

- Event:** “The Role of Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) in supporting and enhancing sustainable Covid-19 recovery”  
(Side event during the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development)
- Location:** Virtual
- Platform:** Via Cisco Webex
- Date/Time:** Thursday, 25 March 2021 12:15-13:45 (Bangkok Time)
- Hosts:** Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Regional Office for South-East Asia and for the Pacific  
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)  
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

## DESCRIPTION

This interactive side event will focus on the role of Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDS) in the Asia Pacific region in promoting avenues for an environmentally sustainable recovery from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

A premise of this side event is that effective laws and policies and strong regional and national institutions promote the environmental rule of law which is the necessary foundation for environmental protection, promotion, and enforcement. That foundation can in turn promote resilience to environmental crises, lower rates of environmental crime, reduce the negative impacts upon human rights and human health, reduce the occurrence of future pandemics and lower the health risks of such pandemics. EHRDs play an important role in upholding and advancing the environmental rule of law.

In 2019, the UN Human Rights Council unanimously adopted a strong consensus resolution<sup>1</sup> recognizing the positive, important and legitimate role of EHRDs<sup>2</sup> in the promotion and protection of human rights as they relate to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, in supporting States to fulfil their obligations under the 2015 Paris Agreement and in realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 21 March 2019 40/11. Recognizing the contribution of EHRDs to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development [https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F40%2F11](https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A%2FHRC%2FRES%2F40%2F11)

<sup>2</sup> According to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, the term ‘EHRDs’ refers to individuals and groups who, in their personal or professional capacity and in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights relating to the environment, including water, air, land, flora and fauna. Land and environmental rights are interlinked and are often inseparable.

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/247/09/PDF/N1624709.pdf?OpenElement>

pledge that no one will be left behind and to reach the furthest behind first. However, alarmed by the increasing rate of killings, violent acts, including gender-based violence, threats, harassment, intimidation, smear campaigns, criminalization, judicial harassment, forced eviction and displacement of EHRDs, including indigenous and women human rights defenders, the Human Rights Council also stressed that the killings, human rights violations against and abuse of EHRDs may violate international law and undermine sustainable development at the local, national, regional and international levels.

This side event will serve as an avenue for Governments, EHRDs, and UN Agencies to present and explore the following topics relevant to the theme of the APFSD:

- The vital role of EHRDs in supporting States to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (including SDGs 13 and 16) and ‘build back better’ from COVID-19
- The impacts of COVID 19 on environmental governance and EHRDs.
- Exploration of the initiatives of Government, the Private Sector and UN agencies in supporting the EHRDs in environmental decision making, implementation, monitoring and follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to build and strengthen the resilience and recovery from COVID
- Identify actions needed to recognize the positive contributions made by EHRDs and to accelerate their participation and inclusion in the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

The format of the side event includes brief presentations from a Government representative, a UN Special Rapporteur, a representative of EHRDs and Women’s Human Rights Defenders, a representative of Indigenous people, and action-oriented exchange with participants to conclude the side event.

## OBJECTIVE

Developing effective, accountable, inclusive and transparent institutions and enabling the role of EHRDs is critical to promote the environmental rule of law and the realization of human rights (including environmental rights) and accelerate climate action on all fronts.

The objectives of this side event are:

1. Increase understanding of participants on the crucial role and contributions of EHRDs in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
2. Raising awareness of the situation of EHRDs in the region and discuss concrete recommendations on actions needed to promote and protect EHRDs.
3. Sharing information concerning good practices and Initiatives from government and business to provide a positive, safe and enabling environment in which EHRDs can operate free from violence, threats, hindrance and insecurity.

## PARTICIPANTS/ SPEAKERS

Keynote: Ms. Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Panelists:

1. Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People, Founder and Executive Director of the Tebtebba Foundation (Indigenous Peoples' International Center for Policy Research and Education)
2. Ms. Ana Zbona, Project Manager, Civic Freedoms & Human Rights Defenders Project, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre
3. Mr. Emmanuel Peni, Human Rights Defender and Coordinator of Project Sepik, Papua New Guinea
4. Ms. Sor.Rattanamanee Polkla, Executive coordinator of the Community Resource Centre Foundation, Thailand

As the side event is virtual, it will be open to all interested participants and the organizers will invite Member States, UN agencies, NGOs, private sector, and other development actors. We expect to attract between 100 to 200 participants to this virtual event.

