

**ELAW**

AUTUMN 2025

advocate

1412 Pearl Street | Eugene, Oregon 97401 | USA | (541) 687-8454 | elawus@elaw.org | www.elaw.org

IN THIS ISSUE:**ELAW Welcomes New Executive Director**
(pg. 1)**Community-Based Climate Strategies**
(pg. 2)**Resounding Victory for Sri Lanka**
(pg. 3)**ASEAN and UNOC3 Conferences**
(pg. 4)**Dang Dinh Bach Wins Human Rights Award While in Prison**
(pg. 5)**New ELAW Team Members**
(pg. 5)**ELAW Fellows**
(pgs. 6-7)**Summer Interns**
(pg. 7)**Legacy Giving: Guardians of Future Generations**
(pg. 8)**ELAW Board**Amy Shannon
PresidentCarla García Zendejas
Vice PresidentRoanne Bank
Treasurer

Mike Axline

John Bonine

Manuela Huso

Diana McCaulay

Kristen McDonald

Cleven Mmari

Monica Moore

Kathy Mulvey

Jasper Teulings

Alison Wright

ELAW helps communities speak out for clean air, clean water, and a healthy planet. We are a global alliance of attorneys, scientists, and other advocates collaborating across borders to build a sustainable, just future.

EDITOR: MAGGIE KEENAN

GRAPHIC DESIGN: HELIOS CREATIVE

PRINTED BY: QSL PRINTING

Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper with soy-based inks.

ELAW Welcomes New Executive Director

After 34 years at the helm, ELAW Executive Director Bern Johnson retired in June, passing the torch to Dr. Lalanath de Silva.

"I have known Lalanath for many years—he is a public interest lawyer from Sri Lanka, and I first met him there through ELAW work years ago," says Bern.

Lalanath brings deep experience working with communities as a public interest lawyer before local courts, administrative tribunals, international adjudicatory bodies, and independent accountability mechanisms. Having spent much of his early career as a litigator, he also served in leadership roles at international nonprofits working to secure environmental and social rights, including Transparentem and the World Resources Institute.

"Lalanath brings a depth of understanding and appreciation for the ELAW network, rooted in his own experiences as an advocate in different contexts," says Amy Shannon, ELAW Board Chair. "The Board considered an impressive and diverse set of candidates. We are excited to have Lalanath as ELAW's new Executive Director and to support him as he guides ELAW into the future."

Together with a small handful of other early recruits, Bern built ELAW from a small organization in the early 90s to today's global team of 30 working with hundreds of partners in 80 countries.

Lalanath lives in Washington, D.C. and will be spending significant time in Eugene, Oregon.



New ELAW Executive Director Dr. Lalanath de Silva.

"I loved working alongside champions for a healthy planet from across the globe. We helped win victories for communities and ecosystems and built a powerful corps of environmental advocates."

