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Fiji should step up action to protect human rights from environmental risks, UN expert says

GENEVA (17 December 2018) – A UN human rights expert today praised Fiji for its global leadership on climate change and urged the country to both continue and increase its actions to protect human rights and the environment at home.

At the end of an official visit to Fiji, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, David R. Boyd, said the island nation was acutely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and associated natural disasters, through no fault of its own, and richer countries should rapidly ramp up financial assistance.

“Rising sea levels, droughts, floods, and tropical storms have already inflicted extensive damage. The wealthy nations of the world must immediately accelerate their mitigation actions and boost climate finance to assist nations such as Fiji in their adaptation efforts,” Boyd said in a [statement](#).

The Special Rapporteur said Fiji, as a new member of the UN Human Rights Council, had committed to promote global recognition of the right to a healthy environment and in 2018, assumed additional obligations by ratifying two key international covenants on human rights*.

“Fiji has introduced several good laws, policies and programmes aimed at protecting people from climate change and environmental degradation,” Boyd said, including the Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy, investments in renewable energy, and a rural electrification programme. However, he said, there were serious gaps between environmental commitments and implementation on the ground.

“Pressing environmental challenges include weak waste management, communities lacking sanitation infrastructure, preventing adverse impacts from mining and other industrial activities, inadequate urban and town planning, and degradation of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems. I witnessed how these environmental problems interfere with a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, housing, water and sanitation, as well as the right to live in a healthy environment.”

Boyd said he was also disturbed to hear Fijians were worried about limited civic space for speaking out freely about their human rights and environmental problems.

“Fiji has made a lot of commendable commitments and is making environmental progress in some areas. But in order to fulfil every Fijian’s right to a healthy environment, the international community must lend a helping hand, the Government must allocate more resources to environmental protection, businesses must obey the law or be punished, and individual Fijians must change their behaviour,” the expert said.

The Special Rapporteur will present his detailed report on the visit to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2020.

ENDS

(*) *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.*

David R. Boyd was appointed as the [UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment](#) for a three-year term commencing August 1, 2018. He is an associate professor of law, policy, and sustainability at the University of British Columbia. His career has included serving as the executive director of Ecojustice, appearing before the Supreme Court of Canada, and working as a special advisor on sustainability for Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin. He has advised many governments on environmental, constitutional, and human rights policy and co-chaired Vancouver's effort to become the world's greenest city by 2020. He is a member of the World Commission on Environmental Law, an expert advisor for the UN's Harmony with Nature Initiative, and a member of ELAW, the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide.

The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

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This year is the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration – translated into a world record 500 languages – is rooted in the principle that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It remains relevant to everyone, every day. In honour of the 70th anniversary of this extraordinarily influential document, and to prevent its vital principles from being eroded, we are urging people everywhere to **Stand Up for Human Rights**: www.standup4humanrights.org