

LIVING FREE OF POLLUTION CALLED BASIC HUMAN RIGHT

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NEW YORK, New York, April 30, 2001 (ENS) - In a historic move, the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights has concluded that everyone has the right to live in a world free from toxic pollution and environmental degradation.

In a statement issued from its Nairobi Headquarters, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) hailed the Commission's decision to invite High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson and UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepfer to organize a seminar on strengthening environmental and human rights principles.

"Many of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have significant environmental dimensions," Toepfer said. "Environmental conditions clearly help to determine the extent to which people enjoy their basic rights to life, health, adequate food and housing, and traditional livelihood and culture. It is time to recognize that those who pollute or destroy the natural environment are not just committing a crime against nature, but are violating human rights as well."

The successful implementation of international environmental treaties on biodiversity, climate change, desertification and chemicals can make a major contribution to protecting human rights, Toepfer added.

The results of the seminar will be considered at the Commission's next session in March 2002 and will feed into the review of progress towards sustainable development that has been achieved since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. This 10 year review will form the basis for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be convened in Johannesburg in September 2002.

The Commission's decision, which marks the first time the UN body has addressed the links between the environment and human rights, was taken at the conclusion of its 57th session in Geneva on Friday.

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