Bern Johnson



ELAW

Dr. Lalanath de Silva
Executive Director

Lori Maddox
Associate Director

Law

Jennifer Gleason
Law Program Director

Pedro León Gutiérrez
Law Program Associate Director

Leticia Aleixo
Attorney

Jennifer Castello
Attorney

Érick Kassongo
Attorney

Anyá Mintz
Attorney

Genee Mislant-Tomboc
Attorney

Bernard Ngaliem
Africa Law Associate

Haley Rowlands
Law Fellow

William 'BJ' Schulte
Attorney

Alejandra Serrano Pavón
Attorney, Marine and Coastal

Science

Dr. Mark Chernaik
Science Program Director

Dr. Johnnie Chamberlin
Climate

Dr. Melissa Garren
Marine Biology

Dr. Rye Howard
Public Health

Dr. Meche Lu
Human Geography,
Environmental Monitoring Lead

Dr. Fernanda Salinas
Ecology

Dr. Gilles Wendling
Hydrogeology

Dr. Bree Yednock
Marine Ecology

Defending Defenders

Luciano Coco Pastrana
Attorney

Grace Hwa
Attorney

Charis Kamphuis
Attorney

Economics

Dr. Megan Egler
Ecological Economist

Network Support and Communications

Karen Guillory
Outreach Manager

Colleen Keane
Network Support Coordinator

Maggie Keenan
Communications Director &
Fellows Program Coordinator

Administration

Erica Dallman
Program Assistant

Zachary Dolan
Grant Finance Manager

Amanda Parkes
Accounting Manager

Matt Pugh
IT Coordinator

Community-Based Climate Strategies – a Solid Return on Investments**Community-Based Climate Strategies—a Solid Return on Investments**

Dr. Lalanath de Silva, Executive Director

More than 90 people died in a flash flood on the Guadalupe River in Texas. Of the dead, 27 were young girls asleep at a summer camp. Wildfires destroyed neighborhoods in Los Angeles and floods ravaged impoverished villages in Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka during this year's monsoons. Climate change is exacerbating these natural disasters, which are becoming more intense. The loss and damage costs run to billions of US dollars.

Protecting the climate is the leading challenge of our time. ELAW partners around the world are working in their home countries to ensure that communities who suffer the worst impacts from climate change have a seat at the table and a voice in the room, and the tools they need to win victories for a healthy planet.

Will the interventions of ELAW partners, hand-in-hand with local community members, add up? Together, can we help save the environment, and mitigate and adapt to climate change? Yes, we can!

Public interest environmental litigation and interventions around the world create new jurisprudence, new obligations, and innovative remedies, while stopping pollution, improving or halting poorly planned projects, and bringing relief to communities. They take root like a little acorn and grow into mighty oaks.

For example, ELAW partners have won judgments from the courts of several countries requiring climate change impacts to be considered in environmental impact assessments when designing and approving projects. Other ELAW partners have stopped the unsustainable exploitation of forests by companies and governments that help reduce the impact of climate change and build community resiliency.

ELAW supports international and regional efforts that provide infrastructure, policy, and financial support for climate change mitigation. Yet, we also need strong collective action at a local level to ensure that these policies have teeth. That is why it is critical for governments and philanthropists to support local action to protect and adapt to the changing climate.

Similarly, national governments may draw up adaptation plans and even fund them. However, it takes local, provincial, and state governments, in consultation with communities and civil society, to turn those plans into action through behavioral changes, zoning, planning, and permitting. It takes the development and implementation of local engineering and technological and nature-based

solutions to successfully prevent and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

In a recent publication titled "Changing the Game," Sam Greenberg, Arushi Desai, and Jessica Kaplan argue that "community-based strategies can yield meaningful mitigation impacts with strong returns on investment." They analyzed 15 case studies from the US and Canada to understand the carbon mitigation impact and return on investment (ROI) of community-based climate strategies.

According to their estimates, efforts studied in the US and Canada will "mitigate 1 to 8 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO_{2e}) by 2030, with some mitigating significantly more," with a "cost per effort well under \$1 of local philanthropic investment per MTCO_{2e} mitigated through 2030."

The US and some European governments are rolling back hard-won climate change mitigation and adaptation commitments. This means ELAW partners around the world need to amplify efforts to stop these roll backs, develop new legal and campaign strategies, make the business case why rollbacks are counter-productive, and help shift the narrative in favor of environmental advocates.

ELAW partners are grassroots leaders that communities rely upon for guidance and inspiration. Our partners are key to strengthening the rule of law and the growth of social movements that trigger politicians to adopt supportive climate change policies and laws.

For example, if we look at just five of the cases ELAW has collaborated on over the last two years with local lawyers in Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa, 1.1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions will be avoided if the cases are successful. Perhaps as important, this work with our partners helps elevate community priorities and drive government action to address adaptation.

Mother Nature is delivering bigger and more frequent disasters, but we are building a corps of grassroots advocates that gives us hope amidst the changing climate for effective mitigation and adaptation measures.

