

NEWS RELEASE



Ghana: Toxics exposure violating human rights, urgent action needed, says UN expert

ACCRA/GENEVA (13 December 2022) -- In the face of threats posed by toxic substances, there is an urgent need for Ghana to respect and guarantee the free and full exercise of human rights, a UN expert said today.

“Ghana should be commended for its leadership at the international level in strengthening multilateral agreements in the chemicals and waste cluster, and it is also leading the African Group in negotiations toward a legally binding agreement on plastic pollution,” the Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, Marcos Orellana, said in a [statement](#) at the conclusion of a 14-day visit to the country

“At the same time, there is weak implementation of laws concerning chemicals and wastes at the national level. This puts individuals at risk of serious human rights violations,” the Special Rapporteur said.

The toxic impacts of mercury use in small-scale gold mining, hazardous pesticides, plastics and e-waste exposures are particularly concerning, Orellana said.

“Ghana is on the receiving end of a global economy that seeks to externalise the costs of waste generation on poor developing countries. The result is exposure of workers lacking protective equipment to the hazardous substances released in the dismantling and recycling of e-wastes.”

At Agbogbloshie, one the world’s largest e-waste dumpsites, thousands of people living and working there are exposed to high levels of hazardous substances. “For a meagre income, children are leaving their schools to burn electronic cables for the extraction of copper,” Orellana said.

“Mercury use in small-scale mining is contaminating soils and water sources at a national scale, compromising the rights of present and future generations.”

The expert said the Government's National Action Plan on mercury is an important step but is not ambitious enough and does not include a phase-out date for mercury use.

"The Government should ban the trade and use in mercury, champion amendments to strengthen the Minamata Convention on mercury, and address mercury use as a form of environmental crime," Orellana said.

Plastic waste also is not properly managed. Plastics are covering beaches and burning in informal dumpsites all over the country. The National Plastic Waste Management Policy is important but effective implementation is lacking, he said. "For instance, Ghana should consider banning single-use plastics, reducing volumes of production and establishing extended producer responsibility schemes."

Several of the pesticides used in Ghana, such as paraquat and chlorpyrifos, are banned for use in Europe because they are hazardous to human health and the environment. "It is also alarming that one of the most widely used pesticides in the country is glyphosate, which is 'probably carcinogenic to humans', according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer," he said.

"I want to highlight the abhorrent double standards of countries that ban dangerous pesticides while allowing them to be produced and exported to developing countries. But Ghana also has a responsibility to protect the human rights of its population."

Orellana said the adoption of the 2021 to 2030 Strategic Plan for the sound management of chemicals and waste was cause for optimism and can help strengthen institutions and norms. Similarly, Ghana can build on its successful experience in addressing PCBs, per requirements of the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants.

"Ghana must take further steps to strengthen its legal framework and improve implementation and enforcement to guarantee the right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment," he said.

The Special Rapporteur will present a report with his findings and recommendations to the Human Rights Council in September 2023.

ENDS

Marcos A. Orellana, [Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes](#), was appointed by the Human Rights Council as of July 2020. Dr **Orellana** is an expert in international law and the law on human rights and the environment. His practice as legal advisor has included work with United Nations agencies, governments and non-governmental organizations, including on wastes and chemicals issues at the Basel and Minamata conventions, the UN Environment Assembly and the Human Rights Council. He has intervened in cases before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes and the World Trade Organization's Appellate Body. His practice in the climate space includes representing the eight-nations Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean in the negotiations of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and serving as senior legal advisor to the Presidency of the 25th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. He has extensive experience working with civil society around the world on issues concerning global environmental justice. He was the inaugural director of the Environment and Human Rights Division at Human Rights Watch. Previously he directed the trade and the human rights programs at the Center for International Environmental Law, and he co-chaired the UN Environment Program's civil society forum. He teaches International Environmental Law at the George Washington University School of Law and International Law at the American University Washington College of Law. Previously he has lectured in prominent universities around the world, including Melbourne, Pretoria, Geneva, and Guadalajara. He was a fellow at the University of Cambridge, visiting scholar with the Environmental Law Institute in Washington DC, and instructor professor of international law at the Universidad de Talca, Chile.

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