CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background

Every three years, GANHRI's International Conference brings together national human rights institutions from across the world to share experience, strengthen cooperation and agree on common priorities. The 15th Conference will be held in Jordan and hosted by the National Centre for Human Rights of Jordan, in line with the regional rotation of the Conference.

This edition will focus on environmental degradation, including climate change, its impact on human rights and the role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). The choice of theme reflects the growing reality that environmental degradation, including climate change, directly affects people's lives, health, homes, livelihoods, cultures and communities in every region.

Extreme heat, floods, storms, droughts, water scarcity, strong wind, food insecurity, rising sea level, pollution, biodiversity loss and other forms of environmental degradation are placing a wide range of rights under pressure. They are also contributing to displacement and migration, particularly where homes, land, livelihoods and access to essential resources are threatened.

These impacts are not shared equally. People and communities already facing poverty, discrimination, exclusion or displacement are often the most exposed to environmental harms, including from climate change, and the least able to influence the decisions that affect them. They may also face greater barriers to access information, participation, access to justice and remedies. In addition, limited access to weather forecast, early warning systems, and financial resources reduces the ability for communities to adapt to climate-related risks.

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In some regions and territories, climate change also interacts with biodiversity loss, deforestation, extractive activities, conflict and other pressures, compounding its impacts on Indigenous Peoples, human rights defenders and communities, with compounding impacts on women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

Certain global climate actions have also created challenges for communities. While the transition to renewable energy is essential to address the climate crisis, increased demand for critical energy transition minerals and the expansion of large-scale renewable energy projects can place significant pressure on local water systems, biodiversity and the rights of affected communities. A just transition therefore requires climate action to be designed and implemented in accordance with human rights, labour and environmental standards, with the meaningful participation of affected communities and the equitable distribution of benefits.

NHRIs, as independent institutions established in accordance with the Paris Principles, have a critical role to play in ensuring that environmental action, including climate action, is grounded in human rights. Through their mandates to monitor, advise, investigate, report, engage with rights-holders and support access to remedies, NHRIs can help ensure that environmental laws, policies and measures are inclusive, accountable and consistent with States' human rights obligations, including through meaningful participation, non-discrimination and access to justice and effective remedies.

2. Rationale: why this Conference, why NHRIs, and why now?

The Conference is closely aligned with GANHRI's Strategic Plan 2023–2027, which identifies climate change and human rights as one of GANHRI's thematic priorities and will provide an opportunity to translate these interconnected strategic priorities into practical NHRI action and strengthen their implementation at national, regional and international levels.

Climate change is unfolding at a time of profound pressure on the international system. Its impacts are becoming more severe and more visible, while global cooperation is increasingly strained by geopolitical tensions, conflict, economic insecurity and competing short-term political priorities. In this context, the Conference will reaffirm the importance of sustained multilateral cooperation and climate action grounded in the best available science and States' human rights obligations.

International environmental processes, including those related to climate change, increasingly recognise that effective environmental action must be grounded in human rights. The implementation of the Paris Agreement, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), adaptation plans, energy transition plans, biodiversity frameworks and other environmental laws and policies all raise fundamental questions around human rights.

Recent legal and policy developments have further clarified the human rights dimensions of climate change. The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on climate change has contributed to clarifying States' obligations under international law in addressing climate change and protecting the climate system. In a significant recognition of the link between environmental protection and human rights, the Court affirmed that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a precondition for the enjoyment of many human rights, and that the human right to such an environment is inherent in, and essential for, the enjoyment of other human rights. The General Assembly welcomed the advisory opinion in its resolution 80/263 of 20 May 2026. Regional human rights courts and international mechanisms have also increasingly recognised the links between environmental harm, including climate change, and the enjoyment of human rights.[1] These developments create new opportunities for NHRIs to bring independent human rights expertise into climate decision-making.

