UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER | Representation Office to the European Union

UN environment programme

EEB European Environmental Bureau

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SPECIAL PROCEDURES UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

International Service for Human Rights

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THE HUMAN RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT: ENGAGING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS

TRAINING : with participation of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to a healthy environment, Astrid Fuentes

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Resource materials on international human rights mechanisms

Inside the document

- Overview of international human rights mechanisms
- Treaty Bodies
- UN Human Rights Council
- Universal Periodic Review
- Special Procedures
- Special Rapporteur. Ms. Astrid Puentes Riaño.

UN human rights monitoring mechanisms

The below human rights bodies review the following nine core United Nations human rights treaties:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
- International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

Treaty-based mechanism

Treaty monitoring bodies

- Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESRC)
- Human Rights Committee (CCPR)
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Committee Against Torture (CAT)
- Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW)
- Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT)
- Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED)

UN Charter-based mechanism

UN Human Rights Council

A subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly and the main intergovernmental body in the UN responsible for human rights.

Special Procedures
Independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective.

Universal Periodic Review
State-led mechanism that conducts a peer review of the human rights situation of each UN Member State

Human Rights Council-mandated Investigative Bodies

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides expertise and support to all of the different human rights bodies.

1. Overview of international human rights mechanisms

- Working with the United Nations Human Rights Programme: A Handbook for Civil Society | OHCHR
- Engagement of the European Union and its member States with UN Human Rights Mechanisms
- ISHR Academy: What are the key differences between the UN bodies that monitor human rights?
- ISHR Academy: Advocacy for Environmental Human Rights Defenders
- EEB Environnemental Complaints Support Portal

2. Treaty Bodies

General

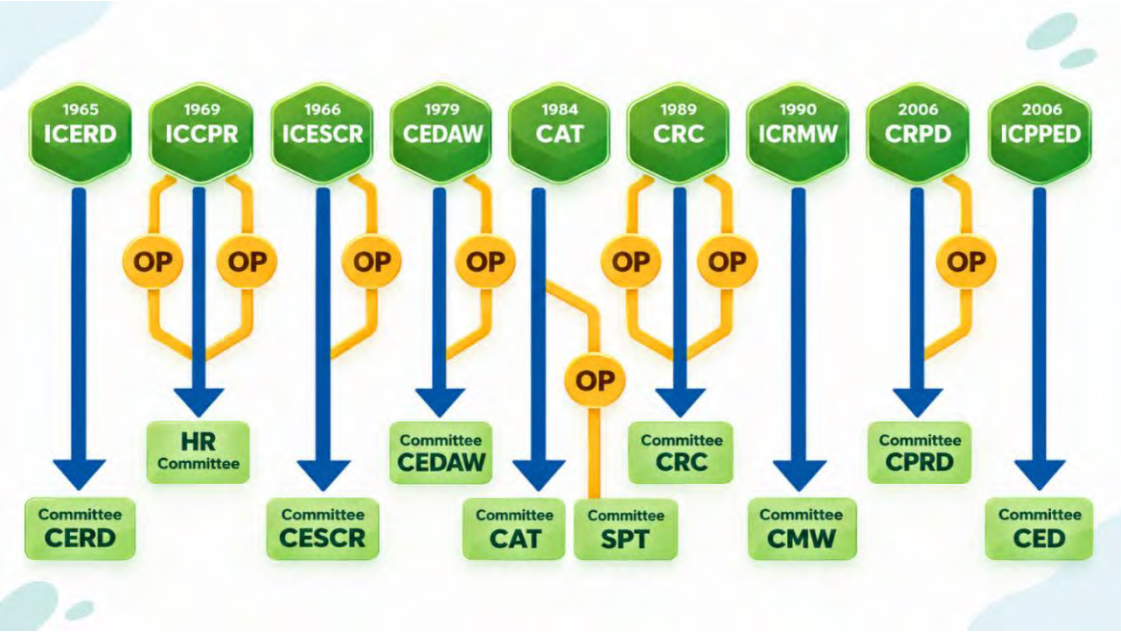
- Comprehensive overview of the UN human rights treaty system, OHCHR Fact Sheet 30
- Training Guide Part I – The Manual – provides concise information about the UN human rights system and detailed information on the Treaty Bodies reporting process, including procedures and requirements.
- Training Guide Part II – The Facilitator's Guide – aims to assist facilitators in preparing and delivering a training course on treaty reporting.

Individual complaints and petitions

- Submit a Complaint: Treaty Body Online Submission Portal
- Guidance for submitting an individual communication to the UN treaty bodies
- Louiza a 15-year-old, was denied access to school while living in Melilla, Spain. She successfully petitioned the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Watch on YouTube

Protection against reprisals

- Basic information on reprisals and the treaty bodies



3. UN Human Rights Council

General

- Watch the video about the UN Human Rights Council - 50 sessions later
- Human Rights Council Booklet
- ISH Academy: This is the HRC - UN Human Rights Council
- HRC Advisory Committee Booklet
- HRC Mapper is a structured, searchable database which consolidates key information about Council initiatives since 2019. It includes Council mandates, mechanisms and reports, each tagged with themes, with quick access to resolutions and report

Complaint procedure

- HRC Complaint Procedure Booklet
- Video on the complaint procedure of the UN Human Rights Council
- Submission form to make a complaint under the Human Rights Council Complaint Procedure

Examples of CSO engagement

- How CSOs can intervene remotely to interactive dialogues of the HRC - Example of a HRC statement
- Side-events and other parallel events - Example of a side event
- Participate in panel discussions - Example of a Panel Discussion

4. Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council

- Tips for engagement at country level for NHRIs and NGOs
- Latest available facts and figures on the engagement of Member States and Stakeholders with UPR
- Information and guidelines for relevant stakeholders' written submissions
- Calendar of tentative deadlines for stakeholders' submissions for the 4th cycle
- Updated UPR Civil Society Guide
- Universal Periodic Review Knowledge Hub

5. Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council

General

- Video: Special Procedures - A spotlight on individual and collective human rights
- Video of SP Introduction
- List of thematic mandates and List of country mandates
- Being a Special Rapporteur: experiences from Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation, Léo Heller (English | French | Spanish)

Communication procedure

- Video and basic information on the communication procedure
- Special Procedure Submission online form
- Leaflet on Special procedures communications (Arabic | English | French | Spanish)
- Special procedures communication database

Country visits

- Official fact-finding country visits by Special Procedures

Examples of CSO engagement

- Engagement with SRs during country visits (visit to the EU)
  - SR poverty, Olivier de Schutter, 25 Nov 2020 – 29 Jan 2021 (A/HRC/47/36/Add.1)
  - SR disabilities, Gerard Quinn, 21 to 31 Mar 2022 (A/HRC/52/32/Add.1)
- Through submitting information for communication letters. See examples related to EU:
  - Communication to the EU concerns regarding the Food and Feed Safety Simplification Omnibus package, and in particular the proposal for a Regulation amending, among others, Regulation (EC) No. 1107/2009 and Regulation (EU) No. 528/2012. (OTH 85/2026)
  - Communication to the EU concerning the two proposed European Union (EU) legislative proposals on new genomic techniques and plant reproductive material which may violate international human rights obligations, particularly the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), by undermining farmers' rights to seeds, information and participation in the decision-making process (OTH 121/2025).
  - Communication to the EU concerning the revision of the REACH regulatory framework (OTH 114/2023).
  - Communication to the EU concerning the practice by EU member states of exporting hazardous pesticides, which are prohibited for use in the European Union, to third countries (OTH 202/2021; OTH 203/2021; OTH 201/2021).
  - Communication to the EU concerning the Draft Commission Regulation amending, for the purposes of a 14th Adaptation to Technical and Scientific Progress (ATP), Regulation (EC) NO 1272/2008 Of the European Parliament and Of the Council on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures (CLP Regulation) (OTH 21/2019).

6. Mandate of Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Ms. Astrid Puentes Riaño

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur

A Special Rapporteur is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. This position is honorary and the expert is not UN staff nor paid for his/her work. The Special Rapporteurs are part of the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.

In March 2012 the UN Human Rights Council decided to establish a mandate on human rights and the environment. The mandate was extended several times, the last being on 3 April 2024, and the title changed to Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (resolution 55/2).

Ms Astrid Puentes Riaño is the third Special Rapporteur on the mandate and she initiated her term on 1 May 2024. The scope of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment as endorsed by UN Human Rights Council resolution 55/2 consists of the following elements:

(a) To continue to study the human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, in consultation with Governments, relevant international organizations and intergovernmental bodies, including the World Health Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme, and relevant multilateral environmental agreements, human rights mechanisms, local authorities, national human rights institutions, Indigenous Peoples, environmental human rights defenders and civil society organizations, including those representing local communities and other persons in vulnerable situations, women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, the private sector and academic institutions;
(b) To continue to identify, promote and exchange views on good practices relating to human rights obligations and commitments that inform, support and strengthen environmental policymaking, especially in the area of environmental protection, and in that regard to disseminate and consider updating documents prepared by the previous mandate holder, as appropriate;
(c) To work on identifying challenges and obstacles to the full realization of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and protection gaps thereto, including in the context of sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals;
(d) To continue to contribute to and participate in, where appropriate, intergovernmental conferences and meetings relevant to the mandate;
(e) To develop a dialogue, liaise and collaborate with all relevant stakeholders with a view to enhancing public awareness of the human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment;
(f) To conduct country visits and to respond promptly to invitations from States;
(g) To apply an age-sensitive and disability-inclusive approach and a gender perspective by, inter alia, considering the particular situation of women and girls and identifying gender-specific discrimination and vulnerabilities when addressing climate change and environmental

degradation, strengthening and promoting women's and girls' leadership, decision-making and their full, equal and meaningful participation, and addressing good practices where women and girls act as agents of change in safeguarding and managing the environment sustainably;

(h) To work in close coordination, while avoiding unnecessary duplication, with other special procedures and mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, relevant United Nations bodies, agencies, funds and programmes

(i) To submit an annual report, including conclusions and recommendations, to the Human Rights Council and to the General Assembly.

Elements of human rights and the environment

All human beings depend on the environment in which we live. A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including, *inter alia*, the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation. Without a healthy environment, we are unable to fulfil our aspirations or even live at a level commensurate with minimum standards of human dignity. At the same time, protecting human rights helps to protect the environment. When people are able to learn about, participate in, and occasionally challenge the decisions that affect them, they can help to ensure that those decisions respect their need for a sustainable environment.

In July 2022, the United Nations General Assembly took the historic decision to recognize that everyone has the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/76/300) following the October 2021, Human Rights Council resolution that recognized this human right (48/13).

Thematic reports

Year	Document	Topic
2027 **UN Human Rights Council**	forthcoming	Situation of environmental human rights defenders
2026 **UN General Assembly**	**A/81/226**	Planning to care for the planet and its people: enabling thriving societies and protecting the right to a healthy environment
2026 **UN Human Rights Council**	**A/HRC/61/47**	Priority actions towards breathing clean air, protecting public health and ensuring a healthy environment
2025 **UN General Assembly**	**A/80/187**	Framework for environmental, social and human rights impact assessments and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment
2025 **UN Human Rights Council**	**A/HRC/58/59**	The ocean and human rights
2024 **UN General Assembly**	**A/79/270**	Overview of the implementation of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment