



**Panel discussion in the context of the expert seminar on
The role of human rights and environmental conservation
in the prevention of future pandemics**

25 October 2022, 10:00--11:30

Palais des Nations, Room XIX, Geneva, Switzerland

**Convened by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and the
environment**

The panel discussion is convened in the context of an expert seminar, organized in accordance with Resolution 46/7, adopted by the Human Rights Council in March 2021, which requested the Special Rapporteur to organize an “expert seminar on the role of human rights and environmental conservation in the prevention of future pandemics.” A summary report will be submitted to the Human Rights Council at its 52nd Session in March 2023 and will include any recommendations stemming from the seminar for consideration of further follow-up action.

1. Background

The health of the planet and of all humans is interlinked. A healthy biosphere is of vital importance for the full realization of human rights, including the rights to life, health, water, food and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as recognized by UNGA resolution A/RES/76/300 and HRC resolution A/HRC/RES/48/13.

Although the health, human rights, and quality of life of everyone directly depend on clean air to breathe, safe water to drink, sustainably produced food to eat, non-toxic environments, a safe climate, and healthy biodiversity and ecosystems, human activity is responsible for environmental damages, causing pollution, biodiversity loss, ecosystem decline, climate change and increasing risks of spillover of zoonotic diseases. Environmental damage and climate disruption have major consequences on health, livelihoods and rights, disproportionately impacting specific groups, including the most vulnerable, and raise important concerns for future generations.

According to WHO, 24% of annual deaths worldwide are due to modifiable environmental factors.¹ Spilling over from wildlife and domesticated animals to humans, zoonotic diseases currently account for 75% of emerging infectious diseases. Of the 1.7 million undiscovered viruses thought to exist in mammal and avian hosts, it has been estimated that 631,000–827,000 could have the ability to infect humans.² The heightened prevalence of some zoonotic diseases has been linked to the loss of

¹ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241565196>

² [https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-](https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf)

[12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf](https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf)

biodiversity,³ while climate change also exacerbates risks of water-borne and vector-borne diseases.⁴

The frequency of pandemics is on a rising trend and is being driven by “land-use change, agricultural expansion and intensification, and wildlife trade and consumption”.⁵ While these drivers are fueling pandemics, they also have important human rights implications including on the rights to a healthy environment, health, food, water and sanitation, housing and cultural rights among others.

The COVID 19 pandemic has been a catastrophe for a wide range of human rights including life, health, and an adequate standard of living by causing increases in hunger, extreme poverty and inequality. Humanity must learn lessons from COVID-19 and other outbreaks of zoonotic diseases in order to prevent future pandemics and leave no one behind. While a number of international initiatives—including the One Health High Level Panel, the WHO-IUCN Expert Working Group on Biodiversity, Climate, One Health and Nature-based Solutions, the Preventing Pandemics at the Source Initiative, and PREZODE--have been created to do this vital work, none of them appear to include a clear focus on human rights. Yet human rights can play an important role in accelerating conservation and climate action, focusing on vulnerable and marginalized populations and holding governments accountable. Rights-based approaches are also essential to ensure that pandemic prevention solutions themselves do not themselves threaten human rights, as can be the case when forest conservation violates the rights of Indigenous peoples

Drawing upon relevant previous reports and scientific articles, including [the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics](#), the Special Rapporteur’s reports on a healthy biosphere ([A/75/161](#)) and a safe climate ([A/74/161](#)) along with the [briefing note on human rights-based approaches to conserving biodiversity](#), the seminar aims to identify potential recommendations and ways forward to minimize spillover risks, prevent future pandemics and protect human rights.

2. Objectives of the panel discussion

The objectives of the panel discussion are to discuss, among other issues:

- Experience with regard to the prevention of zoonotic spillovers, including from an environmental and human rights perspective;
- Common challenges and lessons learnt from the failure to prevent COVID-19;
- Good practices and potential ways forward, including the One Health approach and efforts to ensure spillover prevention and human rights are incorporated in the draft pandemic treaty
- Recommendations to governments, UN agencies and other international organizations, as well as civil society organizations.

3. Outputs

A report on the experts meeting will be presented by the Special Rapporteur to the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council in March 2023, and a submission will be made to

³ [A/HRC/34/49](#)

⁴ [A/74/161](#)

⁵ https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf

the International Negotiating Body responsible for developing the global treaty on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

4. Participants

The panel discussion will gather all interested stakeholders including States, international organizations, and NGOs, and take place in the context of the expert seminar, which will be held on 25 October 2022 from 10:00 to 11:30 in Room XIX, Palais des Nations.

5. Format

A panel of experts from different backgrounds and regions will kickstart the discussion, which will be followed by an exchange with participants in the room. Interpretation in UN official languages will be provided.
