Global Judicial Institute on the Environment
Institut Judiciaire Mondial de l'Environnement
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ADB

Convention on Biological Diversity

MINISTÉRIO DO MEIO AMBIENTE E MUDANÇA DO CLIMA

GOVERNO FEDERAL
BRASIL
UNIÃO E RECONSTRUÇÃO

COP17
YEREVAN ARMENIA
19-30 OCTOBER 2026

TAKING ACTION FOR NATURE

JUDGES DAY

a Major Parallel Event of the 17th UN Biodiversity Conference - From Laws to Implementation

09:00–17:30 | Thursday, 29 October 2026
COP17 Blue Zone, Meridian Expo and Event Center, Yerevan, Armenia

SCAN FOR EVENT DETAILS
For more information, please contact us:
mofaisecretariat@lpr.adb.org





Judges Day is one of the major parallel events that will be held during the Seventeenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP17). It will be comprised of **two complementary events**: (1) ***Launch of the Model Framework Forest Act – From Global Partnership to the Legal Protection of Forests***; and (2) ***Judicial Dialogue on Nature: The Role of the Courts in Biodiversity, Climate, Water and Forest Protection***.

CBD COP17 marks the first global review of progress under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), providing an important opportunity to assess whether international commitments and national biodiversity targets are being translated into measurable actions and outcomes. Effective implementation of the KMGBF requires more than policy commitments. It depends on sustained collaboration among legislatures, executive agencies, regulators, courts, communities, and other stakeholders, as well as integrated responses to the interconnected challenges of biodiversity loss, deforestation, climate change, water insecurity, land degradation and pollution.

By linking biodiversity legal frameworks and justice institutions, Judges Day offers the wider CBD COP17 community a unique platform to examine how global biodiversity commitments can be embedded in domestic legal frameworks, implemented by capable and accountable institutions, and enforced through the rule of law. In doing so, it helps bridge the gap between international commitments and practical implementation on the ground.

Judges Day brings together strong legal frameworks and courts as two parts of a single environmental-rule-of-law continuum:

- The **first event of the Judges Day** is the ***Launch of the Model Framework Forest Act – From Global Partnership to the Legal Protection of Forests*** which focuses on the legislative architecture needed to protect forests and biodiversity. It presents a modern, coherent and adaptable framework that countries may draw upon when designing or enhancing national and subnational forest laws. By linking forest governance with biodiversity, climate resilience, ecosystem services, rights, institutions, incentives, implementation and enforcement, the Model Framework Forest Act seeks to support domestic legal frameworks capable of advancing the KMGBF in diverse national contexts.

- The **second event of the Judges Day** is **the *Judicial Dialogue on Nature: The Role of the Courts in Biodiversity, Climate, Water and Forest Protection*** which turns to the role of courts in interpreting and applying environmental law, enforcing legal obligations and devising remedies in cases properly brought before them. It provides a forum for comparative judicial exchange on biodiversity, forests, climate, water, pollution and land, bringing together judges from numerous jurisdictions.

Judges Day Objectives:

- Support the translation of global biodiversity commitments into effective, coherent and adaptable domestic legal frameworks;
- Strengthen understanding of implementation, compliance, enforcement and remedies under environmental law;
- Promote coherence across biodiversity, forests, climate, water, pollution and land governance;
- Facilitate the exchange of comparative experience, good practices and transferable lessons; and

- Connect the modernization of environmental legislation with its effective interpretation and application by competent institutions, including the courts.

Audience

COP17 participants, including government delegates, policymakers, judges and other justice-sector actors, international and regional organizations, civil society and non-governmental representatives, Indigenous Peoples, academia and others.



Description

Forests are among the world's most valuable natural assets, underpinning biodiversity, climate resilience, sustainable development, and human well-being. Covering nearly one-third of the Earth's land surface and supporting the vast majority of terrestrial species, forest ecosystems provide essential services that sustain livelihoods, regulate climate, conserve biodiversity, and strengthen ecosystem resilience.

The Model Forest Act Initiative (MoFAI) is a collaborative initiative to support the modernization of national forest laws in response to 21st challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and the transition to a circular bioeconomy. MoFAI has developed the **Model Framework Forest Act** and is preparing an **accompanying Legislative Guide** as knowledge resources for legislators and policymakers in designing or revising national and subnational forest legal frameworks. MoFAI provies a systematic way to deliver expertise, efficiency and scale required to match the severity of the global forest crisis.

