

September 26, 2018: The Global Pact for the Environment: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Future of International Environmental Governance

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Professor Jeffrey Sachs and ICC Secretary General John Denton speak on the Global Pact for the Environment

In June 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron and a group of international jurists and lawyers launched a new initiative to create a Global Pact for the Environment. They argued that such a Pact would critically build on the successes of the Paris Agreement to unify international environmental governance and codify key rights and principles from the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, just as the 1966 international human rights covenants codified principles from the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

The “Club de Juristes” released a “[blueprint](#)” for the Pact in Paris in June 2017, which President Macron [introduced](#) at the UN in September of that year and at various conferences around the world (including at Columbia University).

In May 2018, the Global Pact took a big step forward when the UN General Assembly nearly unanimously voted to create an ad-hoc working group to identify and assess gaps in international environmental governance and propose potential new instruments to fill those gaps; the report of the working group is expected in late November.

A year after their first conference on the [Global Pact for the Environment alongside the 2017 UN General Assembly](#), the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), the Columbia

Center on Sustainable Investment (CCSI), Le Club des Juristes, and Iberdrola [reconvened at Columbia University in September 2018](#) to discuss the Global Pact and the path forward for international environmental governance. The event brought together diplomats, lawyers, environmentalists, businesspeople, and faith leaders to discuss what this future might look like.

To kick off the conference, **French Minister for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition Francois de Rugy** and **President of the 72nd UN General Assembly Miroslav Lajčák** framed the dire state of the global environment, and the urgent need for increased international cooperation and ambition to fight transboundary crises like climate change and biodiversity loss. **Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences** echoed this call to action, adding that these are not just environmental but global justice issues, and that addressing them will require human rights protections.

Inger Andersen, Director General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature provided a brief background on international environmental governance, explaining that, to date, environmental treaties have essentially sought to allocate property rights, coordinating pollution or emissions allowances among countries depending on the environmental challenge in question. In contrast, the Global Pact for the Environment would establish rights and principles of environmental governance, including the right to live in a healthy environment, the polluter pays principle, and the non-regression principle.

Jamil Ahmad, Director of the UN Environment New York Office echoed Andersen's comments, noting that there are over 500 sectoral, regional, and non-binding agreements *related to* the environment, but none dedicated to the environment *per se*. According to **Yann Aguila, Chair of the Environmental Law Commission at Les Club des Juristes**, this has left international environmental governance like a state that has specific laws but no Constitution. Rather, a new environment-specific pact centered on a rights-based approach to the environment is necessary to unify and clarify existing agreements.

International Chamber of Commerce Secretary General John Denton called for any new environmental instrument to provide the regulatory clarity, consistency, and simplicity needed for companies to drive long-term sustainable growth. For that reason, he suggested that the private sector should be engaged proactively and constructively through the drafting process. **Carlos Salle, Director of Energy Policy and Climate Change at Iberdrola** agreed that corporate participation in Global Pact negotiations would be important, also to promote buy-in and create the changes in company culture needed to reorient practice toward sustainability. Because cultural changes are so important to promoting responsible corporate conduct, Salle reasoned, the rights to information, education, and participation included in the original Pact Blueprint would be particularly important to promote corporate alignment with the sustainable development agenda.

For **Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University**, the Global Pact will be essential to "bring clarity, fill gaps, and empower domestic judges to strengthen environmental protections." The planet demands nothing less.

Read on for more [perspectives on a Global Pact for the Environment](#).