There is no quick and easy fix for the climate crisis. There are far too many deeply entrenched vested interests and billions of dollars that feed the political world to prop up fossil fuels.

Building the ELAW network has taken decades and we are now perfectly positioned to grow those efforts, change the narrative in favor of the environment, stop the roll backs, and galvanize communities and their interests.

Protecting the climate is the leading challenge of our time. ELAW partners around the world are working in their home countries to ensure that communities who suffer the worst impacts from climate change have a seat at the table and a voice in the room, and the tools they need to win victories for a healthy planet.

Resounding Victory for Sri Lanka



The X-Press Pearl cargo ship, near Colombo Port, Sri Lanka. PHOTO: Xinhua/Alamy

In July, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling, ordering a Singaporean shipping company and related parties to pay US\$1 billion in initial compensation for environmental damage.

In late May 2021, the X-Press Pearl cargo ship caught fire off the coast of Sri Lanka. Twelve days later, it sank, causing one of the worst ever maritime disasters. More than 1,680 metric tons of plastic pellets, also known as nurdles, spilled into Sri Lanka's turquoise waters.

"It caused unprecedented devastation to the marine environment of Sri Lanka, resulting in loss, damage, harm, and injury to the marine environment—the unparalleled treasure trove of marine ecosystems, to marine life of flora and fauna, and to the coral reefs," the judgment stated.

The Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ) and several others filed the case, seeking cleanup efforts and compensation for fishing communities. CEJ called on the ELAW network for scientific support, examples of damages sought in other marine disasters, and more.

This landmark ruling will send ripples through the shipping industry. The first installment of \$250 million was ordered to be paid by September 23, 2025. A further \$500 million should be paid within six months of the judgment, and the final \$250 million is due within one year.

The Court upheld and applied the "polluter pays" principle, asserting that it had become part of the law of Sri Lanka. Additionally, the Court established a Compensation Commission and a Restoration Committee of experts with mandates to continue assessing ongoing damage to the environment and ways to restore it. The Court indicated that it would remain possessed of the case and that further compensation may be assessed against the shipping company in the future.

On August 15, Lloyd's List (a London-based large shipping Association) reported that Chief Executive James Bean at London P&I Club said: "The court has taken what began as a rights-based

claim against the Sri Lankan government and used it as a basis to unilaterally impose liability on our member and their agents seemingly without due process."

Meanwhile, Hemantha Withanage, CEJ Board Chair, says that this is a significant victory for CEJ and the people of Sri Lanka, as the polluters attempted to minimize liability through the Admiralty Court in the UK, despite the serious harm caused to local communities and the environment.

Congratulations to Dr. Ravindranath Dabare, one of the lead counsel in the case, and the CEJ team for this inspiring win that will reverberate around the globe!



Naval personnel remove debris from the X-Press Pearl cargo ship at Negombo Beach, Sri Lanka. PHOTO: Imago/Alamy

ASEAN and UNOC3 Conferences Bring Partners Together



5th ASEAN Environmental Law Conference | Bali, Indonesia | July 7-9, 2025

Southeast Asian nations face enormous challenges protecting communities and fragile ecosystems from the changing climate, short-sighted coastal development, polluting industries, and other threats. In July, ELAW partners in Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam joined ELAW Attorneys Genee Mislang and BJ Schulte in Bali, Indonesia, to share their expertise and advance their work at the 5th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Environmental Law Conference.

The conference focused on measures to accelerate climate action, strengthen governance and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, and support the recognition of environmental rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. The

topics in plenary and breakout sessions included oceans, forests, biodiversity, plastic pollution, waste management, and the protection of environmental human rights defenders and Indigenous peoples.

The conference honored ELAW partner Gloria “Golly” Estenzo Ramos as the ASEAN Environmental Lawyer of the Year, a meaningful recognition of her lifelong dedication to environmental advocacy and justice.