The event will launch the latest draft of the Model Framework Forest Act and the Executive Summary of the Legislative Guide. It will introduce the Act's structure, rationale and principal elements; examine how it can support implementation of the KMGBF; and explore practical pathways for adapting its provisions to different legal systems, institutional settings and national priorities.

The Model Framework Forest Act is designed as a framework law and legal blueprint rather than a prescriptive template. Its modular "shopping cart" approach enables jurisdictions to select and adapt provisions according to their legal traditions, policy priorities, ecological circumstances and implementation capacities.

The Model Framework Forest Act and legislative guide are being developed by a high-level drafting committee comprised of global experts from the legal, policy and scientific disciplines, informed by consultations with diverse stakeholders from around the globe, as well as an Advisory Council providing technical inputs on specific aspects of the text. Since the launch of the initiative in July 2023, consultations have taken place in Nepal, Philippines, Indonesia, Rome, New York, Tokyo, and the Amazon region.

MoFAI is supported by a global alliance of partners to advance a global public good vital in safeguarding biodiversity, regulating and adapting to climate change, leveraging ecosystem services, and providing livelihoods and human well-being. The key partners include the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment (GJIE), Asian Development Bank (ADB), IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law (IUCN WCEL), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Forum on Forests (UNFF), Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), the World Bank Group, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Objectives:

- **Launch the Model Framework Forest Act and the Executive Summary of the Legislative Guide** as integrated knowledge resources for forest law modernization.
- **Present MoFAI's approach** to developing a structured, interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder and adaptable model legal framework based on a "shopping cart" approach.
- **Highlight the relationship between forests and biodiversity**, including the contribution of modern forest law to implementation of the KMGBF.
- **Convene global and regional leaders, policymakers and legislatures and international organizations** to discuss dissemination, adaptation and practical implementation of the Model Framework Forest Act.

AGENDA

9:00 – 09:30 **Welcome Remarks**

Moderator: Olivier Rukundo, Head, Engagement and Cooperation Unit, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Speakers:

- **Hon. Justice Antonio Herman Benjamin,** National High Court of Brazil (STJ), MoFAI Chair and President of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment
- **H.E. Ara Mkrtchyan,** Deputy Minister of Environment of the Republic of Armenia
- **Dr. Grethel Aguilar, Director-General,** International Union for Conservation of Nature
- **Yoko Watanabe,** Director, Nature and Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank
- **Dr. Braulio Dias,** former Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity

9:30 – 9:45 **Keynote Speech: The Role of Forests in Addressing the Triple Planetary Crisis**

Forests are among our most powerful natural allies in tackling the triple planetary crisis. This keynote will highlight their critical role in delivering integrated solutions for climate, nature, and sustainable development, and the urgent action needed to safeguard them for future generations.

- **Inger Andersen,** Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme

9:45 – 10:45 **Launch of the Model Framework Forest Act: A Panorama of the Structure and Content**

This session will officially launch the latest draft of the Model Framework Forest Act and the Executive Summary of the Legislative Guide. It will introduce the structure and key components of the Act, explain its underlying rationale and intended impact and highlight how it can support countries in strengthening forest governance and sustainable forest management. The session will also provide an overview of the collaborative partnership and consultative process that guided its development, underscoring the broad expertise and engagement that informed this landmark initiative.

Moderator: Juliana Almeida, MoFAI Secretariat, Special Assistant to the Director, Law Division, United Nations Environment Programme

Speakers:

- **Hon. Justice Antonio Herman Benjamin**, National High Court of Brazil (STJ), MoFAI Chair and President of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment
- **Christina Pak**, Head of MoFAI Secretariat and Assistant General Counsel (Law and Policy Reform), Asian Development Bank
- **Nicholas Bryner**, MoFAI Rapporteur and Professor of Environmental Law at Louisiana State University
- **Ewald Endres**, MoFAI Drafting Committee Member and Professor of Forest Law and Forest Policy, University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan-Triesdorf
- **Alex Hinrichs**, MoFAI Drafting Committee Member and Forest Governance Advisor, Global Partnerships Unit, European Forest Institute

Q&A

10:45 – 11:00 ***Break***

11:00 – 12:15 **Avenues for the Implementation of the Model Framework Forest Act**

This session will discuss pathways to support the uptake and implementation of the Model Framework Forest Act at national and subnational levels. It will start with a fireside chat among ministers of environment responsible for shaping policy, to be followed by panel discussion with international organizations and other stakeholders.

Moderator: Hon. Deputy Chief Justice Ambeng Kandakasi, Supreme and National Courts of Papua New Guinea

Panelists:

- **Patricia Kameri-Mbote**, Director, Law Division, United Nations Environment Programme
- **Andy Raine**, Executive Secretary, Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
- **Midori Paxton**, Global Head, Ecosystems and Biodiversity, Planet, United Nations Development Programme
- **Giovanni Reyes**, Chair, GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group, President Philippine Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas (ICCA) Consortium
- **Hon. Justice Ananda Bhattarai**, Supreme Court of Nepal (retd)

12:15 – 12:30 **Keynote Speech: Forests and the Global Biodiversity Framework**

This keynote address will examine the central role of forests in achieving the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

- **Astrid Schomaker,** Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity

12:30 – 13:00 **Open Discussion and Next Steps**

13:00 – 14:00 ***Lunch to be provided by organizers***

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COP17 YEREVAN ARMENIA | TAKING ACTION FOR NATURE

JUDICIAL DIALOGUE ON NATURE:

THE ROLE OF THE COURTS IN BIODIVERSITY, CLIMATE, WATER, AND FOREST PROTECTION

14.00-17.30, THURSDAY | 29 OCTOBER 2026
DILIJAN ROOM (CONTACT GROUP 5), COP17 BLUE ZONE,
MERIDIAN EXPO AND EVENT CENTER, YEREVAN



Introduction

The Judicial Dialogue on Nature will provide a high-level forum for judges, policymakers and experts to exchange perspectives on the role of courts in protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, strengthening the environmental rule of law, and supporting effective implementation and enforcement of environmental laws. The dialogue will address the interconnected challenges of biodiversity loss, pollution and climate-related ecosystem stress, including their implications for forests, water resources and land.

Objectives

- **Exchanging insights and building awareness on the environmental rule of law:** based on the historical evolution and recent developments in environmental governance, the participants in this dialogue will discuss the rising role of courts and judges in strengthening ecosystem protection and the importance of application of the environmental rule of law.
- **Exploring legal perspectives on biodiversity protection:** the event will illuminate intersections among biodiversity, water, pollution, and forests, and explore the role of legal frameworks and the need for effective implementation, compliance, and enforcement in addressing these interconnected issues in a coherent and consolidated way.
- **Exchanging good practices and identifying transferable lessons:** experts, policymakers and judges will draw upon recent trends and developments in environmental law and governance, including through rights-based approaches, to explore how to translate them into domestic settings, and share good practices, transferable lessons, and common challenges in adjudicating disputes related to biodiversity.

AGENDA

14:00 – 14:15 **Opening: The Role of Courts in Strengthening the Environmental Rule of Law in Principle and Practice**

Moderator: Olivier Rukundo, Head, Engagement and Cooperation Unit, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

This opening session will situate the dialogue within CBD COP17 and frame the role of courts in responding to the interconnected challenges of biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate-related ecosystem stress, while strengthening the environmental rule of law and implementation.

- **Hon. Justice Antonio Herman Benjamin,** National High Court of Brazil (STJ) and President of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment
- **Patricia Kameri-Mbote,** Director, Law Division, United Nations Environment Programme
- **H.E. Dr. Srbuhi Galyan,** Minister of Justice of the Republic of Armenia
- **Lyaziza Sabyrova,** Country Director, Armenia Resident Mission, ADB

14:15 – 14:30 **Keynote Speech: Role of the Judiciary in the Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**

This keynote speech will explore the role of the courts in translating biodiversity-related international commitments into domestic legal settings.

- **Astrid Schomaker,** Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity

14:30 - 15:30 **Panel I – Judicial Perspectives and Approaches to Nature Protection**

This panel will examine how courts define, apply and enforce legal protection for biodiversity, species, habitats, and protected areas. It will focus on judicial reasoning in cases involving nature conservation, competing land uses, and ecosystem restoration, as well as their intersections with social inclusion and women's empowerment.

