human rights in the European Commission Directorate General for International Partnerships. His portfolio includes the management of the NDICI-Global Europe Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy, support to civil society and mainstreaming of human rights in EU cooperation. His previous experience in the Commission includes relations with the African Union and the coordination of regional programmes in Africa in fields such as human rights, science and technology and regional integration, and a posting to the EU Delegation to Paraguay. Prior to joining the Commission, Jonathan worked as a migration expert for the International Centre on Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).



Marianna BELALBA

Head of the Research Cluster on civic space, CIVICUS

Marianna Belalba leads the Civic Space Research Cluster at CIVICUS, which includes the coordination of the Civicus Monitor, an online tool that tracks civic space developments in 198 countries and territories. She holds a law degree from Andrés Bello Catholic University in Caracas, Venezuela and an LL.M. in International Human Rights from the University of Notre Dame in the United States.



Magali LAFOURCADE

General Secretary French National Commission for Human Rights

Magali Lafourcade is a Magistrate and the Secretary General of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights. She is a graduate from a major business school (ESCP Europe) and Sciences Po, and is a doctor of comparative law. Magali Lafourcade worked as an examining magistrate between 2008 and 2013 and was Deputy Secretary General of the CNCDH between 2013 and 2016 before becoming its Secretary General. She is also a senior expert for the European Agency for Fundamental Rights. Since 2009, she has been a lecturer at Sciences Po. She also leads the continuing education session of judges "Racism in France" provided by the National School of Judiciary. As a Member elected by the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, Magali Lafourcade chaired the Sub-Committee for the Accreditation of National Human Rights Institutions, a body under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Commissioner between 2017 and 2020. She is the author of the reference book "Les droits de l'Homme/Human Rights", collection "Que sais-je?", published in 2018 by Presses Universitaires de France.



Ksenia BOLCHAKOVA

Journalist, Albert Londres Prize Laureate

Ksenia Bolchakova is French-Russian. Born in Russia, she arrived in France at the age of 3 when her father was transferred. Ksenia was the correspondent of the Russian newspaper Pravda in Paris. After studying journalism at Sciences Po Paris, she moved to Moscow where for 6 years she worked as a correspondent for many news channels and for Arte. Back in France, at the end of 2015, after 4 years with the program "7 to 8", she joined the Capa agency as a director. She co-directed the film "Wagner, the shadow army of Putin" broadcasted on France 5 which earned her the Albert London Prize in 2022, the FIGRA grand prize and the DIG AWARDS grand prize for investigation. In May 2022, Ksenia directed another documentary for ARTE, "Ukraine, the End of the World", which won the Louise Weiss Prize for European Journalism 2023. In April 2023, her shocking documentary, co-directed with Veronika Dorman, "Russie, un peuple qui marche au pas / Russia, a people that keeps in step", broadcasted on France 5, takes stock of Russian society, one year after the invasion of Ukraine.



Estelle EWOULE LOBE

*Recipient of the Marianne Initiative for Human Rights Defenders,
Secretary General APADIME*

Estelle Ewoule Lobe is the founder of the association Action for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons and Environmental Migrants in Africa (APADIME) with which she promotes the rights and education of people in equatorial forests, especially women and young people. It defends communities that preserve their forests by providing them with training and legal support and by implementing income-generating activities. It also fights against environmental crimes and illegal logging and trafficking of protected species in the Congo Basin. In this context, it supports reforestation programs in forest areas severely damaged by illegal exploitation of resources.

She is laureate of the 2021 Marianne Initiative.

In her words, her fight aims to "help local communities in the Congo Basin maintain their rights upon their forests, prevent the most vulnerable young people from embarking on illegal immigration, and promote land access and management by women in the region."



Marine CALMET

President, Wild Legal

Environmental lawyer and spokesperson for the collective "Or de question / No Way" opposed to the "Golden Mountain" and the mining industry in Guyana, Marine Calmet advocates for the rights of nature. One foot in the Amazon and the other in mainland France, she develops new responses to the ecological crisis, inspired by the intelligence of ecosystems and the knowledge of indigenous peoples. At thirty-three years old, she is president of Wild Legal, an association whose mission is to be a school and an incubator for the next lawsuits in defense of the rights of nature. She was an expert for the French Citizen's Climate Convention, and she fights for the recognition of the crime of ecocide.

