

Item 4(a): Election of the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders

Statement by Mr. Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders elected by the Meeting of the Parties at its third extraordinary session

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, allow me to thank the member States for their trust in me in conferring upon me the position of the very first person to hold this office. I will certainly also be counting on them for their competencies and their work. As recalled between 2014 and 2020, I was the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights defenders and in this capacity, I have visited more than 60 countries and was able to meet 100s or 1000s of human rights defenders, a large majority of whom were working on Environmental issues and this was after my work on the Environment. They were victims of attack; they spoke to me of this and, also spoke to me of their needs for international protection.

A number of these human rights defenders did not know the procedures of the Human Rights Council and didn't understand that there were status and rules to protect them. I would like to also thank Norway for having in 2019 presented this historic resolution on Protection of Environmental Defenders. I would also like to thank civil society, the NGOs for their professionalism and their commitment. I, myself, come from the world of civil society. I know it very well and they have been a key element in the creation of this mandate. They will be my partners and a source of inspiration for me. And, of course, the Compliance Committee is the one which I will turn to, with which I will work closely with its members to see how we can find complementarity between the two mechanisms of this Convention.

I have expressed much ambition in my candidature's statement, and I will be ensuring that I fulfill all of the responsibilities given me as a Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders. Most importantly I want to be as effective as soon as possible. And, finally, I will certainly be depending on the secretariat; I know well the quality of its work and its commitment. In conclusion, allow me to say that I will be an Independent Special Rapporteur, independent of countries, of NGOs and of the secretariat. I would be a Special Rapporteur who would be demanding of myself and of others and I would be a Special Rapporteur who would listen to all voices. I would be a Special Rapporteur who would be transparent to all Parties to the Convention. And, finally, I hope that I would be a Special Rapporteur who would be able to demonstrate the usefulness of this new mechanism.

Thank you very much.