Chair: Professor Dr. Luc Lavrysen, Former President of Constitutional Court of Belgium and professor emeritus at Ghent University

Panelists:

- **Hon. Justice Sapana Malla,** Supreme Court of Nepal
- **Hon. Justice Karen Zarikyan**, Head of the Administrative Court of the Republic of Armenia
- **Hon. Justice Nongmeikapam Kotiswar Singh**, Supreme Court of India
- **Hon. Justice Anne Omollo,** Environment and Land Court, Kenya

15:30 – 16:00 ***Break***

16:00 – 17:00 **Panel II – Surveying the Judicial Lifecycle: From Interpretation of Environmental Principles to the Implementation of Protection Practices and Enforcement of Rulings**

This panel discussion will examine the role of key environmental principles in judicial decision-making, how courts respond when environmental regulation is contested, how to bridge the formulation of commitments with their practical implementation, and pathways to improving monitoring, compliance and enforcement.

Chair: Hon. Justice Kari Kuusiniemi, President, Supreme Administrative Court of Finland and President of European Forum of Judges for the Environment

Panelists:

- **H.E. Dr. Anna Vardapetyan,** Prosecutor General, Republic of Armenia
- **Hon. Justice Prakash Shrivastava**, Chairperson, National Green Tribunal of India
- **Hon. Justice Brian Preston**, Chief Justice, Land and Environment Court of New South Wales, Australia
- **Hon. Justice Eufrazina Paiva,** Supreme Council of the Judiciary of Angola
- **Hon. Justice Bambang Mulyono,** Chief Judge of The High Court of Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia

17:00 – 17:15 **Keynote Speech: Forward-looking Outlook on Biodiversity Law and Governance**

This keynote speech will share insights on future pathways in the application of biodiversity frameworks through environmental rule of law and governance pathways. It will highlight emerging opportunities to strengthen biodiversity outcomes through innovative approaches.

- **Inger Andersen,** Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme

17:15 – 17:30 **Closing Remarks**

- **Hon. Justice Antonio Herman Benjamin,** National High Court of Brazil (STJ) and President of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment
- **H.E. Dr. Tigran Dadunts,** Deputy Minister of Justice, Republic of Armenia
- **Minister Carolina Hippolito von der Weid,** Minister, Director, Environment Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brazil

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Speakers in agenda order



OLIVIER RUKUNDO

HEAD, ENGAGEMENT AND COOPERATION UNIT, SECRETARIAT OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD)

Olivier Rukundo has been Head of the Engagement and Cooperation Unit at the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) since May 2026. He previously headed the Secretariat's Peoples and Biodiversity Unit, serving as Secretary to the Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and Other Provisions. He joined the Secretariat in 2011, working on the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing, and has advised FAO and WIPO on genetic resources and intellectual property. He holds law degrees from McGill University and the University of Turin.



HON. JUSTICE ANTONIO HERMAN BENJAMIN

JUSTICE, NATIONAL HIGH COURT OF BRAZIL (STJ); CHAIR, MODEL FOREST ACT INITIATIVE (MOFAI); PRESIDENT, GLOBAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Justice Antonio Herman Benjamin is a Justice of the National High Court of Brazil (STJ), where he served as Chief Justice and President of the National High Court of Brazil from 2024 to 2026. He is the founder and President of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment and chairs MoFAI. A former public prosecutor in São Paulo, where he headed the Environmental Protection Division, he co-drafted landmark Brazilian laws including the Crimes Against the Environment Act (1998) and the Forest Code (2012). He has chaired the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law and received the 2015 Elisabeth Haub Prize for Environmental Law.



DR. GRETHEL AGUILAR

DIRECTOR GENERAL, INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN)

Dr. Grethel Aguilar has been Director General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since October 2023. A Costa Rican environmental lawyer, she has 30 years of experience in conservation and sustainable development, with particular expertise in environmental law, Indigenous Peoples' rights and natural resource management. She joined IUCN in 2005 as Regional Director for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, and later served as Deputy Director General and twice as Acting Director General. She holds a Doctor of Law from the University of Alicante, Spain.



YOKO WATANABE

DIRECTOR, NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT, ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)

Yoko Watanabe heads environment and nature initiatives, including biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management, nature-based solutions, and air quality and circular economy for the ADB. She has over 30 years of professional experience working on biodiversity and natural resources management. She has strategically managed large teams and worked on environment projects and programs in over 130 countries. Before joining ADB, she directed the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme as its Global Manager at UNDP in New York. She also worked at the GEF Secretariat in Washington DC for over a decade and held key positions, including Regional Coordinator for the Asia Program, Coordinator on Social Inclusion and Gender, and Program Manager on Biodiversity. While at the World Bank, Yoko served at the Rwanda Country Office and managed its environment portfolio. Before that Yoko worked at the World Wildlife Fund as its Conservation Director in Mongolia and later as a Senior Advisor on Multilateral Relations in Washington DC. She started her development career at JICA in Tokyo, and later at UNDP as Environment Program Officer at Nepal and Mongolia Country Offices.