NHRIs are already engaging with these issues in concrete and innovative ways. Across regions, NHRIs have conducted national inquiries and investigations into the human rights impacts of environmental harms, including climate change; independently monitored States' compliance with their human rights obligations; advised governments on environmental policies; engaged with affected communities and businesses; supported environmental human rights defenders; contributed to litigation and international climate and human rights processes; and promoted accountability and access to remedy where rights have been adversely affected.

This Conference also builds on GANHRI's growing leadership on climate change and human rights. In 2020, GANHRI's Annual Conference adopted a consensus Outcome Statement on Human Rights and Climate Change, setting out commitments and priorities for NHRI engagement. Since then, GANHRI has strengthened this work through the GANHRI Caucus on Human Rights and Climate Change, peer exchange among NHRIs, and engagement with international climate processes. As an accredited observer to the UNFCCC, GANHRI has supported NHRI participation in COP processes and coordinated NHRI contributions, including to the Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement.

Taking place following COP31, the Conference will also provide an opportunity to connect international climate commitments with their implementation at national and territorial levels, including through NDCs, adaption plans and responses to loss and damage.

[1] See, among others, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Resolution on Climate Change and Human Rights in Africa*, ACHPR/Res.342(LVIII)2016, 20 April 2016; Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Climate Emergency and Human Rights*, Advisory Opinion OC-32/25 of 29 May 2025; European Court of Human Rights, *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland* [GC], Application No. 53600/20, Judgment of 9 April 2024; and International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, *Request for an Advisory Opinion submitted by the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law*, Advisory Opinion of 21 May 2024. See also Human Rights Council resolution 59/25, A/HRC/RES/59/25 (2025).

Through the Tripartite Partnership between GANHRI, OHCHR and UNDP, further tools and cooperation were developed to support NHRI engagement in environmental governance. This includes work to support NHRI monitoring of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, helping institutions assess national implementation and promote accountability.

With the support of UNEP, GANHRI has also produced a Practical Guidance for NHRIs on Addressing Human Rights and Climate Change.

In addition, throughout 2026, GANHRI, in collaboration with the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change and with the support of GANHRI's regional networks, is consulting NHRIs across all regions on their work to advance human rights-based climate legislation. The resulting report will be launched at the Conference in the presence of the Special Rapporteur.

In Amman, Jordan, the Conference will offer an important opportunity to connect global human rights and environmental discussions, including on climate change, with regional realities. The Conference aims at positioning NHRIs as essential actors in ensuring that environmental action, including climate action, protects both people and the planet.

NHRIs are uniquely placed to translate international norms into national practice. Their mandates allow them to work across law, policy, monitoring, education, complaints, advice and public engagement. They can support governments and parliaments while maintaining independence, and they can bring the experiences of affected communities into national and international decision-making.

The Conference will create space for NHRIs, and their regional networks, to share lessons, identify gaps and strengthen cooperation, while also allowing partners to better understand and support the role of NHRIs in advancing human rights-based environmental action, including climate action.

3. Objectives

The overall objective of the Conference is to strengthen the role of NHRIs in advancing human rights-based responses to environmental degradation, including climate change, and its impacts.

The specific objectives are to:

- Deepen understanding of the human rights impacts of environmental degradation, including climate change, biodiversity loss, inequality, migration and displacement.
- Strengthen the capacity of NHRIs to advise, monitor and support implementation of environmental laws, policies and programmes, including those on climate change, consistent with international human rights standards and informed by the best available scientific knowledge.
- Support NHRIs to apply Human Rights Based approach in engagement with affected communities, environmental human rights defenders and individuals and groups at heightened risk.
- Promote stronger NHRI engagement with international and regional human rights, environmental and development processes.
- Contribute to a forward-looking outcome declaration setting out shared priorities for NHRI action.

