

AI Index: PRE 01/280/2012
12 June 2012

Rio + 20: Anchor Sustainable Development in Human Rights

World Leaders at Conference to Address Need for 'Green Economy'

World leaders have a once in a generation chance to create a meaningful link between sustainable development and human rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said today in a joint statement targeting Environment and Foreign Affairs ministers gathering in Rio.

Heads of state, government officials, and nongovernmental actors will meet on June 20 to 22, 2012, in Rio de Janeiro for the 20 + UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

They are there to take stock of progress towards commitments made at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development which resulted in the Rio Principles and 'Agenda 21', a blueprint for global, national, and local action on a wide range of environmental and development issues.

Few countries have followed the Rio Principles, and progress on environmental issues has been limited.

"World leaders in Rio should ensure that sustainable development is grounded in human rights," said Jan Egeland, deputy executive director at Human Rights Watch. "It is encouraging that the new draft for the outcome document explicitly refers to human rights, but it doesn't go far enough to ensure that those rights are protected."

Economic development initiatives that do not incorporate human rights obligations and principles can deepen marginalization, discrimination, and injustice.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented human rights abuses in the context of infrastructure projects pursued in the name of development, the operation of extractive industries that have pushed indigenous peoples off their traditional lands, and development policies that have resulted in forced evictions of some of the poorest people.

In the wake of the Arab Spring, we cannot deny the importance of free expression, association, and assembly, equal access to information and to transparent processes, civic participation, and social accountability for sustainable development, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch added.

Sustainable development must also recognize the relationship between environmental sustainability and human rights.

Human rights monitoring bodies and international, regional, and national courts are increasingly recognizing environmental damage as a cause in human rights violations and have firmly established state responsibility with respect to environmental protection.

Human Rights Watch has documented violations of the health rights of vulnerable groups including

children when they have been exposed to toxic chemicals in the context of mining, industrial production, and agriculture.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch called on countries around the world to:

- Re-affirm all states' legal obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights, which are essential for sustainable development.
- Re-affirm that development policies, projects, and practices must reflect states' human rights obligations and that technical and financial assistance must be consistent with human rights obligations.
- Ensure that international financial institutions, like the World Bank, only approve projects that have been subject to effective assessment of potential impacts on human rights and are designed to mitigate any human rights risks that might have been identified by such assessments.
- Re-affirm the right of access to information. Commit to enabling effective participation through transparent processes and by protecting the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly.
- Re-affirm the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth disability, or other status and commit to work with renewed vigor to ensure that sustainable development aid reaches the most marginalized members of society.
- Actively promote women's rights and gender equality through sustainable development policies, which include policies that ensure access to reproductive health services and information.
- Re-affirm the human rights of indigenous peoples.
- Re-affirm that businesses have a responsibility to respect human rights, wherever they operate, to exercise due diligence to assess, prevent, and mitigate their impact on human rights and the environment, and to provide an accessible remedy if abuses occur.

Amnesty International's Director of Demand Dignity Campaign Savio Carvalho said, "Unless governments as well as businesses and international institutions stop sacrificing human rights at the altar of development, marginalization, discrimination, and injustice will continue unabated."

For more Human Rights Watch reporting on the World Bank, please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/topic/business/world-bank-imf>

For more Amnesty International reporting, please visit:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work>

For more information, please contact:

In Rio de Janeiro, for Human Rights Watch, Jan Egeland (Norwegian, English, Spanish): +47-468-35-581 (mobile); or egelandj@hrw.org

In New York, for Human Rights Watch, Iain Levine (English, Portuguese): +1-212-216-1211; or +1-917-497-9852 (mobile); or levinei@hrw.org

In Rio de Janeiro, for Human Rights Watch, Jessica Evans (English): +1-917-930-7763 (mobile); evansj@hrw.org. Follow on twitter [@evans_jessica](https://twitter.com/evans_jessica)

In London, for Human Rights Watch, David Mepham (English): +44-20-7713-2766; or +44-7572-603-995 (mobile); or mephan@hrw.org

In London, for Amnesty International, International Secretariat Press Team: +44-207-413-5500 ext. 5729; or +44-(0)-7961-421-583 (mobile); or +44-(0)-777-847-2126 (out-of-hours press mobile, 7 p.m. GMT–9 a.m. GMT and weekends)

Notes to Editors

For more information please contact Amnesty International Asia-Pacific Press Officer, Katya Nasim at katya.nasim@amnesty.org + 44 207 413 5871 / +44 7904398103