

IUCN, Keeping it Legal at the UNFCCC COP 23

Last Sunday, in a rainy city in Germany, lawyers, students, policymakers, conservationists and private sector representatives from around the world gathered to discuss the future of the planet. Led by the IUCN Environmental Law Centre, in collaboration with UN Agencies, State Party Delegations, NGOs and other partners, they met within the framework of the UNFCCC COP23 to discuss how to use legal tools to address the challenges of climate change. Their moto: “Keep it legal”.



Throughout the day, participants traced a journey covering youth, networks, adaptive governance, integrated planning, innovative legal and governance tools and finance for conservation.

The day started with a welcoming speech from the ELC Director, Dr. Alejandro Iza who emphasised the crucial role of law to address climate change and to ensure biodiversity conservation.



Dr. Alejandro Iza

Youth and Leadership

Before 10am the room began filling with young people. The first session served as a discussion platform for early career environmental professionals to express their voices, exchange experiences and demonstrate how the youth using innovative tools such as social media has been able to increase environmental awareness, promote the creation of networks for young experts and enrichen the current discourse on climate change through research.



Kata Molnar, Moderator

This youth-led session included a panel discussion where young experts representing State Party Delegations, regional NGOs, academia and the ELC Young Professional Training Programme shared fresh ideas on how to address climate change and ensure a sustainable future for generations to come.



Panel discussion

The discussion brought attention to the need to include the voices of the young people in global environmental processes. “We need to claim our space in the global discourse”, said Kata Molnar, a young professional from Hungary. “People say we are the future, we are the hope. But we cannot wait ... we must also be the present.”



We must find ways to communicate across generations

A global network

The need for coordination and communication was a constant theme throughout the day. The second session looked at the question of how to achieve this among the global community of legal professionals, through the lens of the World Commission on Environmental Law, a global network of hundreds of lawyers and legal experts volunteering their time to support the conservation goals of IUCN. It brought out ways to develop and promote a community of practice for climate proofing the rule of law.

The session was facilitated by Christina Voigt, chair of the WCEL Specialist Group on Climate Change, who presented her vision of the role of the Specialist Group in the critical coming years.



Christina Voigt

Through a roundtable discussion, members of the WCEL Specialist Group on Climate Change and the Early Career Group shared their views on how a community like WCEL can play a key role in the development and implementation of a framework for mitigating and adapting to climate change at the national and international levels in the coming years.



Panel discussion

The discussion highlighted the need to involve business, partners, NGOs, academia and other key actors to jointly speak in the same language that lawyers speak. Tribunals do not necessarily have a clear understanding of climate change issues or the means to address it. Capacity is crucial.

Adaptive governance

After lunch, the UNECE Water Convention Secretariat, joined IUCN to outline a multi-disciplinary and multi-level approach to adaptive governance in transboundary waters in the face of climate change. John Matthews from the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation (AGWA) illustrated the challenges derived from climate change in transboundary water management and particularly in relation to the development of hydropower infrastructure. In his words, “infrastructure is the crystallization of water governance.”



John Matthews

Sonja Koeppel from the UNECE Water Convention Secretary further analyzed the challenges illustrated by the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation AGWA. She emphasized the importance of transboundary cooperation and the permanent development of agreements in managing transboundary water resources and in responding to climate change in an effective manner.



Sonja Koeppel

One of the most important reflections from this session was agreement that holistic and cooperative management is essential in the context of shared waters.



This session was concluded by key remarks from Rocio Córdoba, who described the efforts made by Costa Rica through the adoption of the Ecosystem-based Adaptation approach to tackle climate change and reduce the vulnerability of its ecosystems and ensure the livelihoods of its local communities, particularly in coastal areas.



Rocio Córdoba

Integrated Planning

One of the most powerful tools for addressing climate change is planning. Land use is a primary driver of climate stress, while climate change in turn exacerbates pressure on terrestrial and marine resources and undermines rigid spatial plans. In the fourth session of the day, experts in spatial planning, protected areas, coastal management and connectivity addressed planning frameworks from an interdisciplinary perspective. Field experience from Vietnam, Colombia, Tanzania and Zambia on integrating climate change and biodiversity considerations into planning processes at different levels formed a basis for dialogue.



Ning Ling

Following a presentation of IUCN's key initiatives to address these issues, Lifeng Li from Wetlands International, Jennifer Kelleher from IUCN Global Protected Areas Programme and Lydia Slobodian from the Environmental Law Centre exchanged points on how to strengthen legal frameworks for land use planning.



Legal Tools

The fifth session, coordinated with the UN Climate Change Secretariat and UN Environment, focused on innovative tools to assess and strengthen legal frameworks on climate change.



Maria Socorro Manguiat

This session emphasised the need to develop flexible and overarching frameworks for climate change, particularly considering existing legal tools at the global and regional levels which can guide national reform and better governance of natural resources in the face of climate change.



The lack of development of normative frameworks for climate change addressing gender was mentioned by Ana Rojas who called upon the legal community to address this challenge. She highlighted that women bear much of the burden of climate change and face significant obstacles in trying to address it.



Ana Rojas

Conservation Finance

The final event of the day addressed one of the most difficult challenges in combatting climate change and promoting conservation: money. It launched the first phase of the IUCN Incubator for Nature Conservation, created to help identify and develop sustainable financing solutions in protected and conserved sites and connect them with investors and other sources of funding.



Lydia Slobodian

For successful financing of conservation, protected area managers, government agencies, public funding and private funding must come into line. To discuss the case study of Cordillera Azul, one of the ten INC pilot sites, these actors literally came into line to participate in a panel discussion. Patricia Fernandez-Davila (CIMA) introduced the Cordillera Azul National Park, highlighting its importance and its pathway to financial success. Rosa Morales Saravia (MINAM-Peru) brought the government perspective and announced the nesting of Cordillera Azul in the national REDD+ framework. Juan Chang (Green Climate Fund) addressed the role of public finance mechanisms in assuming risk and leading on investment. Sylvain Groupille (Mirova-Althelia) described the role, interest and motivation of private investors. “I think it is a good investment,” he said about conservation, citing both the potential for financial return and the value of the environmental impact itself.



Juan Carlos Gonzalez Aybar, facilitating the Panel discussion

A key message of the event was the need for improvement in communication and connection between the conservation and investment sectors. “There is a need for a translation service,” said Lydia Slobodian, IUCN Legal Officer and INC Project Manager. “We are not speaking the same language.” INC will help fill this communication gap and serve as a bridge between the investment community and the conservation world.



Chocolate from cocoa sustainably harvested in the buffer zone of Cordillera Azul

Networking and Partnerships

IUCN Director General Inger Andersen gave the closing remarks of the day. She highlighted the importance of collaboration between lawyers and other actors – scientists, conservationists,

investors and students – in facing the global climate crisis. And she stressed the importance of partnerships, remarking that SDG 17 on partnerships is one of the most important global goals, and right next to it is SDG 16 which promotes rule of law, essential for the global programme’s success.



Inger Andersen

The day ended with a networking reception, sponsored by Ecosphere+. New connections made among people from different countries, professions, genders and ages brought to life the message on partnerships and proved the success of the day.



The IUCN Environmental Law Centre Team