

# Biodiversity and Human rights

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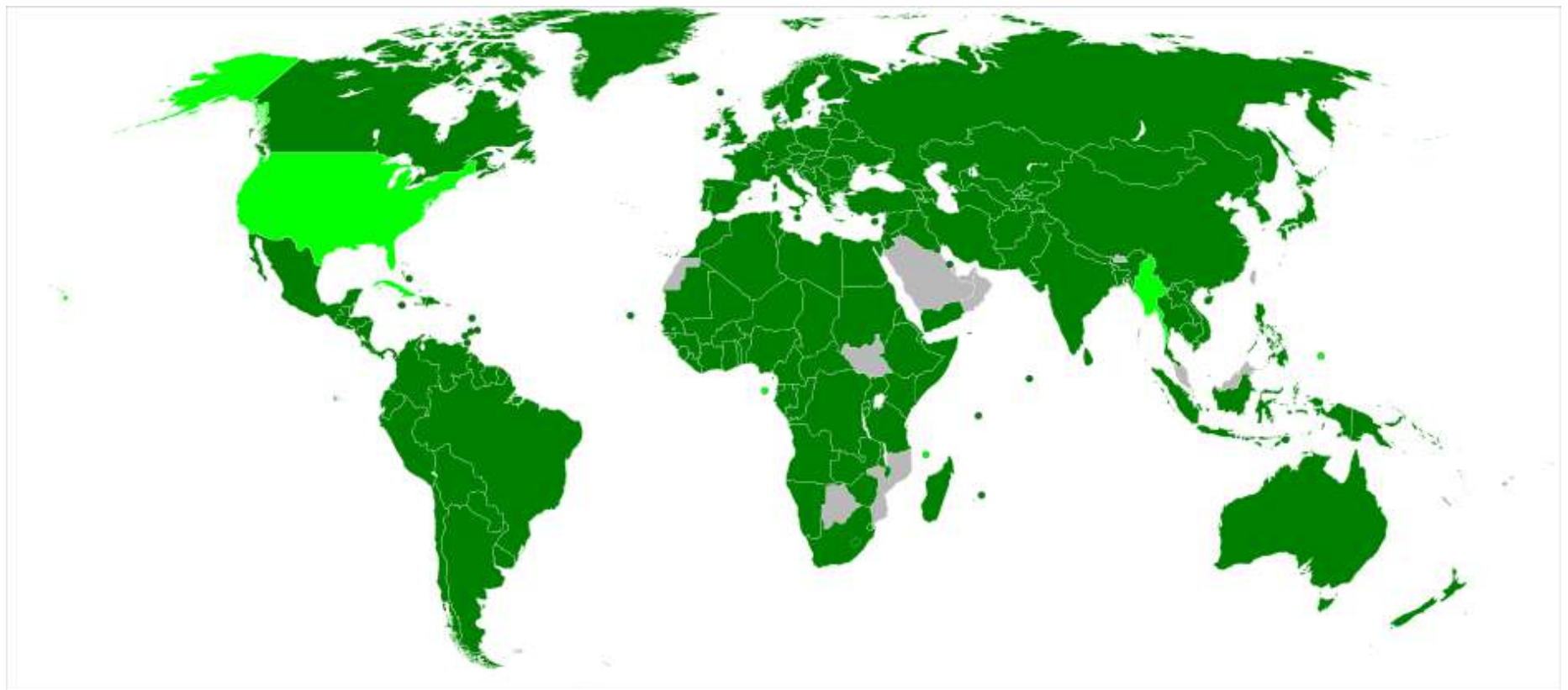






The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)** is a multilateral [treaty](#) adopted by the [United Nations General Assembly](#) on 16 December 1966, and in force from 3 January 1976.

- It commits its parties to work toward the granting of [economic, social, and cultural rights](#) to the [Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories](#) and individuals, including [labour rights](#) and the [right to health](#), the [right to education](#), and the [right to an adequate standard of living](#). Egypt has ratified the Covenant since 1982.



- UNHCR interest in human rights obligations relating to the environment is relatively recent, UNHCR partnership with UNEP works towards Human rights-based approaches to environmental issues, through workshops, the first held in South Africa in April 2016, the next in Brazil in 2017

- The UNHCR also assigned a Special Rapporteur to clarify the human rights obligations relating to the environment, to the conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems and biological diversity (biodiversity)

# The dependence of human rights on biodiversity

- Biodiversity as defined by The Convention on Biological Diversity (art. 2) is “the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems”. Biodiversity thus includes not only the millions of different species on Earth, “it also consists of the specific genetic variations and traits within species (such as different crop varieties), and the assemblage of these species within ecosystems that characterize agricultural and other landscapes such as forests, wetlands, grasslands, deserts, lakes and rivers”.