## BLURB (50-100 WORDS)

The environmental rule of law and enabling the role of Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) can provide the necessary foundations for environmental protection, enforcement, create resilience to environmental crises, and help reduce environmental crime. At this time, Environmental Human Rights Defenders can also play an important part in sustainable recovery from COVID. The occurrence of COVID-19 highlights the vital importance of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Environmental degradation and biodiversity loss create the conditions for an increase in the type of animal-to-human zoonosis that can result in viral epidemics. This side event will discuss both the roles and challenges of Environmental Human Rights Defenders in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to SDGs 13 (climate action) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), but also more broadly.

## PROPOSED AGENDA

Time (Bangkok)	Presentation
12:15 pm	Co-Moderators: <b>Georgina Lloyd</b> Regional Coordinator Environmental Law and Governance UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific  <b>Robert Vaughan</b> OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific  (5 mins)

12.20 pm	<p><b>Introductory Remarks</b>  <b>Ms. Åsa Hedén</b>            Head of Regional Development Cooperation - Asia and Pacific            Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)            (5 mins)</p>
12:25 pm	<p><i>Keynote address:</i>  <b>Ms. Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders</b>            (10 mins)</p>
12:35 pm	<p><b>Panel discussion 1: Moderator - Georgina Lloyd</b></p>
	<p><b>Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People, Founder and Executive Director of the Tebtebba Foundation (Indigenous Peoples' International Center for Policy Research and Education)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How can Indigenous Human Rights Defenders contribute in supporting States to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (including SDGs 13 and 16) and 'build back better' from COVID-19, and why is it vital that they do so?</li> </ul> <p>(5 mins)</p>
	<p><b>Ms. Ana Zbona, Project Manager, Civic Freedoms &amp; Human Rights Defenders Project, Business &amp; Human Rights Resource Centre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What roles can the Private Sector and UN agencies play in supporting the EHRDs in environmental decision making, implementation, monitoring and follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to build and strengthen the resilience and recovery from COVID?</li> </ul> <p>(5 mins)</p>
	<p><b>Mr. Emmanuel Peni, Human Rights Defender and Coordinator of Project Sepik, Papua New Guinea</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What initiatives are in place or can be put in place by government, civil society and others to support EHRDs in environmental decision making, implementation, monitoring and follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to build and strengthen the resilience and recovery from COVID? (5 mins)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Ms. Sor.Rattanamanee Polkla, Executive coordinator of the Community Resource Centre Foundation, Thailand</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How can EHRDs contribute in supporting States to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (including SDGs 13 and 16) and 'build back better' from COVID-19, and why is it vital that they do so?</li> </ul> <p>(5 mins)</p>
13:05 pm	<p>Intervention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Major Group for Children and Youth to UNEP - outcomes of the virtual Youth Environment Assembly (YEA) (5 mins)</b></li> <li>- <b>N1M – highlights of the report on Covid-19 and environmental rights (5 Mins)</b></li> </ul>

	(10 mins)
13:15 pm	<b>Q&amp;A</b> (15 mins)
13:30 pm	<b>Panel discussion 2: Robert Vaughan -Moderator</b>
	<b>Final round before closing</b> <i>All panelists respond to the question:</i> Identify actions needed to recognize the positive contributions made by EHRDs and to accelerate their participation and inclusion in the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. The same question can be out to the audience through the Chat function on Teams menti or poll to crowd-source input.
	Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People, Founder and Executive Director of the Tebtebba Foundation (Indigenous Peoples' International Center for Policy Research and Education) (2 mins)
	Ms. Ana Zbona, Project Manager, Civic Freedoms & Human Rights Defenders Project, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (2 mins)
	Mr. Emmanuel Peni, Human Rights Defender and Coordinator of Project Sepik, Papua New Guinea (2 mins)
	Ms. Sor.Rattanamanee Polkla, Executive coordinator of the Community Resource Centre Foundation, Thailand (2 mins)
13.43 pm	OHCHR Final Remarks (2 mins)

## CONTACTS

### *Focal Persons for the event:*

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