She is the author of the book "Becoming Guardians of Nature" (Ed. Tana 2021), which was awarded with the book prize of the European Institute of Ecology.



Raphaël CHENUIL-HAZAN

*Founder and President of the French Human Rights Platform (PDH),
Director of Together Against Death Penalty*

Raphaël CHENUIL-HAZAN is the founder and President of the French Human Rights Platform (PDH), a network of 30 French human rights NGOs active internationally. He is the Director General of Together Against Death Penalty since 2009, and is a specialist in advocacy on human rights issues. Raphael Chenuil-Hazan was executive secretary and vice-president of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty (from 2009 to 2017). He is Vice-President of Impact-IRAN, a global network on human rights in Iran. Since 2022, he has been an administrator of the Marianne Initiative for Human Rights Defenders. He was co-author in 2021 for the National Council for Development and International Solidarity of the publication "Creating a favorable environment for civil society" that dealt with the shrinking space of civil society in the world.



Victor DAVID

*Researcher about environmental rights and sustainable development,
Research Institute for Development (IRD)*

Doctor in law and social sciences, Victor DAVID is a Research Fellow at the Research Institute for Development. He is currently a Research fellow invited by the Mediterranean Institute of Biodiversity and Ecology in Marseille.

His current research and expertise focus on the evolution of environmental law. He is a recognized specialist of nature rights. Indigenous populations and cultural and legal pluralism also interest him.

Victor DAVID coordinates the CEPIL project of scientific support for the participatory development of the Environmental Code of the Loyalty Islands Province in New Caledonia with the consideration of the Kanak culture based on comparative law studies. CEPIL covers all areas of environmental law (protected areas and species, invasive species, natural resource management, waste, pollution, etc.).

He also supports, as part of the Voluntary Commitments to the UN-Conference on the Oceans, projects of feasibility studies of the recognition of the Pacific Ocean and more recently of the Mediterranean Sea as legal natural entities.

He is a member of the World Commission on Environmental Law of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and an associate researcher at the International Observatory for the Rights of Nature based in Quebec. He is also a member of the Scientific Council of the New Caledonian Biodiversity Agency.



André Franck AHOYO

General Delegate, Identity Emergency Africa Fund

André Franck AHOYO, Franco-Beninese, is a graduated in law and political science from the National Universities of Benin and Panthéon-Sorbonne (Paris I). He is currently the General Delegate of the Emergency Identity Africa Fund, an organization dedicated to promoting birth registration in Africa. In 1998, he participated in the creation of the Association for the Unification of Law in Africa (UNIDA). He then accompanied the Organization for the Harmonization in Africa of Business Law (OHADA) as a Consultant for the International Organization of La Francophonie and as Technical Assistant of IFC (World Bank Group) seconded to the OHADA Permanent Secretariat in Yaoundé (Cameroon) from 2009 to 2013. During his professional career, he served in the private sector within the Véolia Environnement group. Since 2019, he is also a lecturer in public law at the Sorbonne Paris Nord University.



Jérémie GILBERT

Professor of Law Roehampton University

Jérémie Gilbert is a professor of law at the University of Roehampton in the United Kingdom, he is the author of numerous articles and books on the interaction between human rights, ecological justice and the rights of nature, with a focus on the rights of indigenous peoples. As a legal expert, he has contributed to numerous expert opinions in cases before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights, and before many national courts in cases concerning the rights of indigenous peoples. As a consultant, he has worked with UN agencies, governments and non-governmental organizations on human rights issues, including the rights of indigenous peoples. He was one of the independent experts invited to the expert seminar on treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements between States and indigenous peoples. He also was a consultant for the expert mechanism on the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as for the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and for the United Nations Division for Inclusive Social Development. He recently developed an interdisciplinary network on the study of the rights of nature (<https://natureandrights.org/>).



Luz HARO

Executive Secretary

Network of Rural Women of Latin America and the Caribbean

Luz Haro Guanga, is an Ecuadorian peasant, founder of various organizational processes, promoter of training schools for rural women leaders. In 2010, she received the Manuela Espejo award, awarded by the Metropolitan District of Quito, for supporting the rurality and driving Training Schools.

She currently serves as Executive Secretary of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Rural Women LAC Network and Principal Member of the Board of Directors of the Ibero-American Network of Municipalities for Gender Equality (RIMIG) leading the axis of Equity of Opportunities in the Rural World and Food Security.

The Network of Rural Women of Latin America and the Caribbean – LAC Network is a social organization founded in Argentina in 1990 and is composed of more than 200 organizations of Rural Women of Latin America. It carries the voice of the nearly 60 million rural women of the Americas. REDLAC aims to promote the effective citizen and political participation of rural women. Therefore, it designed a Political Agenda that elaborated a key proposal to dignify the countryside: the Declaration of the Decade of Rural Women. Various organizations and institutions support the LAC-RED such as UN Regional Women, FAO, WFP and UNDP Gender Area, among others. This proposal from Red LAC came to the Organization of American States – OAS that approved the project of the "Inter-American Decade for the Rights of All Women, Adolescents and Girls in Rural Settings of the Americas" to be developed in the period 2024-2034.



David HEMBRON

Directeur régional, Caritas Bangladesh

David Hembrom belongs to 'Santal' Bangladeshi indigenous community and has a master in 'Social Work'. He joined Caritas Bangladesh 20 years ago, as a Program Officer of Integrated Community Development Projects (ICDPs) which focused on the development of Indigenous Peoples (DIP). As the Head of the DIP sector of Caritas Bangladesh he supported community empowerment process. As the Regional Director of Caritas Rajshahi Region since 2022, he now advocates for human rights and justice in favor of the Indigenous Peoples and backward communities. Land retention and development, Cultural, Legal, Educational and Basic rights are the core elements of his field works.



Juan Carlos LOSADA-VARGAS

*Representative at the Chamber of Representatives
Congress of the Republic of Colombia*

Juan Carlos Lozada, as a member of the Chamber of Representatives, defended and approved a bill to ensure that animals have a regulation that protects them from abuse: Law 1774 of 2016. This law also gave rise to the Animal Abuse Task Force of the Office of the Nation's Attorney General, which is responsible for investigating offences against animals throughout the country. He is also the author of the law 2047 of 2020 which prohibits the use of animals to test cosmetic products. He is also the author of the law 2111 of 2021 which completely reforms the chapter of environmental crimes of the Penal Code to create the crimes of deforestation and wildlife trafficking. This law also criminalized the illegal appropriation of the nation's property. Juan Carlos Lozada recently also defended and passed a law prohibiting single-use plastics.

He currently defends several bills in the Congress, including the legalization of the recreational use of cannabis, the creation of a mechanism for community participation in extraction projects, traceability of meat, the prohibition of bullfighting, the National Animal Welfare and Protection Code and environmental licences for cemeteries, among other initiatives.

In addition, the representative teaches in his free time yoga and meditation.



Andraina MAHATANASOA

Young leader and human rights defender from Madagascar

Andraina is a 17-year-old Malagasy woman. Currently in her senior year, she is an ambassador for the Miralenta project co-financed by AFD and the European Union. In this context, Andraina carries out with the children's club of Antsirabe actions of awareness, mobilization and advocacy on the prevention of gender-based violence (including child sexual abuse and exploitation) with young people, communities, state authorities and actors of child protection.

Through this project, ECPAT France and its partners aim to strengthen Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Madagascar and the youth representation bodies so that they are able to challenge state authorities in the fight against violence against women. The Miralenta project implements two main axes: the mobilization of children's and youth clubs on the issue of violence against girls and the support of community associations or initiatives, including groups of men, to commit against violence against girls.



