

In Paris this past Saturday, a high-level group of legal experts [endorsed a new proposal](#) for a worldwide environmental treaty: the Global Pact on the Environment. President Emmanuel Macron of France gave the concluding speech at a launch event for the Pact ([text](#) and [video](#) in French); [other speakers included](#) former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Laurent Fabius (Chair of the Paris UNFCCC COP in 2015), Mayor Anne Hidalgo of Paris, Former UN Special Envoy on Climate Change Mary Robinson, IUCN President Zhang Xinsheng, IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law Chair Antonio Benjamin, and California's own Arnold Schwarzenegger (seen [here](#) with President Macron).



The preliminary draft Global Pact for the Environment ([English](#) version/[French](#)) was put together by French legal think tank [Le Club des Juristes](#). It places significant emphasis on human rights related to the environment. Laurent Fabius [called the Pact](#) an effort toward international recognition of a “third generation” of human rights, building on the UN’s two existing international human rights covenants on civil and political rights and on economic, social, and cultural rights.

The push for a global environmental treaty comes in the wake of two major global agreements from 2015: the [Paris Agreement](#) and the adoption of the UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#). The international community is now turning toward the implementation of these two landmark agreements, but, as the drafters of this new Pact put it, there is as yet “no general and global legal text bringing together fundamental principles of environmental law.”

The Pact includes 26 short articles, many of which are restatements of international

environmental law principles that have developed over the past several decades, from the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm to the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. It builds on work that other organizations have done in promoting international environmental law and human rights, including the IUCN's [Draft International Covenant on Environment and Development](#).

Among the key provisions in the Pact are the “polluter-pays” principle, the precautionary principle, sustainable development, intergenerational equity, and several articles on environmental human rights, including substantive rights to a healthy environment and procedural rights to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice — all of which have been recognized in earlier “soft law” instruments like the 1992 Rio Declaration and, in many cases, in regional treaties and national constitutions and laws. The draft Pact also includes reference to new principles, such as a commitment to ecological resilience and a non-regression principle, which calls on governments to refrain from repealing or weakening existing environmental laws.

President Macron announced during his speech that he will bring the Pact as a proposal to the UN General Assembly this September. It represents a significant opportunity to elevate environmental law at the global level — using the principles above as a framework for both enhancing international human rights law and shaping international environmental cooperation.

With high-profile support at last week's launch, and the French Government's weight behind it as well, the international community should rally around this Pact, and will hopefully continue to support it as it is revised and refined over the coming months. While the United States has turned away from the Paris Agreement, it's clear that other countries are not waiting to move forward and take on a leadership role in planning for a more sustainable future.