

10 March 2020

Dear Members of the World Commission on Environmental Law,

In light of rapid developments in the global health risks posed by COVID-19 and increasing complications for travel, we write to inform you that that the organizing committee has decided to **postpone** the 2nd World Environmental Law Congress (Congress), the 3rd General Assembly for the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment, and associated events planned from 23 to 27 March 2020 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

We trust that you understand that this difficult decision was not taken lightly and only after full consultation with the IUCN Secretariat, the World Commission on Environmental Law Steering Committee, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment (GJIE) leadership, the International Council on Environmental Law (ICEL), and other partners, especially the Brazilian judiciary, bar associations, and government representatives, who have all been working very hard to ensure the success of the various important events during the week.

The Congress organizers had already arranged for health precautions to be taken during the event, including on-site medical care, sanitizers, temperature checks, and the attendance of a public health expert in epidemiology. However, recent events have since overtaken even these substantial planning efforts.

Our decision aligns with and is informed by the UNEP announcement on 9 March 2020 that given the evolving COVID-19 situation it could not proceed with the three-day First Global Meeting of National Focal Points to the Fifth Montevideo Programme on the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo Meeting). The Montevideo Meeting anchored our week of events and that would have brought in global participants from over 100 countries. In addition, the Brazilian health authorities have announced additional measures, if confirmed, for arriving travelers that would have posed new difficulties for our participants. These measures are, of course, understandable and part of the increasingly complex and global challenges associated with COVID-19.

We will update everyone on the future date of the postponed Congress and related events as soon as the global health situation stabilizes, and more details are known.

In closing, we wish to thank all of you for your enthusiastic contributions and commitments to the Congress and related events. Whether you are a high-level speaker, session co-chair, stream coordinator, moot court team member or advisor, academic paper presenter, or an interested attendee, your participation is what made – and will make – this Congress and related events a major milestone in the development of the environmental rule of law. We also especially wish to thank our colleagues on the Congress planning team from around the world for their dedication and intensive work on preparing for the Congress and related events for many months. With everyone's continued dedication to our common purpose, the significant time and effort invested will not be lost but carried forward and bear fruit in the near future.

The organizing committee is deeply grateful for your commitment to the issues we all care about, and for your friendship and understanding. With shared optimism, we are unveiling here our motto for the future Congress: “Environmental Rule of Law: One Planet, One Future.”

Sincerely,

Denise Antolini
WCEL, Deputy Chair
International Union for the Conservation of Nature

Arnold Kreilhuber
UN Environment Programme
Acting Director, Law Division