Thomas MÉLONIO

Executive Director Innovation, Research, Strategy, AFD

Thomas MELONIO is the AFD Executive Director of the Innovation and Research. From 2012 to 2017, he was Deputy Advisor, then Advisor on Africa to the President of the Republic of France. He is an economist with a degree from HEC Paris and a PhD from Sciences Po Paris who published many articles on the financing of education, higher education and international migration.



Ayman MHANNA

Executive Director, Samir Kassir Lebanese Foundation

Ayman Mhanna holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Saint Joseph University in Beirut and a Master's degree in International Affairs from Sciences Po Paris. Ayman Mhanna is committed to the defense of freedom of expression in the Middle East. He has been the Executive Director of the Samir Kassir Foundation since 2011. He is also the Director of the SKeyes Centre founded in 2007 by the Samir Kassir Foundation to identify media freedom violations in the region and offer legal and financial support to journalists. Ayman Mhanna was also Executive Director of the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD). He is also involved in numerous NGOs advocating for electoral reform in Lebanon and youth investment in public affairs.



Jyotsna MOHAN

Regional Coordinator, Asia Development Alliance

Dr. Jyotsna Mohan holds a Ph.D Degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and has 20+ years of experience in the development sector and academics. She has been working as a Regional Coordinator – Asia, for a regional CSO platform called Asia Development Alliance, past 8 years. She has research expertise on linking development, democracy and human right, development finance, environment and Climate Governance and Voluntary National Review and training and Capacity building on the above mentioned issues She has written and analysed voluntary national review for the Asia Pacific, role of international financial institutions, Climate justice, in the context to policy coherence for sustainable Development (PCSD) governance and accountability with a focus on SDG 16+.



Edgar MORA

*Minister of Public Education of Costa Rica Mayor (2018-2019)
and Mayor of Curridabat (2007-2018)*

Between 2007 and 2018, he was Mayor of the city of Curridabat, where he led land use planning, urban planning and social development projects in vulnerable communities. He was the head of an innovative project launched in 2015 aiming to turn his city into a more inclusive, innovative, and environmentally friendly place to live. Therefore, Edgar Mora used a holistic, biophilic, and eco-centric approach of urban planning that led the city to recognize pollinators, specifically native bees, as central to the city's urban design and wellbeing. Subsequently, the city of 75,000 inhabitants, received the Wellbeing Cities Award in 2020. Edgar Mora also served as Minister of Public Education from 2018 to 2019.



Alain NONOUKA-GOMAT

*Chief Engineer of Water and Forests and coordinator
of the North Congo Forest Landscape Project
Ministry of Forest Economics*

Alain André Saturnin Nonouka Gomat is Chief Engineer of Water and Forests and has a professional experience of about forty years. He is currently Coordinator of the Northern Congo Forest Landscape Project, funded by AFD.

He first worked in Congo in the fields of reforestation, forestry management, agroforestry, wildlife management and protected areas.

He then worked in international environmental diplomacy as First Counsellor of the Congo Embassy in Nairobi for 6 years, as Deputy Permanent Representative of Congo to the United Nations Environment Programme and with UN-Habitat.

He holds a Master 2 in Science and Technology, with a specialization in Environmental Management of Ecosystems and Tropical Forests obtained at ENGREF/ AGRO-PARISTECH/ SUPAGRO (Montpellier, France).

He also holds a Master 1 in Agronomy and Agri-Food obtained at the National Center for Agronomic Studies of the Hot Regions of Montpellier.

He has completed several training and development courses in forestry, afforestation, ecotourism, wildlife and protected areas, environmental and social impact studies in Italy, Japan, Burkina Faso, Canada and France.



Carol RASK

*Chief Advisor and Team Leader /
Human Rights and Sustainable Development /
Americas Danish Institute for Human Rights*

Carol Rask is a Chief Advisor in the Human Rights and Sustainable Development Department at the Danish Institute for Human Rights. She is also the Team Lead on Equality and Non-Discrimination. Carol is a human rights and development expert with over 30 years of practical experience in supporting human rights-based approaches to sustainable development. At the Danish Institute for Human Rights, her work consists of the development of monitoring frameworks and tools, the production of human rights analyses, and the supporting of capacity development on issues related to human rights and sustainable development. She has led the development of the Institute's work on human rights defenders, including the development of a monitoring framework, the Right to Defend Rights, which is currently being used by national human rights institutions and human rights defender networks in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Carol holds a Masters in Human Rights.



