



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
12 February 2020

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Forty-third session

24 February–20 March 2020

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Sikh Human Rights Group, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 February 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **Human Rights and Environment, a multicivilisational approach**

Report A/HRC/43/53 by the Special Rapporteur on human rights obligations related to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, David R. Boyd is uplifting, somewhat promising but also highlights the immense challenge facing humanity, the earth and its many species as a result of the dysfunctional relationship human beings have with the natural environment in modern era.

Para 38 of the report states an alarming statistics that 9 out of 10 people globally live in areas that do not meet World Health Organisation guidelines for air quality.

Perhaps State members need to think whether a human rights approach and rule of law is the 'only' best way forward to addressing the dangerous and increasingly toxic level of climate change that faces humanity and other biological life.

Let us accept a simple fact. Modern environmental thinking is neither original nor the first time that human beings have thought about their relation with the environment and other life forms. We need to stop pretending or assuming that environmental threats have suddenly dawned on us and humanity has lived in a state of blissful ignorance until the sudden advancement of modern technology, lifestyles and environmental pundits.

Almost every culture, civilization, community and belief system have some concepts of human relationship with the environment based on deep understanding, reverence and experience. Consciousness about the environment did not start in twentieth century. Some civilisations have had sophisticated concepts that go back as far as 6000 years. Indeed the Special rapporteur also made reference to some.

A damaging aspect of United Nation led 'universalism' has been that there has been a gradual marginalization of the wisdoms that cultures and beliefs carry about human relation with nature and which wisdoms were embedded in tradition, customs, festivals and outlook. The pursuit of imposing rule of law and Statism as a philosophical basis of political human society addressing problems has displaced and disenfranchised people's own value systems that had served the close coexistence between nature and human society well for many millennia.

It is when people rediscover the reverence for nature, biodiversity and other life forms in their own way, through their own customs, beliefs and cultures that the human population will act with greater passion than the current utilitarian, legalistic and rationalistic approach.

The limitations of the Special Rapporteur's mandate is appreciated in the context of this report. While it highlights the many steps taken by States in enacting policies, laws, judicial courts and practical steps, the report has not made reference to the success of these in the attitudes of the wider society. It does not throw any light on whether people feel a passionate ownership of the climate challenge that faces human society. Rule of law and human rights courts in themselves will not restore clean air, clean water, healthy food etc if people's attitudes do not change.

The Human Rights Council is urged to think laterally and imaginatively. It is urged not to be obsessed with promoting the worldview of one civilization but to look at the principles and value systems that informed other civilisations and cultures. The environmental challenge facing humanity, other lifeforms, fast going extinct species and biodiversity is too serious to be playing hegemonic politics with. The Council's attention is drawn to a booklet published by UNESCO- <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000188607>

It will be useful for the Special Rapporteur to look at the empirical outcomes of the policies and laws adopted by States in the overall reversal of the climate damage that has occurred in the last two centuries. It is then that a proper assessment can be made whether alternative approaches should also be looked at and whether the Human Rights Council's efforts should be directed at also discussing and incorporating alternatives in dealing with this most threatening of challenges.