



Permanent Mission of the
International Union for Conservation of Nature
to the United Nations

70th Commission on the Status of Women

General Debate

Statement delivered by the Permanent Observer of IUCN to the UN, Dr Sofie Jaffe

New York, 17 March 2026

Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

As the world confronts the interlinked crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and rising inequality, gender equality is not only a human right—it is a prerequisite for effective and lasting environmental action.

IUCN's global research shows that gender inequality continues to limit the resilience of communities, the sustainability of ecosystems, and the success of environmental policy. At the same time, the evidence is clear: when women and girls have equal rights, access, voice, and leadership, environmental outcomes improve, climate ambition rises, and societies become more resilient, peaceful and prosperous.

The theme of the 70th Commission on the Status of Women, is particularly relevant to IUCN's work on addressing gender-based violence linked to the environment and access to and control over natural resources as well as our work to protect and defend women environmental rights defenders. IUCN's research has documented the connections between environmental pressures, resource scarcity, and increased risks of gender-based violence. We know that gender-based violence is used as a systemic tool of control to reinforce power imbalances, at times violently discouraging or stopping women from speaking out for their rights. Environmental action must include mitigation, prevention and response measures, ensuring that women and girls can benefit from conservation efforts and participate safely and meaningfully in environmental decision-making.

Even as major environmental frameworks acknowledge the importance of environmental human rights defenders, their safety continues to deteriorate. Since the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, more than 1,500 defenders have been murdered—an approximate average of one every other day. In 2023 alone, nearly half of those killed were Indigenous Peoples and 12% were women.

Together, these statistics reflect a deeply rooted pattern of gendered and racialized violence. This is not only a matter of environmental justice—it is a human rights crisis.

As a rights-based Union, IUCN is committed to strengthening protections and advancing justice for women and women environmental human rights defenders. We are supporting environmental organizations and community-lead efforts to address, mitigate and respond to

gender-based violence in the context of environmental conservation and the protection of Indigenous women environmental human rights defenders.

We call on Member States to take urgent and coordinated action to protect women environmental human rights defenders. This includes facilitating their access to justice and meaningful participation in environmental decision-making processes; creating policies that protect them and recognizing the vital role that they play in their communities.

Achieving gender equality is not separate from environmental ambition—it is central to it.

Thank you.
