

Collège Voltaire presentation at the Earth Focus debate

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**Should we consider the protection of the environment
as a Human Right?**

Our NGO's name is "Citizens of the world" and we have members from Portugal, France and Switzerland.

One day Einstein talked about bees and their behaviour (...). He explained that if they came to disappear, human beings would disappear too, about four years after them. Everything is linked. We need our environment, that's why, for us, it's really important to take care of it. We think that we must place its preservation at the top of priorities. But in our group we are not really in agreement about its integration in Human Rights. We have two points of view. (...)

The first one is that the environment where we are living in is not healthy and that everybody doesn't know it. So we think that this problem, which is one of the biggest problems of our century, deserves a warning in official papers. And even if the protection of the environment doesn't seem related to human rights two of us think it is, because we have the right to ask for a planet clean enough to live in in peace without always having to think of what tomorrow is going to be.

Nowadays no one really knows what's happening but if there were more information maybe humanity could be ready for the future, whatever it is! (...)

The other point of view is that human beings belong to the environment! We are dependent on nature, what we eat is important for us, what we breathe is really important too!! Human beings are responsible for their environment. I think all of us should be careful of what we do. We belong to the fauna. What we do has a lot of repercussion on all the other beings. So we can say, human beings are responsible for all beings.

Like Chief Seattle, the American Indian Chief in the 18th century, we think what we do to the environment we do against ourselves and against all the fauna and flora. We think the protection of environment is not a right (...) but a duty.

We have to protect it. So we think the protection of environment has the same importance as human rights.

Finally, we came to a conclusion: to answer the question, we think that we should not consider protection of environment as a Human right but as the Duty it is. And we all agree in the group with the following statement: Protection of environment should be the object of a convention in its own right. This is because we depend on the universe; the universe doesn't depend on us!

In other words our solution is to reverse priorities!

Thank you.

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Dan Orsholitz
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Should the Protection of the Environment be Included in the Future Convention of Human Rights?

We are and NGO and we are called the Green Seeds. This name originated from the concept that colour green and the environment go together. The seed comes from the idea that we want environmental awareness to “blossom” seeing as there is still a notable lack of it. So in a sense our group would like to increase environmental awareness, to encourage people to think about their actions and the consequences that they can have on the environment.

We don't *just* think that the protection of the environment should be included in the Convention of Human Rights; we think that it *must* be included. According to article 9 of the International Convention of Human Rights; “Everyone has the right to a clean and healthy environment, including water that is safe to drink and air that is safe to breathe, as defined by law. [...]”. This means that it is our right to have a healthy planet. But, for the planet to be healthy, we also need to follow our obligations to keep it clean. So far nobody really does this. The majority of the planet's population seems to ignore this obligation. We hope that by adding the protection of the environment to the International Convention of Human Rights, people will make more of an effort to keep the planet healthy.

Since we humans depend almost entirely on what our planet has to offer us, we need to take care of what we have or it will just lead to us having many problems. By abusing the environment we abuse one of our fundamental rights. An example can be the pollution that developed countries have caused by exploiting the resources of poorer countries. A very good example would be the state of the environment in various countries in Africa. There are many people that can't even find clean drinking water due to pollution in the various rivers and lakes. In some countries in Africa, water is disappearing altogether because of global warming. Once where there were lakes there are now just barren craters. This of course is, once again, against the fundamental rights of humans. To counter these problems, richer countries who once abused underdeveloped countries should provide funding to clean up the water or any other damage that they managed to cause to the environment. Funds like these do exist but they were mostly created by NGOs and not by any countries which plundered the resources of their colonies. For instance England and France who had many African colonies have never done anything to repay whatever destruction they managed to cause.

One thing we are never exactly aware of is the fact that we lead very comfortable lives because there are many other that don't. Many people in China, India, Bangladesh etc. that work in factories producing cheap goods for us suffer while they work and their jobs don't really help them live any better. Instead they work almost for free so some western and even local corporations can make a huge amount of profit. While there seems not to be a direct link between this and the protection of the environment, what we keep forgetting is the fact that these same companies will pollute the environment while producing their products. The reason for this is the fact that attempting to diminish the environmental impact that occurs when we produce goods costs a lot of money. Big corporations seeing that there aren't very many environmental laws in place in poorer developing countries decide to abuse their position in every way possible. Another thing we forget is that the global economy forces developing countries into creating an

industry as quick as possible. The problem is that to be able to create an economy quickly, most of these countries don't have the time ,nor the money, to be able to think about the environment.

So, in a way we can link environmental problems to the pressure that the global economy exerts on developing countries. Since they need money quickly and because in today's world it's harder for developing countries to make it, they have to industrialise them-selves as quick as possible. Seeing as the quickest ways to industrialise are also the oldest and consequently the least environmentally friendly, pollution in developing countries is very high. One country which has caused many scandals of this sort is China. Olympic athletes are complaining that China is too polluted and many of them won't participate in this year's Olympic Games. This pollution is due to the fact that China needs a lot of cheap energy. The cheapest way to produce energy for them was to create numerous coal powered plants. Obviously burning coal is one of the easiest ways to produce electricity, western countries during the industrial revolution used this method, but a big contributing factor is China's sheer size and population. China houses approximately one sixth of the world's population.

In conclusion we think the protection of the environment must be included in the International Convention of Human Rights because, we already have the right to a clean environment but it seems that we don't exactly respect this right. By including the protection of the environment in the ICHR we hope that it will raise public awareness of environmental issues and that people will begin to see that we have an obligation to keep our environment clean if we want to have a right to a clean environment. So we mustn't forget that the air we breathe, the food we eat and our survival all rely on the environment and biodiversity so let's preserve our Earth. We can't forget that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is not binding, which means we don't have to follow what's written in it. A convention is more appropriate, because it would be binding.

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Simon Salazar
Charles Prati

Sustainable development issues

We, the Act, Now! Organisation, are a Non-Governmental Organization that thinks for different reasons that the convention on human rights doesn't need to add more articles about the protection of the environment.

First, we want to say that we're not against the protection of the environment; in fact, we are an NGO that is active exclusively on this issue! We just think that we don't need to fill the convention with it, when there are other needs, that are just as important and that have more relevance to human rights like freedom of religion, shelter, health care, etc.

Secondly, we already have in the international convention on human rights the ninth article that covers the basic elements of the subject. And we already have the Rio declaration on environment and development that, although lacks in importance and power of leverage that could be useful, is more detailed. Sustainable development is a complicate issue that deserves a convention of it's own. We think that we shouldn't be adding those in the Human rights convention which is focused around human beings and their political and social needs and rights.

Nature has its place, but it's too long an issue to be fully covered in this convention, it would therefore be too superficial.

Thirdly, we believe that if every government respected the human rights, the environmental issues would de facto be addressed. We think that the non-respect of the human rights are intimately linked with the economical views and decisions of every country. These are more driven by the "well being" of their economy, than the well being of the population. The day a government chooses its population over its own comfort, the protection of the environment won't be a fight anymore, it will be evidence.

Charles Prati and Simon Salazar