

NEWS RELEASE

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Giving Mother Earth a Voice in Paris **International Tribunal on Rights of Nature** **Convenes during COP21** **December 4-5, 2015 – Maison des Métallos**

Paris, France – Key environmental justice issues from around the world will have their day in court when the International Tribunal on the Rights of Nature convenes in Paris on December 4-5, 2015, against the backdrop of UNFCCC talks that must move beyond past failures and false solutions to avert global catastrophe.

The high profile international “Peoples Tribunal” – convened by leaders in Earth law and planetary justice from around the world – posits a new legal framework, drawing on the wisdom and cosmovision of indigenous people, aimed at achieving true systems change by recognizing the rights of ecosystems “to exist, persist, and regenerate their vital natural cycles.”

Under current law, nature is treated as private property to be destroyed for profit. It is a legal framework that is proving deadly to people and planet, requiring a transformation of our international and domestic legal systems toward a jurisprudence that recognizes rights of nature. The shift to this new legal framework is underway – Ecuador and Bolivia recognize rights of nature in their constitutions and more than two dozen municipalities in the United States have adopted rights of nature ordinances, including the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (pop. 305,000).

A 13-member panel of judges will preside over the two-day Tribunal, hearing six cases:

CLIMATE CRIMES AGAINST NATURE (December 4 at 9:40)

Former UN Bolivian Ambassador **Pablo Solón**, **Maude Barlow**, Council of Canadians, and **Maxime Combes** of Attac France, will highlight false climate solutions that fail to address root problems – such as water privatization, “climate-smart agriculture,” REDD+, financialization of nature, and other schemes – introducing expert witnesses and victims of climate crimes from Belarus, Canada, Ecuador, France, Mexico, Slovakia, and the Philippines.

AGRO-FOOD INDUSTRY AND GMOS (December 4 at 15:00)

Indian ecologist and physicist **Vandana Shiva** of Navdanya and **Ronnie Cummins** of Organic Consumers will present the case against the global proliferation of GMOs and forms of industrial agriculture that destroy the soil, increase greenhouse gas emissions, pollute water, and reduce biodiversity, calling on expert witnesses from France, Mexico, and the United States.

DEFENDERS OF MOTHER EARTH (December 4 at 16:30)

Indigenous leaders, mining victims, and others who defend nature present the case of the growing risk of violence, including murder, faced by defenders of Mother Earth in South America but also in Europe and other parts of the world. A tragic example: Only days prior to testifying before the 2014 Tribunal in Lima, Peru, on Ecuador’s Mirador mine, José Isidro Tendetza Antun was killed.

FRACKING (December 5 at 9:15)

Shannon Biggs of Movement Rights, USA, and **Geert De Cock** of Food & Water Watch, Belgium, will present the case against hydraulic fracking, an extreme and devastating form of energy production, drawing on expert witnesses from France and the United States showing how communities have been effective in using rights of nature laws to ban fracking.

MEGA DAMS IN AMAZON (December 5 at 10:30)

Gert-Peter Bruch of Planete Amazone presents the case against building mega dams in the Amazon, with indigenous leaders as expert witnesses testifying to the displacement of tens of thousands and the destruction of the Amazon threatened by the proposed massive diversion of rivers.

CHEVRON AND YASUNÍ (December 5 at 14:15)

Carlos Larrea and **Pablo Fajardo**, Ecuadorean lawyers who litigated the case in Ecuador against Chevron, argue against the proposed oil exploitation of the Amazon's pristine Yasuní National Park. Calling on the testimony of indigenous leaders, they also demonstrate the impact of decades of pollution from oil drilling by Chevron and argue for addressing such harms as ecocide under the terms **Valérie Cabanes** of End Ecocide on Earth explains just prior to their presentation, making the case for recognizing ecocide under international criminal law.

The Earth Defenders prosecuting the cases at the Tribunal are **Ramiro Ávila**, law professor, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (Ecuador), and **Linda Sheehan**, Director, Earth Law Center (US).

The distinguished panel of Tribunal judges, headed by South African attorney **Cormac Cullinan**, author of *WildLaw: A Manifesto for Earth Justice*, includes: **Alberto Acosta**, former President of the Constitutional Assembly (Ecuador); **Nnimmo Bassey**, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (Nigeria); **Christophe Bonneuil**, science historian (France); **Dominique Bourg**, professor of geosciences (Switzerland); **Philippe Desbrosses**, author, environmental sciences expert, organic farmer (France); **Tom Goldtooth**, Executive Director, Indigenous Environmental Network (US, Dine' and Dakota); **Osprey Orielle Lake**, Executive Director, Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (US); **Ruth Nyambura**, African Biodiversity Network (Kenya); **Felício Pontes**, Federal Prosecutor (Brazil); **Damien Short**, Director of the Human Rights Consortium (UK); **Atossa Soltani**, Amazon Watch founder (US); and **Terisa Turner**, professor of anthropology, former UN Energy Specialist (Canada).

The judges will render decisions calling for reparation, mitigation, restoration, and prevention of further damages and harm. Although its decisions do not presently carry the force of law, the Tribunal provides the world with a model for adjudicating cases under a legal framework that recognizes the rights of nature, offering a real and present solution to the root problem behind climate change and other human-induced ecological disasters.

The Paris Tribunal marks the third time the International Tribunal for Rights of Nature has convened. Sponsored by the Global Alliance for Rights of Nature, the inaugural Tribunal was held in Quito, Ecuador, in January 2013, followed by a session in Lima, Peru, in December 2014. **Natalia Greene** (Ecuador), Tribunal Secretariat, **Cormac Cullinan** (South Africa), Tribunal President, and **Samanta Novella** (France) of NatureRights, will introduce the proceedings.

The Tribunal will convene from 9:00 – 13:00 and 14:00 – 18:00 on Friday and Saturday, December 4 and 5, at the Maison des Métaux in the 11th arrondissement at 94, Rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud. Registration required: <http://therightsofnature.org/rights-of-nature-tribunal-paris/>.