

# Environmental Defenders

## Current Legal Developments and Challenges

20 January 2023, Executive Academy, Foyer



According to the United Nations, environmental defenders are persons “defending environmental rights, including constitutional rights to a clean and healthy environment”. Environmental Defenders play a crucial role in the global fight against the climate and biodiversity crisis. However, harassment and even threats against environmental defenders present an issue of growing concern across the globe. This has led to new regulatory initiatives, such as the European Commission’s proposal for an Anti-SLAPP-Directive or the establishment of a “Rapid Response Mechanism for Environmental Defenders” under the Aarhus Convention. Our conference takes these developments as a point of departure to reflect on the multifaceted role the law plays for defending environmental rights. The panelists will present legal-doctrinal analyses of the relevant legal framework as well as socio-legal perspectives on environmental defenders and their perception of the law. Overall, we aim to contribute to future legal developments in the field and to a better understanding of the impact and social functions of law.

### LOCATION

WU Vienna  
Executive Academy  
Foyer (EA.0.024 Foyer)  
Welthandelsplatz 1  
1020 Vienna, Austria

To access the conference venue on Campus WU (Executive Academy, Foyer) please use **U2 subway station Messe-Prater**, exit Messe (5-10 walking minutes). Other options: Bus line 82A stop “Welthandelsplatz” (2-4 min); tram line 1 stop “Prater Hauptallee” (10-15 min).

Campus WU is accessible via multiple bike paths and has approximately 1,000 bike racks along its perimeter. City bike (Wien Mobil) sharing stations are located at the south entrance of Campus WU and at the subway stations Messe-Prater and Krieau.



### ORGANIZERS

WU Vienna  
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We aim to be certified as a Green Meeting with the Austrian Ecolabel!

# AGENDA

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**Friday, 20 January 2023**

WU, Executive Academy, Foyer

08:30 Registration

## 09:00 Opening of the Conference

Welcome Address

*Verena Madner, WU Vienna*

Opening Remarks

*Teresa Weber, WU Vienna*

## 09:30 Panel I: Protected or Threatened by the Law? Experiences of Environmental Defenders

The Global Perspective: The Environmental Justice Atlas

*Brototi Roy, Autonomous University of Barcelona / Central European University*

European Experiences: Justice & Environment

*Summer Kern, Justice & Environment*

The Local Perspective: Environmental Defenders in Austria

*Veronika Marhold, Ökobüro*

Discussion

11:00 Coffee Break

## 11:15 Panel II: International Instruments for the Protection of Environmental Defenders

Environmental Defenders and the UN System

*Marianna Bolshakova, Regional Coordinator, Environmental Law and Governance, United Nations Environment Programme*

Aarhus Rapid Response Mechanism for Environmental Defenders and the Special Rapporteur for Environmental Defenders

*Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur for Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention*

Protection of Environmental Defenders under the Escazú Agreement

*Pablo Peña Alegría, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú*

Discussion

12:45 Lunch Break

## 13:45 Panel III: Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPP)

SLAPPs: Recent Examples

*Charlie Holt, Greenpeace International / CASE Coalition against SLAPP in Europe*

The EU's Anti-SLAPP Package

*Zsuzsanna Belenyessy, Legal Officer, Directorate-General for the Environment, European Commission*

SLAPPs and Fundamental Rights

*Lien Stolle, Human Rights Centre, Ghent University*

Discussion

15:15 Coffee Break

## 15:30 Panel IV: Civil Disobedience – Is it a Legitimate Strategy?

Civil Disobedience: Conceptual Issues

*Megan Blomfield, University of Sheffield*

Civil Disobedience and Direct Action as Tools of Social Movements

*Felix Butzlaff, WU Vienna*

The Climate Necessity Defense

*Ingeborg Zerbes, University of Vienna*

Discussion

## 17:00 General discussion

## 17:45 Conclusion

Closing Remarks

*Teresa Weber, WU Vienna*

## Registration:

<https://www.wu.ac.at/en/lawgov/events/environmental-defenders/>