

Press Release

Rights of Nature a focus at the IUCN Congress
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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September 8th, 2021: The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) started in Marseille, France on September 3rd. As the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, the IUCN is a global authority on the status of Nature and the measures needed to safeguard the planet. Intended to meet every four years, the [IUCN Congress 2020](#) is now being held as a hybrid format in light of the pandemic.

At the IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2012, Members of the Union passed Resolution 100: "Incorporation of the Rights of Nature as the organizational focal point in IUCN's decision making." Within this resolution, the IUCN called for Nature's rights to be a "fundamental and absolute key element in all IUCN decisions" and work towards the creation of a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature. However, implementation has been slow. "This is about much more than recognizing rights. We must work to shift our baselines, adopt new principles and standards for decision making, and transform the ethics and values that underlie our legal, economic and governance systems. We still have a long way to go to reconstruct our relationship with the natural world and achieve the vision of living in harmony with Nature," says Michelle Bender, Ocean Campaigns Director at the Earth Law Center.

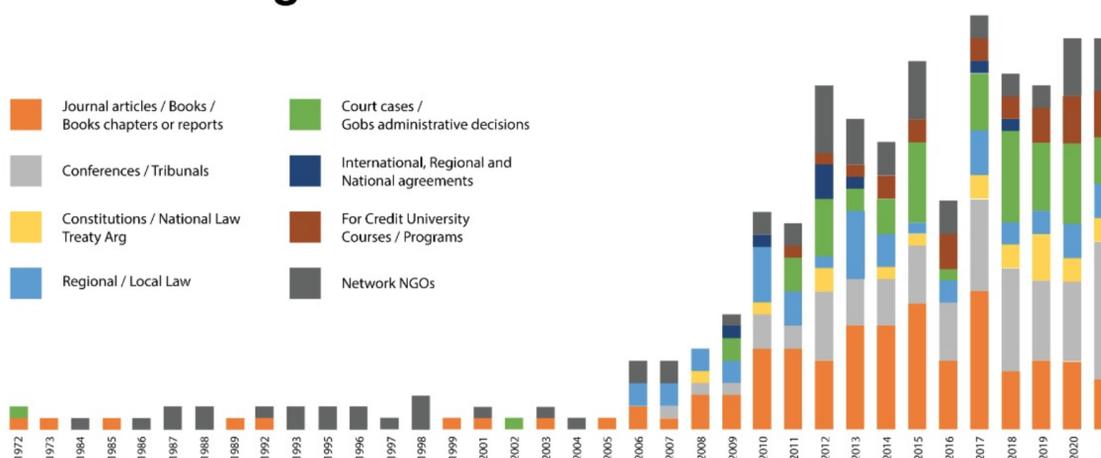
Earlier this year, at the IUCN's Global Youth Summit, Earth Law Center and the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN) Youth Hub held a joint workshop and co-created a declaration with over 200 participants on the [Rights of Nature and Future Generations](#). They comprise: formally adopting the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth; creating an IUCN Commission (or working group within each Commission) for the Rights of Nature to be mainstreamed through cross-cutting and joint initiatives, events, discussions or projects; and creating best-guidelines documents to provide guidance to IUCN members on best practices and challenges to implementation and enforcement of Earth-centered governance. The Declaration and recommendations are included in the IUCN's [Draft Outcome Statement](#) produced August 11, 2021 and is expected to be presented at the Marseille Congress.

Civil society groups are pushing Rights of Nature at the Marseille Congress to ensure it remains at the top of the agenda, and the IUCN works towards implementing its commitments under

Resolution 100, its Action Programmes and the IUCN World Declaration on the Environmental Rule of Law. Within this advocacy effort, Osprey Orielle Lake, Executive Director of the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN) stated, "In order for IUCN to truly uplift Resolution 100, there must be a primary understanding by governments and financial institutions that humans must urgently reorient themselves from an exploitative and ultimately self-destructive relationship with nature, to one that honors the deep interrelation of all life and contributes to the health and integrity of the natural world. An essential step in achieving this goal is to create a system of jurisprudence that sees and treats nature as a fundamental, rights-bearing entity and not as mere property to be exploited or used in market-based schemes. This is a worldview change, and one that Indigenous Peoples have been demonstrating for generations."

Almost 13 years have passed since Ecuador became the first country in the world to recognize that Nature is a subject of Rights in its Constitution. Now, 37 countries recognize the Rights of Nature, either at a national level, in subnational legislation or by recognizing the rights of an ecosystem. The time has come for the Rights of Nature. As Natalia Greene, member of GARN's Executive Committee, said in her opening speech for the *'From Glaciers to Oceans'* event in Marseille, "We do not defend nature, we are nature that defends itself. We are an integral part of this incredible living community, the ecosystem-Earth, and we are all subjects of rights."

Rights of Nature timeline



Rights of Nature activities at the Congress included:

- On September 4th, GARN's European Hub presented the day event called *"From Glaciers to Ocean: Forum for the rights of European aquatic ecosystems"*, at Coco Velten in Marseille. This event included a press conference, four interesting panels about the philosophy of the Rights of Nature and the rights of aquatic ecosystems, a

movie and a debate, and the awaited launch of the verdicts of the five cases heard by the [European Tribunal](#) in Defense of Aquatic Ecosystems, which took place from January to May 2021.

- Sept 5th: Ecocide Presentation Red Mud Case “Ecocide and red mud, a canyon’s autopsy” - Espaces Générations Nature
- Sept. 5th: Conference: Rights of Nature and Future Generations : a common destiny, Conference at Espace Generations Nature
- A joint workshop held on September 5th ‘Energizing the Rights of Nature’ in partnership with Comité National de l’UICN, France; IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL); Earth Law Center; Consejo Internacional de Derecho Ambiental (ICEL); Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN); and Odyssey.
- Sept. 6th: Conference: European movement for the rights of nature! Espace Generations Nature
- Sept. 6th: Conference: “Does Nature have rights?” Valérie Cabanes, Sarah Vanuxem and Marine Calmet at the Mucem Museum.
- ELC and GARN sent a [letter to IUCN](#) President Zhang and IUCN Members on September 7th, highlighting ways in which the IUCN can implement Resolution 100.
- A symposium September 6th and 7th by ICEL, IUCN WCEL and Pace University on “Environmental Law Confronts Earth’s Ecocrises”
- September 8th press conference on the global rights of rivers movement and the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers in specific, in addition to an emergency motion submitted on the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers (outcome pending).
- September 9th session on “Rights of Nature: legal perspectives from America, and its implications in International Environmental Law” by Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and Ecologic Institute

The IUCN has a unique opportunity to progress with the guarantee of the Rights of Nature in this Congress, especially through the advancement of Resolution 100. The Rights of Nature is present during this world gathering, through its various organizations and representatives, to advocate for transformative, systemic change, so necessary during this urgent time for the people and the planet.

About the organizations:

Earth Law Center (www.earthlawcenter.org): ELC champions Earth-centered laws and community-led movements that respect and protect all life on the planet.

Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (<https://www.therightsofnature.org/>): GARN is a global network of organizations and individuals committed to the universal adoption and implementation of legal systems that recognize, respect and enforce "Rights of Nature".

Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (<https://www.wecaninternational.org/>): WECAN is a solutions-based organization established to engage women worldwide in policy advocacy, on-the-ground projects, trainings, and movement building for global climate justice.