



ASIAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE
FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LAW



POLITICAL SCIENCE
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY



Rights of Nature and Human Rights in Southeast Asia

Legal advances, development policies
and new ontologies

Photo by Patrik M. Loeff (Lao Cai, Vietnam)

1st December 2025

Faculty of Political Science,
Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

Conference - December 1st, 2025

Rights of Nature and Human Rights in Southeast Asia.

Legal advances, development policies and new ontologies

Our planet and humanity are confronting multiple, interconnected ecological crises, from climate change and biodiversity loss to rising levels of pollution. Despite the proliferation of policies, laws, directives, and international treaties intended to protect the environment, the planet's health continues to decline. In this context of faltering environmental governance, one emerging proposal is to embrace a new legal paradigm: the recognition of the rights of nature.

This approach challenges the dominant, human-centered view that treats nature primarily as an object, rooted in anthropocentric assumptions of a separation between humans and the rest of the natural world. Instead, the rights of nature movement advances an alternative perspective: one that sees the natural world as an interconnected system of diverse, interdependent forms of life, encompassing the biosphere in its entirety—both human and non-human.

In light of recent progress in debates and decision-making aimed at bringing human rights and the rights of nature closer together, Southeast Asia has witnessed the emergence of several initiatives. While the formal recognition of the “rights of nature” has not yet taken shape at the regional level, multilateral dialogues (ASEAN, OHCHR/ESCAP) are increasingly opening up to these issues. In this respect, the ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment (ADER), adopted at the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in October 2025, marks a historic step in integrating environmental rights into ASEAN's human rights framework¹.

Nevertheless, civil society organizations have voiced serious concerns about the drafting process, citing short public input periods, limited translation, and minimal consultation². Indigenous representation is particularly lacking, despite references to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)³. Also, progress toward formal recognition of the Rights of Nature remains uneven and slowed by institutional inertia and limited inclusivity. Sustained pressure, reform, and meaningful participation—especially from indigenous and grassroots voices—will be essential to transform current momentum into lasting rights recognition.

Challenges thus remain, particularly regarding the drafting of texts and their legal force. Potential advances include stronger recognition of Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs), the establishment of binding mechanisms, and enhanced accountability. These legal and governance

¹ <https://asean.org/joint-press-release-of-aichr-asoen-interface-consultation-on-the-proposed-asean-declaration-on-the-right-to-a-safe-clean-healthy-and-sustainable-environment/>

² Carolyn Cowan, “Rights groups call for greater public input in ASEAN environmental rights framework”, News Mongabay, 8 May 2024, news.mongabay.com

³ Stockholm Environment Institute Asia, “Listening to the perspectives and priorities of Indigenous Peoples on the ASEAN Declaration on Environmental Rights”, <https://www.sei.org/projects/ips-asean-declaration-of-environmental-rights/?utm>

efforts can be further enriched by political, geographical, and anthropological perspectives⁴. Against this backdrop, this conference will bring together governance actors, civil society representatives and researchers, to share recent progress and explore future challenges for the development of legislative frameworks linking nature rights and human rights.

Conference Approach and Objectives

This conference will focus on the triptych of conventional human rights, the right to a healthy environment, and the rights of nature—analyzing their interdependence and exploring how development actors can approach these issues from an ecocentric perspective⁵.

The conference will first examine how development policies intersect with the incorporation of the rights of nature into national environmental regulations. Particular attention will be given to the challenges of articulating human rights and the rights of nature in Southeast Asia, especially the “inter-legalities” arising from the coexistence of diverse normative systems and the potential conflicts between these categories of rights. Such conflicts may be analyzed both at a theoretical and normative level—for instance, through questions of hierarchy of norms—and at a practical level, notably in relation to territorial dynamics such as green colonialism or land grabbing, often at the expense of the customary or informal rights of local populations.

Another focus of the conference will explore how the rights of nature are defined and constructed, the actors driving this process, and the legal strategies employed—whether through case law, regulation, or constitutional reform. Particular attention will be given to territorial contexts, especially those marked by conflict, where narratives and power dynamics between actors crystallize into the legal recognition of new rights for natural entities.