INGER ANDERSEN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

Inger Andersen has been Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations since 2019. A Danish economist and environmentalist, she has more than four decades of experience in international development and environmental policy, with a focus on drylands, water and biodiversity. She was previously Director General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and held senior roles at the World Bank, including Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa.



JULIANA ALMEIDA

MOFAI SECRETARIAT, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE DIRECTOR, LAW DIVISION, UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Juliana Almeida is part of the MoFAI Secretariat and Special Assistant to the Director of the Law Division at UNEP in Nairobi, supporting the Division's work on environmental law, governance and multilateral environmental agreements, including the Model Forest Act Initiative. She joined the Law Division as an International Environmental Law Specialist working on judicial capacity-building, human rights and the environment. She previously worked as an accredited Parliamentary Assistant at the European Parliament and at Portugal's Permanent Representation to the European Union to support the 2021 Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU.



CHRISTINA PAK

HEAD, MOFAI SECRETARIAT; ASSISTANT GENERAL COUNSEL (LAW AND POLICY REFORM), ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)

Christina Pak is Assistant General Counsel (Law and Policy Reform) at the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and heads the MoFAI Secretariat. She leads ADB's Law and Policy Reform Program, which delivers legal and judicial reform technical assistance across Asia and the Pacific, with a portfolio covering environmental protection and climate change, gender equality and private sector development. She has also served as ADB project counsel and as its Accountability Mechanism Policy Counsel. She sits on the Steering Committee of the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law and is admitted to practice in New York and New Jersey.



NICHOLAS BRYNER

MOFAI RAPPORTEUR; PROFESSOR OF LAW, LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Nicholas (Nick) Bryner is Professor of Law at Louisiana State University, where he directs the Climate Change Law and Policy Project, and serves as Rapporteur of the Model Forest Act Initiative. He teaches environmental, natural resources, energy and administrative law. He was previously an Emmett/Frankel Fellow in Environmental Law and Policy at UCLA School of Law and a Visiting Associate Professor at George Washington University Law School. He holds an LLM in Environmental and Energy Law from George Washington University, as well as a JD and an MA in Latin American and Hemispheric Studies.



EWALD ENDRES

MOFAI DRAFTING COMMITTEE MEMBER; PROFESSOR OF FOREST LAW AND FOREST POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES WEIHENSTEPHAN-TRIESDORF, GERMANY

Ewald Endres is Professor of Forest Law and Forest Policy at the University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan-Triesdorf in Germany and a member of the MoFAI Drafting Committee. Trained in both forest management and law, he has more than 30 years of experience in the field and has written several books on forest and environmental law. He is a member of the Scientific Advisory Board on Forest Policy, which advises the German Federal Government on legal and policy issues affecting forests.



ALEX HINRICHS

MOFAI DRAFTING COMMITTEE MEMBER; PROJECT MANAGER, GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS, EUROPEAN FOREST INSTITUTE (EFI)

Alexander is a forester with more than 35 years of experience in forest management, forest governance, and international development cooperation. He has worked with several international organisations on natural resource management, primarily in Asia and the Pacific. From 2015-2024, he served as Head of the Asia Regional Office of the European Forest Institute (EFI), supporting forest governance reforms in numerous countries including initiatives on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) and sustainable supply chains. Since its inception, Alexander has been a member of the drafting committee of the Model Forest Act. He currently serves as Forest Governance Advisor to EFI's Global Partnerships Unit, provides technical backstopping to several international initiatives, and lectures at universities and professional training institutions.



PATRICIA KAMERI-MBOTE

DIRECTOR, LAW DIVISION, UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

Patricia Kameri-Mbote is Director of the Law Division at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which leads UNEP's work on environmental law, governance and multilateral environmental agreements. She was previously Professor of Law at the University of Nairobi, where she taught for more than 30 years and served as Dean of the School of Law. An Advocate of the High Court of Kenya and Senior Counsel, she holds doctoral and master's degrees in law from Stanford University and a higher doctorate from the University of Nairobi. Her work spans environmental and natural resources law, property law, human rights and women's law.



