



National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Environmental Rights

Course Syllabus



ASIA PACIFIC FORUM
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION



Course Introduction

There is increasing recognition that a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is essential and necessary to the full enjoyment of human rights such as the right to life, health, housing food, water, and sanitation. In addition to these substantive rights, the ability of individuals and communities to participate in decision-making and access information related to developmental activities and those that affect their environment is a fundamental aspect of protecting the rights of the most vulnerable – including indigenous peoples. The link between human rights and the environment is most evident in the large number of national constitutions which recognise the right to a clean and safe environment and in the increasing recognition of this link in human rights jurisprudence and academic studies.

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) with a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights are well-positioned to address the urgency of environmental issues, exacerbated by climate change from a human rights perspective. With the growing awareness on the importance of environmental rights, more NHRIs are also including environmental rights activities in their work plans, and building knowledge, skills and tools related to environmental rights.

NHRIs can engage in environmental rights through several approaches including, complaints-handling and investigation, inquiries, awareness and education as well as research and policy recommendations. NHRIs can also engage with rights-holders and duty-bearers in relation to environmental rights, support victims and environmental rights defenders, as well as building a strong network of collaboration nationally and internationally to bring attention to environmental issues.

This course is designed to support NHRIs to connect their human rights promotion and protection mandates and subsequent activities to environmental rights and to facilitate their alignment with the growing environmental rights jurisprudence. The first part of the course will provide insights into environmental rights recognised in the international human rights regime, including the links with core human rights conventions, work of human rights bodies, special procedures, as well as jurisprudence from regional and national courts. Environmental rights in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Business and Human Rights (BHR) will also be explored in this part of the course.

After establishing the context of environmental rights, the course will then map out the indispensable role NHRIs can play in promoting and protecting environmental rights and in including an environmental dimension in their programmes and activities. Creating awareness on environmental rights, advocacy and engagement with rights-holders and duty-bearers will then be covered. The essential role of NHRIs in protecting environmental rights, through investigations, monitoring, inquiries, and supporting victims and human rights defenders will follow. NHRI good practices in the promotion and protection of environmental rights will be highlighted in each topic area.

The last part of the course will explore building partnerships and collaboration at the national, regional and international levels in relation to environmental rights. This would include

practical approaches to building partnerships with civil society, government, academia, human rights defenders, as well as regional and international stakeholders.

Learning Objectives

By successfully completing the course, the learners will be able to:

1. Define the relationship between human rights and the environment in the context of international human rights framework and recognise the minimum core content of this right.
2. Understand key practices of promotion and protection of environmental rights within the NHRI's mandates, including general practices of monitoring, investigation, inquiries, research, advocacy, and awareness activities.
3. Understand the importance of partnerships and collaboration with relevant stakeholders in promoting and protecting environmental rights.
4. Develop an appreciation of the important role NHRIs can play in promoting and protecting environmental rights and learn to replicate some of the good practices within their own institutions.

Course Content and Duration

This online course is comprised of 4 individual modules, with each module consisting of several short lessons. Each lesson is designed to be concise and easy to complete within 10-15 minutes to allow learners to accommodate the learning within their busy schedules. Each module is designed to be approximately 90 minutes long. The total course is, thus, about 6 hours in length, which can be completed as a self-paced course over a short duration of time. However, to ensure sustained learning momentum, it is suggested that the course be completed over a maximum of 4-6 weeks.

The content is presented using multiple learning aids and tools, including text, infographics, short videos, quizzes and exercises. In addition to the core content, each module provides additional learning materials, including journal articles, videos and links to external sources to facilitate more advanced engagement with the subject area and content.

Core Content Outline

The course is made up of 4 separate modules, with each module consisting of several lessons covering thematic/ topic areas. The 4 modules are:

- **Module 1:** The right to a clean and safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment in the international human rights framework
- **Module 2:** The role of NHRIs in the promotion of environmental rights
- **Module 3:** The role of NHRIs in the protection of environmental rights
- **Module 4:** Building partnerships and collaboration on environmental rights

At the end of each module, the course content will be recapped and assessments to measure learning and comprehension of the content will be included. At the end of the course, a course assessment will measure the overall level of learning, understanding and comprehension of the entire course content.

A certificate of completion will be generated automatically once the learner has completed the course requirements and attained 80% marks in the final quiz. A softcopy of the certificate will be available for downloading.