

## Strengthening the link between human rights and climate change

Wendy Flannery rsm

The 28<sup>th</sup> July saw the historic adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of a resolution recognizing “The Right to a Healthy, Clean, and Sustainable Environment” as a basic and universal human right. The [resolution was adopted](#) by a vote of member states with 161 in favour, 8 abstaining, and no opposition, with over 100 states co-sponsoring the resolution. The UN Human Rights Council had [previously affirmed](#) “The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment” in October 2021. A General Assembly resolution is not legally binding but has immense political importance as a statement of principle and values.

This resolution was applauded by both human rights experts and advocates on climate change and sustainability as a monumental step forward in addressing the environmental crisis – affirming the indivisibility of human rights and of the well-being of humans and nature.

This recognition means more accountability from governments to ensure we live in a world with a safe and stable climate, a toxic-free environment, with clean air, access to safe water and adequate sanitation, healthy and sustainably produced food and thriving biodiversity and ecosystems.

The opportunity to strengthen the link between human rights and climate change will come up at this September’s UN General Assembly. The intergovernmental Pacific Islands Forum, including Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, [has endorsed a Vanuatu-led initiative to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](#) on climate change harm. If supported at the UNGA in September, the ICJ will be asked to **consider whether climate inaction is a breach of human rights**. An advisory opinion from the ICJ could put climate justice and human rights at the forefront of the climate change discussion and **drive highly industrialised countries like Australia to take stronger climate action**. A global alliance of over 1,500 civil society organisations in 130 countries is supporting the initiative. Can we ensure that more governments are willing to support this proposal?