Environmental Human Rights Defenders in Europe: Threats, Challenges & Opportunities

Monday 31 October 2016, 11:00-13:00
International Environment House II (7-9 ch. de Balexert)

BIOGRAPHIES

Sylvie MOTARD, Deputy Director, Europe Office, UN Environment

Sylvie Motard is Deputy Director at the UNEP Regional Office for Europe in Geneva.
With more than 20 years of experience in the field of environment and sustainable development within the United Nations system and the European organisations, Sylvie is specialized in environmental and European law and economy (University of Bordeaux, France, and Amsterdam, Netherlands). Her assignments at the European Commission and at the European Parliament provided her with an in-depth knowledge of the European Union decision making processes both at formal and informal levels.

After setting up and managing UN Environment's office to the EU in 2000 in Brussels, Sylvie joined the UN Environment Office for Europe in Geneva in 2009. In addition to general management functions, her portfolio includes the relations with Western European countries, partnerships with sub-national entities and the coordination of resource mobilization initiatives in Europe. She also contributes to the intergovernmental processes in the region like inter alia the UN ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conferences.

Monika GRIEFAHN, Chair of the Board, Right Livelihood Award Foundation

Monika Griefahn is co-founder of Greenpeace Germany and a German politician of the SPD. She was a Member of the German Parliament (1998–2009), functioning as an expert on culture and the media as well as foreign (cultural) policy. From 1990 to 1998 she was the Minister of the Environment in the State of Lower Saxony. From 1980 to 1990 she was an activist in the environmental organization Greenpeace and the first woman on the international board of Greenpeace (1984–1990).

Since 1986 Monika Griefahn has been volunteering for the Right Livelihood Award Foundation. She has been a member of both the jury and the board. In 2010 she was appointed co-chair alongside Jakob von Uexküll. Griefahn is also a member of the German UNESCO-commission and vice-chair of the F.C.-Flick Foundation against xenophobia, racism, and intolerance. In 2008 she became a member of the presidency of the German "Kirchentag", a biennial national festival for Protestants. Moreover, she is jury-chair of a national festival on ecological and nature films (Ökofilmtour").

Alla YAROSHINSKAYA, Right Livelihood Award Laureate 1992 - Russia

Right Livelihood Award Laureate for revealing, against official opposition and persecution, the extent of the damaging effects of the Chernobyl disaster on local people.

Alla Yaroshinskaya was born in 1953 in the Zhitomir region of the Ukraine and on graduating in journalism from Kiev University worked for 13 years as a correspondent of the local newspaper. At university she was a political dissident. During her work she consistently tried to expose party corruption and suffered administrative penalties. At the end of 1986 she began to feel uneasy about the supposed evacuation of areas, which had been contaminated by radiation from the Chernobyl accident in April that year, and she began to investigate.

János VARGHA, Right Livelihood Award Laureate 1985 – Hungary

Right Livelihood Award Laureate for working under unusually difficult circumstances to preserve the river Danube, a vital part of Hungary's environment.

János Vargha is an environmental activist, biologist, recipient of the 1995 European Environmental Prize and founder of the movement Duna Kör. Together with his movement, he actively campaigned against the expensive Gabcikovo-Nagymaros dam complex, which would have endangered the environmental and social balance of a vast portion of Hungarian territory and beyond. János Vargha, conscious of the impact of the project both on the wildlife and on the local populations, committed himself to preserve the river Danube and the ecosystem around it, as well as guarantee its inhabitants access to drinking water supplies.

Mariana MONTOYA, Researcher, Universal Rights Group

Mariana Montoya works as a Researcher at the Universal Rights Group in Bogotá (Colombia) and Geneva. During her time at the Universal Rights Group, Mariana has focused on projects relating to contemporary and emerging human rights issues, and human rights and religion.

Mariana holds a Masters Degree in Development from the University of Cambridge, and a Post-Graduate Degree in Development and a Law Degree from Universidad de los Andes, Colombia. Her master’s thesis provided an analysis of the different approaches to poverty, including from a human development perspective. She previously worked in the academia as a public-law researcher and in the private sector in corporate law.

Barbara RUIS, Legal Officer, UN Environment Regional Office for Europe

Barbara Ruis is an international lawyer, specialized in treaty law, law of international organizations, international environmental law and sustainable development law. She joined UNEP in 1993, and left a couple of years later to be the lawyer of the Secretariat of the Commission for Sustainable Development in New York, after which she became a researcher and lecturer at the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Barbara rejoined UNEP in 2002, working with the Biodiversity and Land Law and Governance Unit within the Division of Environmental Law and Conventions till November 2008. She was then transferred to become the legal advisor to UN Environment Office for Europe in Geneva. Her current activities focus on environmental liability, governance, the Ramsar convention and national capacity building activities in the region.

Barbara has been working on the topic of Human Rights and Environment for the past 8 years. She has been representing UN Environment in the Human Rights Council. She works closely with the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and suitable environment, appointed by the Human Rights Council, as well as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and NGOs.

Barbara holds a Masters Degree in International Law and a post doctorate certificate in environmental impact assessment.

Lukas HEINZER, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva

Lukas HEINZER joined the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva in July 2015, where he focuses on human rights. Before that, Lukas worked as a diplomat in Venezuela and for the UN in Nepal and New York (on human rights and peacekeeping).