Zidane SATIGNON KUESSI

Young leader and human rights defender from Benin

Zidane is a 24 years old young leader of Beninese origin, committed to the promotion of youth rights, gender equality and climate justice. After a degree in General and Territorial Administration at the National School of Administration of Benin, he is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Public Law at the University Paris-Saclay. He is involved in various organizations such as the Youth Parliament of Benin, the National Movement of Girls (MoNaFi) of Benin, the NGO Educ'ECO, the Association for the Promotion of the SDGs, the Major Group of Children and Youth of the UN, and the Youth Plan of the NGO Plan International France.



Jan Robert SUESSER

Deputy Director Coordination Sud

Jan Robert Suesser is Vice-President of Coordination SUD. He represents the Research and Information Centre for Development (CRID) on its Executive Board. He is an officer of the French Human Rights League.

As a member of trade unions or associations, he participated in projects in many countries with a diversity of partners, to build more democratic and inclusive societies through the promotion of the access to rights.



Eleanor THOMPSON

Deputy Director, Namati

Eleanor Thompson is a public interest lawyer who works alongside community-based paralegals at Namati to help communities in Sierra Leone protect their land rights and environment. Among other work at Namati, Eleanor provides direct legal assistance to communities during lease negotiations with investors. Eleanor has worked extensively on human rights, the rule of law, and justice at national, regional, and global levels for over 15 years. She influenced positive law reform in Sierra Leone by co-drafting the Customary Land Rights Bill and National Land Commission Bill, creating more equitable and democratic frameworks for decision-making on land. Eleanor is passionate about supporting people to utilize their power to protect their rights, hold their leaders accountable, and shape the laws that affect them.

Moderators and organisers



Virginie LEPETIT

Editor-in-Chief, Courrier international

Virginie Lepetit started out as a chemist, then became a science journalist. She spent ten years working in the specialist press at Usine Nouvelle. Her favourite subjects were chemistry, energy and the environment.

She then joined Courrier international in 2008, in the Science department. Then the Culture department. Before taking charge of special issues and supplements.

She has been editor-in-chief of the newspaper since 2021.



Daniel BASTARD

Daniel Bastard, Asia Director, Courrier International

Daniel Bastard has been a journalist and press freedom activist for twenty years. Before becoming Asia Director of Courrier International, he monitored press freedom violations for the NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

He has contributed to the emergence of media in young democracies such as East Timor, where he trained journalists at the Casa de Produção Audiovisual, the country's main audiovisual production company. He also re-established a partnership between RSF and the Cambodian Centre for Independent Media in 2017, when press freedom was under threat. Daniel Bastard has also trained Thai journalists in cybersecurity techniques.



Farid Lamara

Human Development Expert and Strategic Advisor, Strategy, Foresight and Institutional Relations Department, AFD

Farid Lamara is a thematic expert and strategic advisor to AFD on human development issues. He holds a PhD in International Relations and Diplomacy and a degree in Social Sciences. He has been active in the field of European and international cooperation for 30 years. Active in the field of European and international cooperation for 30 years, he has worked for a wide range of organizations – civil society organizations, international organizations, governmental development and cooperation agencies – in particular on international migration, global health, inequalities, gender, sustainable development, human rights and the rights of nature.



Sarah HAYES

Human Rights and Development expert, Consultant for AFD

Sarah Hayes is an international lawyer specialized in international cooperation and partnerships. She has been working with AFD since 2021 as a Human Rights Expert. She works in particular on the modalities for integrating the human rights-based approach into the AFD Group's activities, and on the prospective project on the rights of nature. Between 2017 and 2021, as part of her duties at the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, she coordinated the elaboration of the interministerial strategy "Human Rights and Development". She also participated in the following of international debates and the development and monitoring of cooperation projects dedicated to the realization of human rights, the protection of rights defenders, open data, citizen participation and land governance.

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