

A close-up portrait of a woman with a serious expression, looking directly at the camera. She has a small pink cloth tied around her head, and a large, heavy bundle of green sticks and branches is balanced on top of her head. She is wearing a black and white checkered shirt and a red beaded necklace. The background is a soft-focus natural setting with more greenery.

WWF POLICY STATEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Introduction

WWF seeks to advance our mission - a world in which both people and nature thrive – on the fundamental principle that positive outcomes for both people and nature depend on firmly anchoring and integrating human rights into conservation practices. While the protection of human rights lies with governments (i.e. as the ‘duty-bearer’), WWF recognizes that businesses and organizations, including ours, have an important role in contributing to positive human rights outcomes.

Building on WWF’s earlier commitments as a member of the [Conservation Initiative on Human Rights](#), this policy statement articulates WWF’s commitments and key requirements on human rights. Together with the associated policies on [Indigenous Peoples](#), [Gender](#), [Child Safeguarding](#) and the [WWF Environmental & Social Safeguards Framework \(ESSF\)](#) – it forms part of our network’s core standards.

WWF is guided in our efforts by internationally proclaimed human rights as contained in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, UN Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and other applicable international and regional instruments¹. Further, WWF is committed to respecting customary rights and additional rights under national law, provided that they are not inconsistent with international human rights principles².

Adherence to core standards is mandatory across our network and underpinned by our core values of courage, integrity, respect and collaboration. The human rights policy statement applies to all of WWF’s network and work, including place-based projects, partnerships, policy advocacy, communications, institutional operations and other initiatives.

Principles

Implementation of our human rights commitments is driven by WWF’s use of **seven guiding principles** to progressively put these into practice by **employing a human rights-based approach** across all our work. The principles are:

1. **Respect human rights.** Respect internationally proclaimed human rights and do not contribute to infringements of human rights while pursuing our mission
2. **Advocate for governments, as duty-bearers, to fulfil their obligations** to rights holders

¹ Including, but not limited to, the nine UN Core International Human Rights Instruments, ILO Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, the ILO core labour standards, and the regional Aarhus and Escazú conventions on access to environmental information, participation in decision-making and access to justice. As defined in international human rights instruments, “human rights” are universal, inalienable, indivisible and interdependent fundamental freedoms. Most human rights are ascribed to individuals, but some protect individuals as part of a collective or are exercised collectively (e.g., the rights of indigenous peoples). WWF also recognizes the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment (R2E) and is a signatory to the campaign for its universal recognition.

² “Customary rights” are generally not covered by international law (other than those of indigenous peoples), but upholding and respecting local communities’ rights to manage or use lands, waters and resources is critical to many conservation initiatives.

3. **Promote human rights within our work.** Promote the protection and realization of human rights within the scope of our activities, including respect for the right of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes for Indigenous Peoples³
4. **Identify and mitigate negative human rights impacts.** Ensure that instances of potential and actual negative human rights impacts connected to our activities are identified and appropriate steps are taken to either prevent or mitigate those impacts
5. **Help protect the vulnerable.** Make special efforts to prevent harm to those who are vulnerable to infringements of their rights, and to support the protection and fulfilment of their rights within the scope of our activities
6. **Encourage good governance.** Support the improvement of governance systems that can secure the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the context of our work on conservation and sustainable natural resource use, including elements such as legal, policy, and institutional frameworks, and procedures for equitable participation and accountability
7. **Support rights holders** to exercise their substantive and procedural rights and to ensure that the accountability for upholding these rights is understood. To help to identify social and power inequalities, capacity constraints and additional forms of injustice that constrain the exercise of legitimate rights, including inequities in the distribution of environmental costs and benefits.

WWF's own and managed activities

In order to promote and respect human rights in relation to WWF's activities - both direct and those which it manages - WWF will:

- Develop and implement human rights due diligence in all landscapes and seascapes where we work to identify and mitigate the human rights risks that our work may pose, through systematic application of the ESSF and, where necessary, additional measures
- Mainstream gender as a cross cutting consideration across all offices, strategies, and activities. Support gender-responsive actions and/or gender-transformative interventions
- Identify risks of discrimination, including the threat of violence and take steps to address those risks
- Promote and uphold the rights and the welfare of children, and safeguard them against actions that place them at risk of any form of violence or harm
- Make specific efforts to protect those most vulnerable to rights infringements. Put in place safeguards to identify and avoid involuntary resettlement and ensure that any restriction of access to legally titled areas and/or customarily used resources is voluntary, mitigated and compensated

³ Where potentially affected peoples are not officially recognised as Indigenous, but are peoples who are historically, socially and culturally distinct and have customary practices that are inextricably linked to nature, the principles of FPIC will be extended to them. Said peoples may include tribal, ethnic minority, nomadic, hunter-gatherer and pastoralist (nomadic, semi-nomadic, transhumance) communities.

- Conduct context specific security and conflict assessments in relation to all place based activities, as detailed in the ESSF
- Establish grievance and remedy mechanisms and communicate these mechanisms to affected rights holders and
- Ensure that our human rights commitments are consistently reflected in our communications, including by elevating the voices of rights holders.

Partnership

Partnerships are key to WWF's work. In order to promote human rights through its partnerships, WWF will:

- Practice and advocate for **human rights principles in engagements with partners**. Assess the human rights records and policies of potential partners, and potential impacts of initiatives proposed; and include compliance with specified requirements in agreements
- In our relationships with governments and law enforcement and security entities, ensure written agreements include compliance with **human rights standards and recognised good practices for law enforcement** and security
- Through our **partnerships with the public and private sector**, promote the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* and human rights due diligence and
- Build **partnerships with other civil society organizations** on principles of equity, organizational autonomy and mutual accountability.

Promotion and advocacy

WWF will seek to promote and advocate for human rights through the following actions:

- Promote **equality, equity and social justice** within the scope of our projects, programmes, partnerships, advocacy and other influencing work at multiple levels
- Promote and contribute to **enabling conditions** and the **improvement of governance systems** that can secure human rights, provide for equitable and inclusive participation – particularly for groups who tend to be under-represented – and foster accountability
- Support and advocate for the rights of Indigenous Peoples to **access, use, own and make decisions** over land and natural resource management, including respect for the principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)
- Support the **capacities and opportunities for rights holders to represent themselves** in policy influencing and decision-making spaces
- Encourage and support **respect for customary rights to areas and resources** - whether or not they are formally recognized – and compliance with national laws and regulations that strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights

- **Speak to violations against environmental human rights defenders** and to the responsibility of the duty-bearers at local and national level, without putting at risk staff or partners.

Transparency, accountability and resourcing

It is essential to build transparency and accountability into a human rights approach. WWF will:

- Disclose information on risk assessments and mitigation measures developed through the human rights due diligence process, and provide **access to [grievance mechanisms](#)** as required by the respective ESSF standards
- **Regularly monitor, evaluate and report on** the implementation of our human rights commitments and progress of our risk mitigation measures, including **independent monitoring and review** by [the Office of the Ombudsperson](#).

To ensure **sufficient resources, capacity, expertise** and **adequate institutional arrangements** to implement our human rights standards across all operations, WWF will:

- Ensure the availability and inclusion of **expert staff**, including security, social and human rights specialists
- Provide **training on WWF's commitments on human rights**, tailored to different staff responsibilities and facilitate ongoing learning and adaptation and
- Appoint a **Human Rights Advisory Group**, composed of external experts.