

Earth Jurisprudence

reconnecting with the laws and lore of the Earth



Newsletter: May-October 2018

News from Africa

Panel session at the African Commission on Sacred Natural Sites and Earth Rights Defenders



Banjul, October 2018: At the recent NGO Forum of the 63rd Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), a delegation from Gaia and the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) drew attention to the African Commission's call (ACHPR/Res. 372 (LX) 2017) for State parties "to recognise sacred natural sites and territories, and their customary governance systems".

A joint panel session with the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN), emphasised the need to address the root causes underpinning the increasing threats to defenders of human rights and Earth rights and to decolonise our minds. There was an enthusiastic response from the panel session with Liz Hosken (Gaia), Apollinaire Oussou Lio (GRABE-Benin), Dennis Tabaro (NAPE-Uganda) and Margaret Kagole (custodian of sacred natural sites, Bulissa, Uganda).

Mapping the ancestral past in Tharaka, Kenya



With enthusiasm often bursting into song and dance, elders and youth, men and women, came together from Tharaka-Nithi community, in the foothills of Mount Kenya, to start mapping their ancestral past.

For nearly 5 years they have been working to revive their traditional knowledge and practices, accompanied by African EJ practitioner Simon Mitambo and local organisation SALT. They were introduced to the art of [eco-cultural mapping and calendars](#) - a community process developed by indigenous communities in the Colombian Amazon - by Gaia's Liz Hosken and the SALT team, and took the first steps in mapping their ancestral territories and sacred natural sites. Looking back to the past, before the impact of colonisation, is a step forward for the Tharaka-Nithi community, building back their resilience and community cohesion for the future. [See the photo-story about mapping in Tharaka.](#)

Earth Jurisprudence represented in advanced course on Indigenous Peoples' Rights at the University of Pretoria



South Africa, September 2018: Roger Chennells - lawyer, anthropologist, and co-facilitator of Gaia's training for African Earth Jurisprudence practitioners - was a guest speaker at the University of Pretoria's [short course on Indigenous Peoples' Rights](#). With a focus on transformation and restorative justice, he highlighted the growing network of African EJ practitioners and their work in accompanying communities on a journey of reviving customary governance practices and cultural memory; and emphasised the strategic potential of ACHPR Res372 for the protection of Sacred Natural Sites and Territories.

Learning the language of Nature



South Africa, July 2018: The second intake of trainees on Gaia's course for African Earth Jurisprudence (EJ) practitioners - from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Cameroon and Benin - spent a week with the Proteus Initiative in Towerland Wilderness, South Africa, learning the 'Goethian approach to relating with Nature', and sharpening their capacity to observe, to be present.

As one participant commented "This helps us learn what elders do naturally - keenly observe Nature's laws by learning her language".

Global News

International Rights of Nature Symposium

Ecuador, September 2018: The [2018 International Rights of Nature Symposium](#), hosted by the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN), brought together activists, academics, indigenous leaders and students, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the adoption of Rights of Nature in Ecuador's Constitution and discuss how to grow the rights of Nature movement.

Gaia's Fiona Wilton, as GARN Executive Committee member, was part of the visioning and strategic planning. Method Gundidza, from EarthLore in South Africa/Zimbabwe, and Gaia's Advisor Nnimmo Bassey, from Nigeria, brought African voices to a panel session on global advances for Earth Jurisprudence and the rights of Nature. [Read more about the Symposium here.](#)

Report by UN Secretary-General on Harmony with Nature

The latest report by the UN Secretary-General (A/73/221) on Harmony with Nature gives a global overview of the growing movement for rights of Nature and the embodiment of Earth Jurisprudence in law, policy, education and public engagement - available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

The report includes recognition that "*The first cohort of African Earth jurisprudence practitioners... have become spokespersons for respecting the laws of nature and reconnecting with the Earth*" (para 94). It draws also on contributions to the 8th interactive dialogue on Harmony with Nature, April 2018, when Method Gundidza, a graduate from Gaia's training for African Earth Jurisprudence practitioners, gave a moving presentation on *Reweaving the Basket of Life*. [Click here for Method's speech.](#)

Sami Parliament supports Rights of Mother Earth

Sweden, May 2018: At an assembly meeting on May 25th, the Sami Parliament in Sweden decided to support the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth. The Sami, like many other indigenous peoples, have everyday experiences of the impacts of climate change, exploitative mining projects and forestry. [Read the full article here.](#)

Dehcho First Nations and the Canadian Government announce the first of new indigenous protected area

Canada, October 2018: Edéhzié Protected Area was designed by the Dehcho First Nations Assembly to protect water, conserve biodiversity and wildlife habitat, and maintain the Dehcho Dene relationship with their lands, for future generations. In an agreement with the Canadian government, this will hopefully be the first of many new indigenous protected areas aimed at increasing the amount of Nature protected from coast to coast. [Read the official news release.](#)