Finally, a third axis will address the epistemological generativity of the rights of nature by examining the personality and identity of their objects. The discussions will ask: to what extent does granting rights to a natural entity foster the creation of new ecosystemic, landscape, territorial, and cartographic assemblages, thereby contributing to an ontological transformation of the entity itself?

⁴ Jérémie Gilbert, Farid Lamara and Sarah Hayes, Le nexus "droits humains" et "droits de la nature". Débats, tensions et complémentarités [The nexus between ‘human rights’ and ‘rights of nature’. Debates, tensions and complementarities], *Papiers de recherche de l’AFD*, AFD, pp. 1-44.

⁵ For several perspectives on this approach, see the seminar “Des droits de la nature dans le Sud global” [Rights of Nature in the Global South], <https://univ-droit.fr/recherche/actualites-de-la-recherche/manifestations/51805-des-droits-de-la-nature-dans-le-sud-global?utm>.

TIMELINE

Monday, 1st December 2025, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University

**Coorganized by the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC),
Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University,
and the Asian Research Institute for Environmental Law (ARIEL)**

Opening Session: 9am – 9:20am

- Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University: Prakob Siriprakob (Prof., Dean)
- Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia: Jérémy Jammes (Prof., Director)
- Asian Research Institute for Environmental Law: Matthew Baird (Director)

Panel 1: Policy and Governance 9:20am – 10:55am

Introductory Keynote: Matthew Baird (Asian Research Institute for Environmental Law)
Moderator: Catherine Baron (Prof., Sciences Po Toulouse)

- Siriporn Sriaram (Senior Project Officer, Thailand & Regional, AFD, Thailand)
- Hans van Willenswaard (Advisor, School for Wellbeing Studies and Research)
- Romchat Wachirarattanakornkul (OHCHR)
- Rocky Guzman (ARIEL)

Discussion: 10:40am – 11:15am

Break: 11:15am – 11:30am

Working Groups (45 mins): 11:30AM – 12:15PM

(coordinated by Matthew Baird and Rocky Guzman, ARIEL)

Parallel Working Group 1: Policy and Governance

Parallel Working Group 2: Policy and Governance

Potential Guide Questions:

- How can ASEAN Member States translate the Declaration's principles into national laws, policies, and institutional frameworks? What concrete measures can be taken
- In developing a regional action plan or roadmap to guide implementation, what key components or mechanisms should it include?
- How can civil society, academia, and other stakeholders be meaningfully engaged in supporting the Declaration's implementation?

Lunch: 12:15PM – 1:15PM

Panel 2: Research and Advocacy: 1:15pm – 2:30pm

Introductory Keynote: Bernard Formoso, Université Paul Valéry de Montpellier – France:
“Human and Environment Rights: Trends and Challenges for the Future”

Moderator: IRASEC/ARIEL

- Catherine Baron (Prof., Sciences Po Toulouse)
- Dayoon Kim (Research Associate, Stockholm Environment Institute)
- Julien Claude (Prof. and Research Fellow, IRD) – "The challenge of fine scale biodiversity dynamic surveys for adaptive policies in wildlife conservation in Southeast Asia"
- Mike Hayes (Lecturer, Mahidol University)

Discussion: 2:30PM – 3:00PM

Break: 3:00 – 3:15PM

Working Groups (45 mins): 3:15pm – 4:00pm

(coordinated by Matthew Baird and Rocky Guzman, ARIEL)

Parallel Working Group 1: Research and Advocacy

Parallel Working Group 2: Research and Advocacy

Potential Guide Questions:

- How are the rights of nature currently recognized or interpreted in national constitutions, laws, or judicial decisions across the region?
- What research is needed for environmental rights of nature and rights of nature for the ASEAN region?
- What strategies can strengthen recognition, implementation, and public awareness of environmental rights and the rights of nature?

Report back 4 – 4:30PM

Closing 4:30 – 4:45PM

Final words: IRASEC, Chulalongkorn U. and ARIEL