- It is clear that a healthy environment is essential for the enjoyment of human rights.
- The full enjoyment of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food and water, depends on the services provided by ecosystems. The provision of ecosystem services depends on the health and sustainability of ecosystems, which in turn depend on biodiversity. The full enjoyment of human rights thus depends on biodiversity, and the degradation and loss of biodiversity undermine the ability of human beings to enjoy their human rights.

- Bearing in mind that Human rights law does not require that ecosystems remain untouched by human hands. Economic and social development depends on the use of ecosystems, including, in appropriate cases, the conversion of natural ecosystems such as old-growth forests into human-managed ecosystems such as pastures and cropland. But to support the continued enjoyment of human rights, this development cannot overexploit natural ecosystems and destroy the services on which we depend. Development must be sustainable, and sustainable development requires healthy ecosystems.

I will now examine more closely the relationship between the rights to life and health; the right to an adequate standard of living; and the right to non-discrimination and biodiversity.



# The rights to life and health

- **Medicine**: Biodiversity is an irreplaceable resource for new medicines, but we are rapidly destroying the resource before we have discovered all that it has to offer
- **Microbial diversity**: essential for the development of normal immune responses, now as more people live in urban settings and as global biodiversity decreases, there is reduced diversity of environmental microorganisms which is part of the more global problem of disappearing natural environments and general loss of biodiversity.
- **Infectious diseases**: the increase in some zoonotic diseases (diseases are normally found in animals but can infect humans has been linked to the loss of biodiversity.
- **Mental health**: It is increasingly clear that exposure to nature has beneficial effects on mental health, whether for recovery, prevention or rehabilitation and stability.



# Indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants safeguarded by the local community –Bedouin doctor Ahmed in wadi Tilaah









## Right to adequate standard of living

- This includes the rights to food and housing, and the rights to safe and clean water and sanitation. The benefits of biodiversity are particularly evident in relation to the right to food: high production through crop diversity, species richness, the resilience and stability of agroecosystems through local varieties which emphasizes the importance of the preservation of local crop variety (seed banks)

# Local crop varieties





# Agrobiodiversity and cultural identity



Also, Food security depends on the biodiversity of the surrounding environment. Because growing any single crop requires more than its seeds; a multitude of species are necessary, from microbes, insects, worms, and small vertebrates in the soil to a host of species above ground that control pests, fertilize soils, and pollinate flowers.





## Non-discrimination and the rights of those most vulnerable to the loss of biodiversity

- Everyone depends on ecosystem services, but some people depend on them more closely than others. Indigenous peoples, fisherfolk and others who rely directly on the products of ecosystems, rivers, lakes and grazing land for their food, fodder, fuel and medicine, for them, environmental harm can and often does have disastrous consequences. As such, the degradation and loss of biodiversity often reinforce existing patterns of discrimination. And in addition to the material consequences of environmental degradation, there are often grave cultural effects.







- Moreover, the loss of biodiversity-dependent ecosystem services also has disproportionate effects on people who are vulnerable for other reasons, including gender, age, disability, poverty or minority status.
- Let's examine the case of children, for children as a distinct group in every society, are particularly vulnerable to biodiversity loss. Biodiversity is critical to their being able to enjoy their right to health and education, as well as other rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) lists over 40 rights children enjoy.

The eleven main child rights dependent on biodiversity are the rights to life, survival and development (art 6), identity (art 8), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (art 14), best interests of the child (art 18), special protection by the State (art 20), right to a clean and safe environment (art 24), right to decent living standards (art 27), right to education (arts 28 and 29), right to culture, religion and language (art 30), right to cultural life (art 31) and right to know these rights (art 42).







- Threats to children's rights from biodiversity include direct risks to life, health and safety from some species in the local ecosystem, such as microbes, venomous plants, venomous or disease-bearing invertebrates, and large predators and herbivores. Urban and rural environments currently also pose many risks to children's life, health and safety as there are major issues with access to health care when it is needed and balanced risk management.



- The responsibility towards children and attempts to heightened protection for the Rights of Children threatened by Loss of Biodiversity should focus on projects and initiatives that create and foster their relationship, appreciation and interaction with biodiversity, examples come from various regions around the world mainly through a systemic attempt to influence education systems, both formal and informal.

- *Contact with Local Ecosystem* (Lima, Peru) – School staff develop a program to give a children of all ages the ongoing experience of planting, caring for, and communing with local species of plants, in a slum area, and thus increasing biodiversity.
- *Local Biodiversity in School Grounds* (India) - Mammals (monkeys, mongoose, squirrels), many birds, reptiles and amphibians are allowed to visit and breed in school grounds, due to religious and cultural traditions which venerate all life, making local biodiversity an everyday part of the school children's experience.
- *Eco-spirituality Retreats*
- *Regeneration of Local Ecosystems* in Schools Grounds (Trees are labeled to aid identification and local species planted)

- *linking biodiversity and recycling:* (Vancouver, Canada) – raising funds through recycling waste to support scientific research into a local pod of killer whales
- Indigenous Youth Trained in defence of Human Rights threatened by Climate Change



# Thank you

