

Principles and Policy Guidance on Children's Rights to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment in the ASEAN Region



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Foreword

The global environmental crisis undermines the fundamental rights of every child in countless ways through the climate emergency, air pollution, lack of access to safe and sufficient water and the rapid decline of biodiversity. We see this with unprecedented clarity now that the most vulnerable and marginalized children and communities are grappling with compounding challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The current pandemic has highlighted that a failure to take action to address all aspects of the global environmental crisis threatens a wide range of human rights including rights to life, health, food, water, culture, a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and of course children's rights.

Three years ago, in 2018, my predecessor John Knox, the first Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment submitted a ground-breaking report on the relationship between children's rights and environmental protection. The report clarified the many ways that environmental degradation can harm children as well as the unique vulnerabilities of children. In the ensuing three years, there has been a growing understanding of the basic human right to a healthy environment, the need to keep the best interest of the child at the centre of our joint efforts to achieve a sustainable future, and the vital role that children themselves can play in identifying, advocating for, and implementing solutions.

In October 2020, the 45th session of the Human Rights Council adopted a pioneering resolution on realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment (A/HRC/45/30). The resolution calls on States to ensure that the best interest of the child is a primary consideration in environmental decision-making and urges States to take a wide range of ambitious actions to guarantee that children can grow, learn and play in a healthy environment.

Progress has been made in recognizing and strengthening the linkages between children's rights and the right to a healthy environment, and informative resources are increasingly available (such as the Special Rapporteur's recent reports on clean air, a safe climate, healthy ecosystems, safe and sufficient water, and good practices). However, many States continue to request guidance on how to involve children in climate and environmental policies, engage them in decision-making and protect their environmental rights. We are pleased to offer such guidance, developed with the full participation of a diverse group of experts, including youth, from countries across the South East Asia region.

Children and youth are already driving change around the world, voicing their expectations that governments must accelerate ambitious action to ensure a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for their future. As States emerge from the nightmare of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to fulfil the dreams of our children by placing the UN Sustainable Development Goals at the heart of all recovery actions. We trust that the Principles and Policy Guidance in this document will inspire policymakers to meet the challenges that children have laid down for them, motivate all members of civil society to support children and young people to ensure their future, encourage businesses to do their part, and give children and youth in South East Asia and other regions of the world a tool they can use to promote and defend their rights, including a healthy environment.



Dr. David R. Boyd

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights
and the Environment



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No group is more vulnerable to environmental harm than children. Air pollution, water pollution and exposure to toxic substances, together with other types of environmental harm, cause 1.5 million deaths of children under the age of 5 every year, and contribute to disease, disability and early mortality throughout their life. In addition, climate change and the loss of biodiversity threaten to cause long-term effects that will blight children's lives for years to come. Making matters worse, children are often not able to exercise their rights, including their rights to information, participation and access to effective remedies.

Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Environment on the relationship between children's rights and environmental protection, 2018.

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