Many thanks to the organizations that made this gathering possible: Asian Research Institute for Environmental Law, Indonesian Center for Environmental Law, LAWASIA, Greenpeace Southeast Asia, ASEAN Youth Forum, and Raoul Wallenberg Institute.

“Meeting in person made it possible to deepen discussion of these topics even during breaks and to create and enhance collaboration with partners in the region.”

Genee Mislang, ELAW Attorney

Third United Nations Oceans Conference (UNOC3) | Nice, France | June 9-13, 2025

ELAW Team members and partners gathered in Nice, France, in June for the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3). The week featured plenaries with UN delegates, ocean action panels, a public exposition space, and over 450 topical side events spread across the city and online.

Members of ELAW’s Marine Working Group (MWG) hosted over 20 side events highlighting human rights, small-scale fisheries, sustainable ocean foods, coral reef protection, marine protected areas, impacts of land reclamation and development, and bridging science policy to action. Many side events by ELAW partners emphasized threats from the expansion of oil and gas projects in the ocean—a topic largely absent from the official conference agenda.

“We formed new and deeper connections among MWG members, public interest lawyers, our Law and Science Teams, civil society, UN Delegates and Special Rapporteurs, and funders supporting ocean work,” says Dr. Bree Yednock, ELAW Scientist.

The MWG has 92 members from 32 countries and meets monthly to catalyze strategies for coastal community and marine protection around the world. Following UNOC3, Humay Abdulghafoor (SaveMaldives) led a reflection session for the broader MWG at its monthly meeting on July 8, together with Luisina Vueso (GGON) and Carolina Sanchez N. (Quantum Leap). The group discussed strategies for leveraging similar international platforms to advance a human rights-based approach

to marine protection. “This approach holds promise,” says Alejandra Serrano, ELAW Attorney. “Together, we can ensure that community voices are heard at these important international fora.”



(Left to right): Rhea Yray (Oceana), Roger Joseph “Rocky” Guzman (ARIEL), Macarena Martinic (FIMA), Stephanie Hewson (WCEL), Alejandra Serrano (ELAW Attorney), Dr. Bree Yednock (ELAW Scientist), Dr. Melissa Garren (ELAW Scientist), and Humay Abdulghafoor (SaveMaldives).

ELAW Stands With Bach

Dang Dinh Bach Wins Human Rights Award While in Prison

Vietnamese lawyer and environmental activist Dang Dinh Bach was awarded the Roger N. Baldwin Medal for Liberty by Human Rights First in recognition of his work protecting communities from environmental harm.

Bach's wife, Thao, received the award on his behalf because Bach has been in jail with political prisoners in Prison No. 6 in Vietnam's Nghe An Province for more than four years.

Human Rights First President and CEO Uzra Zeya presented the award in recognition of Bach's "lifetime commitment to protecting communities in Vietnam from the harmful effects of pollution and the climate crisis. A commitment that has come at great personal cost." She described that "Bach is one of several individuals who have been targeted with judicial harassment and politically motivated charges after advocating for a just transition away from coal-based energy. Bach has been an instrumental leader in advancing environmental protections in Vietnam."

For years, Bach's organization, Law and Policy for Sustainable Development, sought justice for communities across Vietnam suffering the impacts of polluting coal-fired power plants and other public health and environmental hazards.

In Opinion No. 22/2023, the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on Arbitrary Detention stated: "The Government's treatment and attitude towards Mr. Bach can only be characterized as discriminatory and has negatively impacted his right to equality before the law. It appears that Mr. Bach was targeted based on his activities related to environmental activism and monitoring of



the State's compliance with international and domestic regulations related to environmental law."

The ELAW team is humbled by Bach's perseverance. He has undergone six hunger strikes since his arbitrary arrest in June 2021 to protest harsh conditions within the prison, which he worries are "destroying the health and spirit of political prisoners." Using the tools he has available to him, he dedicates his hunger strikes "to justice, rule of law, and respect for human dignity" and "to compelling his country's government to change."

