



Center for Democratic and
Environmental Rights

Press Release: Ireland Parliament Advances Rights of Nature Constitutional Amendment *CDER Testifies Before Parliamentary Committee*

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Today, the [Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action](#) of Ireland's National Parliament (Oireachtas) recommended that the Irish Government advance a national referendum on a constitutional amendment to enshrine the rights of nature in the country's constitution.

This significant move by the Joint Committee comes in response to a report from the Irish [Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss](#), which recommended that the rights of nature be enshrined within Ireland's Constitution to protect biodiversity. The Citizens' Assembly report was issued in April of this year.

The [Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights \(CDER\)](#) provided input and expertise to the Parliament's Joint Committee.

CDER's Mari Margil and Thomas Linzey were invited to appear before the Joint Committee in October. Their testimony focused on how the rights of nature has advanced through law making and court decisions, beginning in the United States, to today including laws and court rulings in Canada, Bolivia, Colombia, Uganda, and elsewhere, addressing urgent environmental crises that existing environmental laws fail to address.

Margil and Linzey also shared their experience consulting with Ecuador's Constituent Assembly as it drafted a new constitution in 2008, and how the rights of nature constitutional provisions have been used to protect Ecuador's natural environment. The new constitution was approved through a nationwide vote, making [Ecuador](#) the first and

only country in the world to have protected the rights of nature through their national constitution.

In their testimony, they explained why the rights of nature is needed. As Margil explained in her opening statement to the Joint Committee:

“Environmental laws around the world treat nature as simply a thing, a resource – with laws regulating its use. As such, environmental laws *legalize* environmental harm, including the destruction of ecosystems and pollution of land, air, and water.

Under such laws, today we face global environmental crises – including ecosystem collapse, soaring species extinction rates and biodiversity loss, and climate change.

In the face of this, civil society, governments, and courts are recognizing that we need to make a fundamental shift in humankind’s relationship with the natural world. That we can no longer – as Colombia’s Constitutional Court put it – act as a “ruler” of nature – that we must recognize that we are part of nature.

This means changing how we govern ourselves toward nature, and how nature itself is treated under law.”

The full opening statement may be found below.

In response to the Joint Committee’s report, CDER’s Margil stated, “We congratulate chairperson Brian Leddin and the Joint Committee for its work and taking this important step forward toward enshrining the rights of nature within Ireland’s Constitution. Further, we look forward to the Government and Parliament’s next steps to protect the rights of nature, and offer whatever assistance we can in this process.”

CDER’s Linzey added, “We wish to thank the many citizens, experts, and civil society organizations who have engaged Parliament and the Citizens’ Assembly. Direct citizen involvement with democratic processes is essential to protecting the natural environment and the rights of nature.”

CDER further acknowledges the contributions of our partners, including Dr. Peter Doran of Queens University Law School who has been an important voice in supporting the rights of nature before the Citizens’ Assembly and the Joint Committee.

If the Irish Parliament puts forward a national referendum on the rights of nature and it is approved by the people of Ireland, Ireland would become the first country within the European Union to enshrine the rights of nature within a national constitution.

Further resources

Joint Committee, Report: Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action report issued December 14, 2023, on the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, with recommendations on the rights of nature, may be found at [this link](#)

Video: Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action hearing on the rights of nature, October 17, 2023 – watch the hearing at [this link](#)

Citizens' Assembly, Report: Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss – read the report at [this link](#)

CDER Opening Statement: CDER's opening statement to the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action may be found in full below.

To learn more about the rights of nature, including rights of nature laws, court rulings, and enforcement efforts around the world, visit CDER's website: centerforenvironmentalrights.org.

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