"The time for a movement to protect our larger family around our beloved Earth is for now. The culture, the consciousness that connected humans with the rest of Earth community is gone!!! We need soul searching to bring back this consciousness, awareness that other community members - the birds, insects animals, trees, water - have been pushed to the edge, displaced and destroyed, as if they do not have rights to be, to habitat and to enjoy life as we do." - Dennis Tabaro, Uganda

African voices on re-connecting with the laws and lore of the Earth

- **Apollinaire Oussou Lio**, Director of GRABE-Benin and Earth Jurisprudence practitioner (EJ1), has been a regular guest on Benin's national television programme 5/7 Matins, in discussions on forest protection and the role of Benin's sacred forests: [Parole au Sage, Le débat, Parole aux internautes.](#)
- **Fassil Gebeyehu** (EJ1) shares a personal journey of the farming wisdom and plant knowledge in various communities in Ethiopia, published in *Wingscape's* magazine's (Volume 7, Issue 1) Summer 2018 issue on [Biocultural Diversity Conservation: Communities at the Cutting Edge](#); and contributed his findings on how farmers manage their seed systems to the GRAIN/AFSA reports on [The real seeds producers: Small-scale farmers save, use, share and enhance the seed diversity of the crops that feed Africa](#), 29 October 2018.
- Zimbabwean writer, activist and Earth Jurisprudence practitioner-in-training (EJ2), **Gertrude Pswarayi-Jabson**, has been reflecting on the importance of reviving Africa's rich cultural and spiritual practices. Read [Africa can come back to Life](#)

Upcoming & Recent Events

- 21 September, 2018: [UKELA's Wild Law Conference](#), Bristol University.
- 4-12 October, 2018: [World Commons Week](#),
- 25-26 October, 2018: [International Symposium: Exploring our legal relationship with the living world](#), - Ecocentre, Griffith University, 170 Kessel Road, Nathan - Brisbane, Australia.
- October 26-29, 2018: "[Living Earth Community: Ways of Being and Knowing the World](#)" Upperville, VA, USA. Organized by Peter Crane, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim.
- 10-13 December, 2018: [7th International Annual Conference on the Rights of Nature for Peace and Sustainable Development](#), OSI, United Nations, Geneva. A call is open for contributions.
- July, 2019: [3rd International Forum for the Rights of Mother Earth, Colombia.](#)

"The indigenous peoples of the Colombian Amazon say that we are nature. Everything is from the same source. Humans have evolved from nature; humans, nature, and all of Earth have evolved from our galaxy and the universe beyond." - Martín von Hildebrand, Colombia.

Read [Voices from the Amazon](#), a short article by Gaia's Associate in Colombia, Martín von Hildebrand, published by the [Planetary Health Alliance](#).

Recommended Reading, Listening & Viewing

- WATCH [Earthrise](#) a new documentary from Global Oneness Project, the story of the first image, captured in 1968, of the beauty, awe, and grandeur of the Earth from space.
- WATCH an engaging short video, for a beautiful and visual introduction to the [secret language of trees!](#)
- WATCH [Schooling the World: The White Man's Last Burden](#), the story of the devastating impact of formal, Western modes of schooling on indigenous cultures and peoples.
- READ the report [Indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge in the context of the UN framework convention on climate change: Compilation of Decisions and Conclusions Adopted by the Parties to the Convention](#), by IIPFCC and CIEL.
- READ [Giving Nature a Voice: Legal Rights and personhood for Nature](#), a comparative legal analysis of Nature Rights in Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, New Zealand and India.
- READ [Juristic Personhood for Sacred Natural Sites: A potential means for protecting Nature](#) by John Studley and William V. Blesich, Parks Magazine Vol 24.1 May, 2018 (or order a copy of [Indigenous Sacred Natural Sites and Spiritual Governance](#), available in hard copy or e-book)
- READ Gleb Raygorodetsky's report from Western Canada on [what we can learn from Indigenous cultures about responses to climate change](#), in *Resurgence/Ecologist* magazine.
- READ how [Dhimurru rangers are preserving their culture by protecting the environment](#), published in the *New York Times* (19 October 2018)
- DOWNLOAD the [latest Issue of the Ecological Citizen Newsletter](#).
- DOWNLOAD [Deep Time Walk](#), a unique and contemplative guided walk through 4.2 billion years of deep time.
- SIGN-UP to the Comox Valley Climate Change Network, for [regular chronicles](#) from Mike Bell on a range of Earth Jurisprudence issues.

Earth Jurisprudence is the philosophy and practice that recognises the Earth as lawful and ordered.

We humans are embedded in her living processes, and our actions should be guided by the primary laws of the Earth.



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