SPECIAL PROCEDURES
UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

27 March 2026

Respected Secretariat of the Aarhus Convention,

We, the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, are writing to express our strong support and warmly welcome the Guidelines on the Right to Peaceful Environmental Protest and Civil Disobedience published in October 2025 by the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, Mr. Michel Forst.

The Guidelines provide a valuable and robust tool to assist States to act in conformity with their international obligations in their response to peaceful environmental protest, including civil disobedience. They recall that, under international law, peaceful environmental protest, including civil disobedience, is a legitimate and protected exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of expression.

We note with great concern the continued and increasing criminalization and other repression experienced by people and organisations who seek to protect their human right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment through the exercise of the rights to access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters protected under the Aarhus Convention.

Environmental degradation and the suppression of civic space are deeply interconnected. Where ecosystems are threatened or destroyed, we frequently observe parallel acts to silence those who speak out in their defense. Attacks on environmental defenders through restrictive legislation, criminalization, or intimidation, not only undermine fundamental freedoms but also enable further environmental harm by removing critical voices of accountability.

Against this backdrop, the triple planetary crisis of biodiversity loss, climate change, and toxic pollution, demands urgent and sustained public mobilization. Such forms of collective action are vital tools for upholding human rights, and for holding governments and businesses accountable for environmental violations.

We therefore acknowledge the Guidelines as a timely tool for assisting States in fulfilling their obligations to respect and protect, without discrimination, the right of all members of the public to participate in decision-making processes, including through the exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. They also provide important guidance on States' duty to ensure access to effective remedies for any violations of these rights,

and to take appropriate measures to ensure that other stakeholders act in accordance with international human rights law and standards in relation to their exercise.

The Guidelines also support environmental human rights defenders to exercise their rights to access information, participate in decision-making, and access justice in environmental matters, without fear of penalisation, persecution, or harassment.

We appreciate your attention and look forward to continuing the collaboration for the effective implementation of the rights protected by the Aarhus Convention, in conjunction with international human rights obligations, especially the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, to work towards and maintain a lively environmental democracy worldwide.

Yours sincerely,

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