



2021 HLPF SIDE EVENT

Empowering people to protect the planet in a COVID-19 context: the contribution of SDG 16 and environmental access rights to sustainable and resilient recovery

15 July 2021, 1-2.30pm New York time [online]
[\[Verify your local time here\]](#)

Organized by Uruguay in collaboration with Costa Rica, France, Mexico, Saint Lucia and Switzerland, UN ECLAC, UNECE, ESCAP and UNEP and in the margins of the 2021 High-Level Political Forum

DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENT

COVID-19 is easily the most complex challenge the world has had to face in decades. The current health situation has severely affected peoples, societies and economies and further exposed gaps and heightened vulnerabilities. Moreover, the pandemic has not prevented the climate and biodiversity crises from aggravating. As the United Nations Secretary-General has alerted, the international community is still far from the Paris Agreement's 1.5-degree objective. Temperatures and extreme weather events are on the rise and ecosystems are increasingly depleted. The aforementioned place severe strains on the path to sustainable development.

Against this background, Sustainable Development Goal 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and environmental access rights emerge as powerful instruments to unlock transformative change for people and planet. Through transparency, accountability and inclusive, all-of-society approaches, countries are better placed to tackle environmental challenges and preserve their natural capital. Access to information, public participation and access to justice ensure that informed decisions are made and that all sectors of society have a say in those issues that affect their health and environment. Aiming to engage the most vulnerable, access rights likewise materialize the 2030 Agenda as whole, seeking to leave no one behind.

Several groundbreaking initiatives to strengthen environmental governance have come to the fore over the last decades. Most recently, the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement), adopted in 2018 and in force since 22 April 2021, is the latest Multilateral Environmental Agreement to have been adopted under the aegis of the United Nations and constitutes the first regional treaty of Latin America and the Caribbean. For its part, the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), adopted in 1998 and in force since 2001, was the first treaty to regulate such rights and is celebrating its twentieth anniversary in 2021. Significant strides have also taken place in the Asia-Pacific and African regions, with national, regional and sub-regional developments seeking to strengthen environmental access rights at various levels.

To reflect on some of these efforts and analyze their value in furthering the environmental dimension of SDG 16, this event will generate a space for inter-regional multi-stakeholder dialogue with representatives of Member States, United Nations entities and other relevant stakeholders. The Escazú Agreement, the Aarhus Convention and other national and regional developments that strengthen transparent, inclusive, evidence-based and participatory policies for sustainability will be showcased. Particular attention will be placed to how the implementation of environmental access rights to information, public participation and justice can support effective pathways for building back better, acting as a linchpin of sustainable and inclusive recovery in a COVID-19 context.

LANGUAGE

The event will be in Spanish and English.

THE EVENT WILL BE WEBCAST LIVE THROUGH: <http://live.cepal.org/escazu>

USEFUL RESOURCES:

- [Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean \(Escazú Agreement\)](#)
- [Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)
- [Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters \(Aarhus Convention\)](#)
- [InforMEA Introductory Course on SDG 16 and access rights \(free online course\) prepared by UNEP, UNECE and ECLAC](#)
- [An Assessment of Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Decision-Making in Asia-Pacific](#)

PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME

- 1-1.15pm **Welcoming remarks on behalf of the organizers**
Master of ceremonies: Mr. Joseluis Samaniego, Director, Sustainable Development and Human Settlements Division, UN ECLAC
- H.E. Rodolfo Solano, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Costa Rica
 - H.E. Carlos Amorín, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations
 - Ms. Alicia Bárcena, UN ECLAC Executive Secretary
- 1.15-1.50pm **Panel 1: Intergovernmental experiences to empower people for the planet**
Moderator: Ms. Soo-Young Hwang, Legal Officer, International Law Unit, UNEP
- **Featured speaker:** H.E. Pearnel Charles Jr., Minister of Housing, Urban Renewal, Environment and Climate Change, Jamaica
 - Ms. Lena Hehemann, Legal Affairs Division, Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland
 - Mr. Some Gontrand Yanbéfar, Legal Affairs Director, Ministry of the Environment and Fisheries, Burkina Faso
 - H.E. Prof. Dr. Amara Pongsapich, Representative of Thailand to ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)
 - Ms. Sofie Sandström, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Finland to the UN
- 1.50-2.25pm **Panel 2: National and sub-regional considerations in the implementation of environmental access rights for a sustainable recovery**
Moderator: Ms. Katinka Weinberger, Chief, Environment and Development Policy Section, ESCAP
- **Featured speaker:** H.E. Dr. Gale T.C. Rigobert, Minister for Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development of Saint Lucia
 - H.E. Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Representative of Indonesia to ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)
 - Mr. Alex Winstone, Policy Advisor, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, United Kingdom
 - Mr. Thomas Legoupil, Ministry for the Ecological Transition, France
 - Ms. Rosario Díaz Garavito, Founder and Chief Executive Director of The Millennials Movement
- 2.25-2.30pm **Concluding observations**
- Ms. Janet Ranganathan, Vice President for Research, Data, and Innovation, World Resources Institute