ANDREW (ANDY) RAINE

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS (CMS)

Andy Raine became Executive Secretary of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and of ASCOBANS on 1 June 2026. He has worked with the United Nations since 2009, including with UNDP in New York, the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok and, most recently, as Deputy Director of the Law Division and Head of International Environmental Law/Frontiers in Environmental Law at UNEP in Nairobi. Before joining the UN, he practiced law for six years at international firms in the United Kingdom and Australia. He holds law and business degrees from the University of Queensland and an LLM in Environmental Law and Policy from University College London.



MIDORI PAXTON

GLOBAL HEAD, ECOSYSTEMS AND BIODIVERSITY, PLANET, UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Midori Paxton is Director of the Nature Hub in UNDP's Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, where she leads UNDP support to more than 140 countries on implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, nature-based solutions and related agreements. She has three decades of experience in conservation and development, and was UNDP's Head of Ecosystems and Biodiversity from 2016 to 2023. Earlier, she was a regional technical advisor in Bangkok and spent a decade in Namibia supporting the national protected area system. She holds a master's degree in Environment and Development from the University of Cambridge.



GIOVANNI REYES

CHAIR, GEF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ADVISORY GROUP
PRESIDENT, PHILIPPINE ICCA CONSORTIUM

Giovanni B. Reyes is an Indigenous Kankanaey leader from Sagada in the Cordillera region of the Philippines. He serves as Chair of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) and President of the Philippine ICCA Consortium (Bukluran), a national network working to strengthen the recognition and protection of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' conserved territories and areas (ICCAs), also known as Territories of Life.



HON. JUSTICE ANANDA BHATTARAI

JUDGE, SUPREME COURT OF NEPAL (RETIRED)

Hon. Justice Ananda Mohan Bhattarai served as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Nepal until his retirement, and has longstanding experience and in-depth expertise in environmental law. He previously worked as Chief Judge of the Court of Appeal in Biratnagar and Patan, Acting Chief Judge at the Court of Appeal in Tulsipur, and across several district courts. He completed his Doctorate in Jurisprudential Science (J.S.D) in Environmental Law, Human Rights Law, and Constitutional Law at the National Law School of India University in Bangalore, has pursued professional studies at the Max Planck Institute and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and holds three masters degrees in Business Law, English Literature, and Political Science.



ASTRID SCHOMAKER

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD)

Astrid Schomaker has been Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity since 2024, when she was appointed by the UN Secretary-General. She previously spent more than 30 years at the European Commission, most recently as Director for Green Diplomacy and Multilateralism and, before that, Director for Global Sustainable Development in the Directorate-General for Environment. Her earlier Commission roles covered EU–US relations, regulatory cooperation with Japan, relations with the Andean Community, and the marine environment and water industry. She studied English, history and law in Hamburg and Norwich and holds an LLM from the Free University of Brussels.



H.E. DR. SRBUHI GALYAN

MINISTER OF JUSTICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

H.E. Dr. Srbuhi Galyan has been Minister of Justice of the Republic of Armenia since November 2024 and was reappointed in the government formed in August 2026. She previously served as Deputy Prosecutor General (2020–2024), where she coordinated work on the confiscation of illicit assets, and as Deputy Minister of Justice (2019–2020). Earlier, she worked at Armenia's Special Investigative Service. She holds law degrees and a PhD in law from Yerevan State University, where she has taught criminal law since 2015, and also teaches at the Academy of Justice.



LYAZIZA SABYROVA

COUNTRY DIRECTOR, ARMENIA RESIDENT MISSION, ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (ADB)

Lyaziza Sabyrova leads the ADB's operations and activities in Armenia, and is a leading expert in economics, regional cooperation, and strategy in Central Asia and the Caucasus. She has over 30 years of professional experience, including two decades with the ADB. She joined ADB in September 2000 as Economist in the former AEWU and held increasingly responsible positions in Operations. From 2006 to 2008, she was posted as a Senior Economist at Kyrgyz Republic's Resident Mission. She was promoted to Principal Regional Economist in June 2015 where she led country partnership strategies, economic and knowledge work, and the institutional strengthening of the CAREC Institute. Ms. Sabyrova holds a Doctorate and Master's degree in Economics from Indiana University, United States. She also holds a Diploma in Political Economy from Kazakh State University, Kazakhstan.