ELAW's Defenders Team and the Alliance for Land, Indigenous, and Environmental Defenders (ALLIED) have been working with international human rights organizations for years to advocate for Bach's release, and will continue to do so.

New ELAW Team Members



Grace Hwa

Attorney
Defending Defenders Program

Grace brings nine years of criminal defense experience from her time as a Public Defender in Los Angeles County, as well as a breadth of experience in international development, social justice, and human rights advocacy and policy from her three years in Myanmar with International Bridges to Justice (IBJ) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and four years in Nepal with the US Agency for International Development (USAID). She holds a bachelor's degree in visual arts from the University of California, San Diego, and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Southern California Gould School of Law. Grace finds joy in looking for nudibranchs in the ocean and bugs in the forest, and she aspires to be an expert forager of fungi now that she has moved to the Pacific Northwest.



Dr. Megan Egler

Ecological Economist

Megan brings experience conducting research about how climate and energy policy, fossil fuel liabilities, and energy infrastructure and mining projects impact justice for communities. She will support ELAW partners in applying economic arguments that protect communities and the environment. Megan earned a Ph.D. in natural resources from the University of Vermont with a specialization in ecological economics, and a master's in food, agriculture, and resource economics from the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. Megan serves as a Board member of the Canadian Society for Ecological Economics. Outside of work, she finds joy in sharing hunts and harvests, making music, and in the conviviality woven throughout daily life.



Brigadier (at left) joins ELAW Intern James Meschia (center) and ELAW Attorney Leticia Aleixo at Cape Perpetua on the central Oregon coast.

Brigadier Siachitema | Zambia | June 29-July 4, 2025

Attorney Brigadier Siachitema is collaborating with ELAW to hold a Chinese mining company accountable for a deadly mine tailings dam collapse in Chambishi, Zambia, and protect southern African communities from short-sighted plans to mine coal. He has worked with the Southern Africa Litigation Center since 2015.

His short ELAW Fellowship this summer followed a visit to New York, where he spoke at the Nexus Global Summit and joined filmmakers and others who received an Emmy Award for the Center for Investigative Reporting's documentary film *The Grab*. Brigadier's work defending victims of land grabs in Zambia is featured in the film.

"I've collaborated remotely with members of the ELAW Team and was pleased to meet in person and better connect with members of the ELAW network around the world," says Brigadier.

During his ELAW Fellowship, Brigadier had the opportunity to work one-on-one with members of the Law and Science Teams to advance his work protecting communities in Zambia and across southern Africa from short-sighted "development" projects. He also toured the Wayne Lyman Morse US Courthouse. We will keep you informed as we advance our work with Brigadier in the year ahead.

Mamadou Alpha Diallo | Guinea | July 1-3, 2025

"The climate crisis is real," says Mamadou Alpha Diallo, a Guinean attorney who helps communities understand what is at stake and participate in decisions being made about projects that threaten the climate and sacrifice community wellbeing.

Alpha serves as monitoring and evaluation program officer for CODEC Guinea, a coalition of 10 organizations that protect natural resources and defend human rights. He traveled from Conakry, Guinea, to Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, to tap the expertise of Congolese colleagues at Centre Congolais pour le Droit du Développement Durable (CODED).

This new ELAW Fellows program makes it possible for ELAW partners to collaborate, in person, with colleagues at their home offices around the world.

ELAW Attorney Erick Kassongo and CODED's Victorine Kilembé developed the program to help Alpha dig deep into energy law and policy, and litigation strategy, to advocate for a just energy transition. ELAW Attorney Jennifer Castello joined the program, traveling from her home office in France.

CODED arranged meetings for Alpha with lawyers, university professors, officials from the Ministry of Energy, representatives of the United National Development Programme, and Congolese civil society leaders.

"I learned a lot about the energy sector and energy laws in Congo, and how our colleagues use legal tools to protect communities and the climate," says Alpha.