4. Key areas of focus

Following broad consultation with GANHRI members across all regions, the Conference will focus on the following key areas:

Human rights-based environmental governance: The role of NHRIs in advising governments and parliaments on climate legislation, adaptation and mitigation plans, loss and damage and equitable climate finance frameworks responsive to the circumstances of all countries, particularly Small Island Developing States and other highly climate-vulnerable countries, disaster and risk reduction policies, environmental regulations, just transition frameworks and development strategies. This includes promoting access to information, the effective and meaningful participation of affected communities in environmental-related decision-making, and access to justice and effective remedies where rights are adversely affected. One session will also include the launch of a joint report with the Special Rapporteur on Climate Change on NHRIs and human rights-based climate legislation.

Equality, non-discrimination and environmental justice: The role of NHRIs in monitoring and addressing disproportionate impacts, promoting equality and supporting climate policies that respond to the rights and needs of those most affected, including persons experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This includes promoting intergenerational equity, youth participation, inclusive and accessible decision-making, access to environmental information, legal empowerment and effective remedies for climate-related human rights harms and supporting safe and enabling environments for human rights defenders working on climate,

land, environment and natural resource, building on the commitments of the Marrakech Declaration.

The Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment, including biodiversity loss, pollution and environmental degradation: The links between climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, pollution, land degradation and water scarcity; the ways in which armed conflict can compound environmental and climate-related harm; and the role of NHRIs in monitoring environmental harm, including through the appropriate use of digital technologies, and supporting human rights-based environmental governance.

Human mobility: The human rights dimensions of climate-related migration, displacement, planned relocation and other forms of human mobility, including climate-related displacement (internal and cross-border), and the protection of persons who are unable or choose not to move in the face of climate-related risks. Particular attention will be given to ensuring access to essential services and effective protection for migrants and displaced persons in situations of climate-related disasters and emergencies.

Business, human rights, and international engagement: The role of NHRIs in promoting responsible business conduct, human rights due diligence and accountability, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. This includes addressing human rights risks associated with climate-related investment projects, promoting private-sector support for climate adaptation, and the impacts of the transition on workers, livelihoods and groups at heightened risks. It also covers opportunities for stronger NHRI engagement with the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review, special procedures, regional human rights mechanisms, regional environmental processes, UNFCCC processes, biodiversity processes and sustainable development mechanisms.

5. Expected outcomes

The Conference is expected to result in:

- Enhanced understanding among NHRIs and partners of the human rights impacts of environmental degradation, including climate change, and identification of practical approaches for NHRIs to monitor, advise, report and support accountability in relation to environmental degradation, including climate change, and human rights.
- Enhanced cooperation among NHRIs, GANHRI regional networks, United Nations partners, civil society, human rights defenders and other stakeholders, including strengthened engagement with international and regional human rights, and environmental processes.

- Adoption of an outcome declaration setting out shared priorities and practical commitments for NHRI action on the environment, including climate change, and human rights.

6. Participants

The Conference will bring together representatives of NHRIs from all regions, GANHRI regional networks, United Nations agencies and mechanisms, regional human rights bodies, civil society organisations, environmental human rights defenders, environmental experts, academic institutions, development partners, representatives of communities directly affected by environmental degradation, including climate change, and other relevant stakeholders.

7. Outcome declaration

The Conference will culminate in the adoption of an outcome declaration. The declaration will provide a common framework for NHRI action and follow-up on the environment, climate change and human rights.

The declaration is expected to address the role of NHRIs in promoting human rights-based environmental action, including on climate change, including through monitoring, advice, reporting, engagement with affected communities, protection of environmental human rights defenders, promotion of equality and non-discrimination, support for access to justice and remedies, and engagement with international and regional mechanisms.

8. Conclusion

Climate change is reshaping the human rights landscape and requires urgent, coordinated and human rights-based responses. NHRIs have a vital role to play in ensuring that environmental action, including climate action, is not only ambitious, but also fair, inclusive and grounded in human rights.

By convening the 15th GANHRI International Conference in Amman, Jordan, the National Centre for Human Rights of Jordan, together with GANHRI, OHCHR and co-funded by UNDP and EU, will provide a global platform for NHRIs and partners to strengthen cooperation, share practice and define the next generation of NHRI action on the environment, climate change and human rights.