PROFESSOR DR. LUC LAVRYSEN

FORMER PRESIDENT, CONSTITUTIONAL COURT OF BELGIUM; PROFESSOR EMERITUS, GHENT UNIVERSITY

Professor Dr. Luc Lavrysen is a former President of the Constitutional Court of Belgium and Professor Emeritus of Environmental Law at Ghent University, where he directed the Centre for Environmental and Energy Law. He became a judge of the Constitutional Court in 2001 and its Dutch-speaking President in 2020. He co-founded the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment (EUFJE) in 2004 and was its President for 17 years until 2025. He is a founding member of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment and a member of the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law.



HON. JUSTICE SAPANA PRADHAN MALLA

JUSTICE, SUPREME COURT OF NEPAL

Hon. Justice Sapana Pradhan Malla is the most senior Justice of the Supreme Court of Nepal, where she has sat since 2016, and served as Acting Chief Justice in 2026, the second woman to lead Nepal's judiciary. Her judgments have set precedents on constitutional, environmental and human rights issues, particularly gender justice. Before joining the bench, she spent nearly three decades as a lawyer and rights advocate, co-founding the Forum for Women, Law and Development and litigating public interest cases on women's rights and on environmental issues such as water pollution and marble quarrying. She was a member of Nepal's Constituent Assembly and has served as Secretary General of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment.



HON. JUSTICE KAREN ZARIKYAN

HEAD OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COURT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

Hon. Justice Karen Zarikyan is President of the Administrative Court of the Republic of Armenia since March 2025. The Court hears public law disputes, including those between individuals and state bodies. He has been a judge of the Court since 2013 and has spent his whole legal career there, joining in 2008 as a clerk and later serving as Adviser to the President of the Court. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in law from the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University and a Candidate of Legal Sciences degree.



HON. DEPUTY CHIEF JUSTICE AMBENG KANDAKASI

DEPUTY CHIEF JUSTICE, SUPREME AND NATIONAL COURTS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Hon. Deputy Chief Justice Ambeng Kandakasi has been Deputy Chief Justice of the Supreme and National Courts of Papua New Guinea since 2018 and a judge of those courts since 2000. He is leading the establishment of a specialist resources, environment and climate change track in the National Court and the training of judges and lawyers in the environmental rule of law. He sits on the governing councils of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment and the Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration. An accredited mediator, he has chaired the PNG Judiciary's Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee since 2001 and is Vice President of the Asia Pacific Mediation Forum.



HON. JUSTICE NONGMEIKAPAM KOTISWAR SINGH

JUSTICE, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

Hon. Justice Nongmeikapam Kotiswar Singh is a Judge of the Supreme Court of India and the first judge from Manipur to sit on the Court. He was previously Chief Justice of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, a judge and Acting Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court, and a judge of the High Court of Manipur. His judgments span constitutional, criminal, administrative and environmental law, including rulings on water pollution and public health. Before his elevation in 2011, he practiced before the Supreme Court and the Gauhati High Court and served as Advocate General of Manipur.



HON. JUSTICE ANNE ABONGO OMOLLO

JUDGE, ENVIRONMENT AND LAND COURT OF KENYA

Hon. Justice Anne Abongo Omollo is a Judge of the Environment and Land Court of Kenya, sitting in Nairobi. Appointed in 2012, she has also served in Busia, Mombasa and Bungoma, and has championed the Judiciary's green justice agenda, stressing that environmental law should educate the public as well as punish. She has 30 years of experience in the legal profession, including in private practice and as a lecturer at Maseno University. She holds LLB and LLM degrees from the University of Nairobi and was admitted as an Advocate in 1996.



H.E. DR. ANNA VARDAPETYAN

PROSECUTOR GENERAL, REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

H.E. Dr. Anna Vardapetyan is the Prosecutor-General of the Republic of Armenia. She has previously served in a number of distinguished positions in government, academia, and the judiciary, including as Assistant to the Prime Minister and Deputy Minister of Justice, Professor of Law at Yerevan State University, and Senior Specialist and Advisor to the President of the Court of Cassation. She has authored and co-authored more than 20 scientific articles, manuals, analyses and books, and is fluent in Armenian, English and Russian.



HON. JUSTICE PRAKASH SHRIVASTAVA

CHAIRPERSON, NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL OF INDIA

Hon. Justice Prakash Shrivastava has been Chairperson of the National Green Tribunal of India, the specialized tribunal for environmental disputes, since August 2023. He was previously Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court (2021–2023) and a judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court from 2008. For about six years from 2015, he was also Commissioner for the Welfare of the Victims of the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster. Before his elevation, he practiced before the Supreme Court of India in tax, civil and constitutional law.