While in Kinshasa, Alpha (right) met with 2022 ELAW Fellow Jimmy Munguriek (left) and 2020 Fellow Oliver Ndoole. "Sharing our experience and strategies was invaluable," says Alpha.



Mamadou Alpha Diallo (back row, 5th from left) joins ELAW Attorneys Érick Kassongo (back left) and Jennifer Castello (front row, 2nd from right) and colleagues at CODED.

“I returned home better equipped to advance national energy policy that moves us away from fossil fuels and ensures that electrification plans benefit communities.”

Mamadou Alpha Diallo

Summer Interns



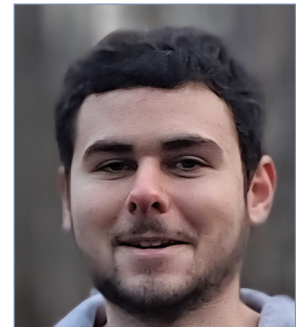
James Meschia
Legal Intern



Emanuelle Buzin DeCola
Undergrad Intern



Liam Cassidy
Defending Defenders Intern



Jonathon Arnold
Defending Defenders Intern

James is in his final year at the University of Oregon School of Law. He worked with the Law Team to help partners protect coastal ecosystems and public access to those coasts in the Americas and Southeast Asia. At the end of his internship, he wrote: *“I have learned that ELAW is not just a job, but a lifestyle. No matter what continent someone is on, everyone so clearly knows that their job is, every day, making the world a better place. And that’s how people treat the work—with urgency, diligence, and care. I will carry this mentality for the rest of my career.”*

Emanuelle helped the Science Team analyze data to improve air and water quality in Egypt and helped answer requests for help from partners in Ecuador. *“ELAW is incredibly diverse,”* she said. *“It was exciting and inspiring to see people from around the world in different technical fields working towards the shared goal of a healthy planet!”* Emanuelle recently earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Oregon with a major in environmental science.

Liam and **Jonathan** are law students at Western University in Ontario, Canada. Dr. Charis Kamphuis, ELAW Defenders Program attorney, supervised their internships. Charis says: *“They worked hard this summer compiling research for our team on corporate accountability, human rights law tied to the regulation of civil society organizations, criminal defamation, and more.”*

Jonathan wrote that during his internship, he learned *“how important building relationships and working together with allies is for advancing human rights causes and environmental justice.”*

Liam said, *“Working with the Defending Defenders Team exposed me personally to some incredibly brave and remarkable people.”*



ELAW

(541) 687-8454 | elawus@elaw.org | www.elaw.org

Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide

1412 Pearl Street
Eugene, Oregon 97401
USA

Return Service Requested

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
Paid
Eugene, Oregon
Permit No. 686

To switch to the electronic version of the ELAW Advocate, or if you wish to stop receiving it, please email us at optout@elaw.org and let us know your preference!



Legacy Giving: Guardians of Future Generations

Including ELAW in your will helps secure ELAW's long-term vision of creating a world where the rights of the environment and communities are respected and protected, and decisions are grounded in principles of environmental justice.

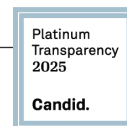
Please consider joining the **Guardian of Future Generations** giving circle at ELAW. By including ELAW in your will, you can help ensure that we leave the gifts of clean air, clean water, and a healthy planet to our children and grandchildren.

Please visit www.elaw.org/supportelaw or contact Karen Guillory, Outreach Manager, to learn more about how you can help ELAW build the movement of environmental defenders who will fight for a brighter future for generations to come.

karen@elaw.org | +1 541-687-8454 x.105



MAKE A GIFT TODAY!



Charity Navigator and Candid give ELAW their highest rating for financial management, accountability, and transparency. You can be confident that your gift helps advance our mission of helping communities speak out for clean air, clean water, and a healthy planet. Please visit elaw.org/give to make a tax-deductible gift.