HON. JUSTICE KARI KUUSINIEMI

PRESIDENT, SUPREME ADMINISTRATIVE COURT OF FINLAND; PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN UNION FORUM OF JUDGES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT (EUFJE)

Hon. Justice Kari Kuusiniemi has been President of the Supreme Administrative Court of Finland since 2018 and is President of the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment (EUFJE). He has been a member of the Court since 2003, and under his leadership it held the presidency of ACA-Europe, the association of the EU's supreme administrative courts, from 2023 to 2025. A specialist in environmental and administrative law, he was previously Professor of Environmental Law at the University of Turku and has published widely in both fields.



HON. JUSTICE BRIAN J. PRESTON

CHIEF JUSTICE, LAND AND ENVIRONMENT COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Hon. Justice Brian J. Preston AO SC has been Chief Judge of the Land and Environment Court of New South Wales since 2005. Before his appointment, he was a senior counsel practicing mainly in environmental, planning and administrative law, and earlier principal solicitor at the Environmental Defender's Office NSW. He has taught postgraduate environmental law for more than 30 years, wrote Australia's first book on environmental litigation and has published more than 160 articles and chapters. He is a founding member of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment and chairs the Environmental Law Committee of LAWASIA.



HON. JUSTICE EUFRAZINA PAIVA

MEMBER, SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE JUDICIARY OF ANGOLA

Hon. Justice Eufrazina Paiva is a legal scholar, judge, and holder of a master's degree in environmental law. She earned her Law degree from the Catholic University of Angola. She has received training by the Harvard Kennedy School and from Georgetown University. She served as a Member of the National Assembly (2008–2012), where she was part of the technical team responsible for drafting Angola's 2010 Constitution. She also worked as an Advisor to the Constitutional Court and as Director of the Legal Affairs Office of Angola Telecom. She is currently a Judge, a lecturer in Urban Planning and Environmental Law at the Catholic University of Angola, and a member of the University's Senate. She is a founding member of the Imbondeiro Environmental Association, contributing to the planting of more than 50,000 trees in Angola, and coordinates the Francisco de Assis Assistance Center, which provides support to more than 400 disadvantaged families. She was awarded the Second Degree Civil Merit Order by the President of the Republic of Angola (2023) and the Peace and Development Class Medal (2025).



HON. JUSTICE BAMBANG HERY MULYONO

CHIEF JUDGE, MEDAN HIGH COURT, NORTH SUMATERA, INDONESIA

Hon. Justice Bambang Hery Mulyono has been Chief Judge of the Medan High Court in North Sumatera since August 2026, having previously led the Bali High Court. With nearly three decades of judicial service, he has held senior roles at the Supreme Court of Indonesia, including Special Staff to the Chief Justice, Head of the Agency for Judicial Training, Research and Development, and Acting Director General of Religious Courts. He has represented the Indonesian judiciary at international forums on environmental law, climate change and judicial reform.



H.E. DR. TIGRAN DADUNTS

DEPUTY MINISTER OF JUSTICE, REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

H.E. Dr. Tigran Dadunts is Deputy Minister of Justice of the Republic of Armenia, with experience in legal and judicial reform, alternative dispute resolution, international commercial arbitration and private law. He has served in a variety of prominent roles as a Lecturer at Yerevan State University, Chairman of the Arbitration and Mediation Center of Armenia and Director of the Center for Legislation Development, and as a legal expert at PwC Armenia and Unibank Armenia. He holds a PhD in Law from Yerevan State University.



CAROLINA HIPPOLITO VON DER WEID

MINISTER, DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, BRAZIL

Carolina Hippolito von der Weid is the Minister Director of the Environment Department (DEMA) at Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty), where she leads Brazil's international environmental diplomacy and engagement on global climate, biodiversity, and sustainability issues. She assumed the position in 2025 after serving in a range of senior diplomatic roles within the ministry. Her previous assignments include Deputy Head of the Environmental Division, Head of the Division for Digital Issues, Head of Trade in Services and E-commerce, and diplomatic postings in the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Germany. She holds a Master's degree in International Relations from the Pontificia Universidade Católica of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio) and an MBA in Agribusiness from USP/ESALQ.