



**ELAW**

SUMMER 2026

# advocate

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## Building Collective Power



### 2026 ELAW ANNUAL MEETING

Bangkok, Thailand | April 20-23



ELAW brings strength in numbers. Since our founding in 1991, we have grown into a powerful network, collaborating with the world's leading grassroots advocates in 88 countries.

Collaborating across borders to win victories for communities and the environment requires trust built over many years.

The 2026 ELAW Annual Meeting (April 20-23), co-hosted in Bangkok by ELAW partners at the Community Resource Centre (CRC), brought together more than 100 ELAW partners from 45 countries, building the trust and collaboration that make the ELAW network strong.

**"At ELAW Annual Meetings, we join hands to ensure that the real impacts of short-sighted mining and other polluting projects in our country and around the world are fully considered by communities, by authorities, and in the courts."**

Sor.Rattanamee Polkla  
CRC Executive Coordinator/Co-Founder

Participants attended plenaries, collaborated in small working groups, joined a case fair, and visited Sri Nakhon Khuean Khan Park on the Chao Phraya River. The field trip provided an opportunity for ELAW partners to witness how tax disincentives threaten biodiversity in a forested urban oasis south of Bangkok.

The meeting brought together advocates at all stages of their careers, including seasoned practitioners who have been part of ELAW for more than 30 years, and new partners attending their first meeting.

Following the ELAW Annual Meeting, many participants contributed to a "Global Dialogue on Environmental Justice, Transboundary Governance, Climate Accountability, and Community Rights," held at the Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University.

This public conference brought together environmental lawyers, scientists, environmental defenders, academics, and civil society leaders from Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe, North America, and Latin America to exchange knowledge and strengthen collaboration.

The conference was co-organized by CRC, ELAW, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Rivers and Rights, and the United Nations Environment Program, in collaboration with the Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University.

The ELAW Annual Meeting and public conference built collective power!

Many thanks to the tireless efforts of the CRC team: Sor.Rattanamee Polkla, Atittaya Ngampradit, Chalerm Sri Prasertsri, Decha Khambaomueng, Mingkhawan Thuemor, Prashant Singh, Songsit Weerapatrungrdech, Tittasat Soodsan, and Weerawat Obo. And thanks to the many volunteers who made this year's meeting possible, including Ploynatchaya Srimek, Teerana Kualsawasd, and Martine Coguie.



Scan here to see ELAW Board of Directors



Scan here to see ELAW Team

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.

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For more information on CRC see: [crcthai.org](http://crcthai.org)

# Building Collective Power

## Changing the Narrative Workshops

Aketa Marie Williams, Erin Uy

Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide Annual Meeting  
Bangkok, Thailand  
April 2026



Sri Nakhon Khuean Khan Park on the Chao Phraya River.

### Focus Issues at 2026 ELAW Annual Meeting

- Climate, Pollution, and the Just Energy Transition
- Rights and Governance
- Conservation and Policy
- Defending Defenders
- Narratives, Power, and Public Discourse

### Changing the Narrative

ELAW partners are increasingly stigmatized by corporations and governments seeking quick profits and political gains through short-sighted, ill-designed projects. Partners are sometimes branded as “saboteurs,” “anti-development,” “obstructionists,” and even “eco-terrorists.”

The 2026 Annual Meeting featured the launch of ELAW’s Changing the Narrative project, in collaboration with communications firm Spitfire.

Together with Spitfire, we are providing tools and techniques to help partners identify and challenge false narratives and amplify the social good of environmental protection.

Spitfire presented a plenary session, followed by two workshops with 22 partners from 17 countries. In the months ahead, Spitfire will host two webinars and provide one-on-one coaching to select ELAW partners to build communications capacity and challenge false narratives.

**“There comes a moment in this fight—and I believe many of you know it well—when the magnitude of the environmental crisis can make you feel profoundly alone. I shared this with you during the event, with the honesty that the space allowed us. But listening to you, seeing your work, learning your stories from the most diverse corners of the planet, reminded me of something fundamental: We are not alone. We are many. And today, more than ever, this means everything.”**

Henry Carhuatocto, President  
Institute for the Legal Defense of the Environment  
and Sustainable Development (IDLADS), Peru

**“This was my first annual meeting. I met a lot of wonderful people that I hope to see again soon. I thank each and every one of you for doing the work you do, for helping each other without a second thought, for supporting each other, and for always inspiring me to face the many injustices we all stand up against.”**

Shahinaz Adel, Executive Director  
Egyptian Foundation for Environmental Rights

# Building Collective Power

## 2026 Annual Meeting participants hailed from:

Argentina	Mexico
Australia	Myanmar
Bangladesh	Namibia
Brazil	Nepal
Cambodia	Nigeria
Canada	Pakistan
Chile	Panama
China	Peru
Czechia	Philippines
Democratic Republic of Congo	Portugal
Dominican Republic	Slovakia
Ecuador	South Africa
Egypt	South Korea
Germany	Spain
Guinea	Sri Lanka
Honduras	Tanzania
India	Thailand
Indonesia	Timor-Leste
Japan	Ukraine
Kenya	United States
Laos	Vietnam
Malaysia	Zambia
Maldives	Zimbabwe



**"Ecosystems don't recognize borders, and neither should our legal strategies. The tools and alliances forged at this meeting are indispensable for holding transboundary projects accountable and securing environmental justice for our communities."**

Aye Mon Thu, Thailand

## Standing with Defenders Through ALLIED

by Luciano Coco Pastrana

ELAW's work rests on a simple fact: When public interest lawyers, scientists, and advocates collaborate across borders, communities become harder to silence.

ELAW was a novel network of electronic collaboration in 1991 and now participates in numerous coalitions to share learning and build collective power. In that spirit of collaboration, ELAW helped create, launch, and incubate the Alliance for Land, Indigenous and Environmental Defenders (ALLIED).

ALLIED's multi-stakeholder network of civil society organizations, lawyers, funders, Indigenous communities, and defenders themselves is fighting the escalating attacks against people who protect territory, water, forests, and biodiversity.

Soledad Cayunao is an Indigenous Mapuche woman, working to defend the headwaters of the Río Chubut in Argentine Patagonia. When Soledad was prosecuted for so-called usurpation of her own ancestral territory, ALLIED brought her story to light through its short documentary series: *Changing the Story*.

This powerful documentary showcases individual environmental defenders and counters the stigmatizing narratives used to intimidate and harass them. In early April, a court in Bariloche acquitted Soledad of all charges.

This victory was thanks to courageous defense lawyers, sustained community organizing, the slow, stubborn work of public pressure, and the visibility brought by *Changing the Story*.

Power imbalances, corruption, and discrimination behind attacks on defenders demand collective answers. Today, ALLIED brings together over 100 organizations and grassroots defender groups across every region of the world to speak truth to power.

Representing ELAW, I co-chair ALLIED's Law and Advocacy Working Group. We bring lawyers and defenders together to coordinate and build effective protection strategies, advocate before regional and international human rights mechanisms, and scale up our impact to protect environmental defenders.

I traveled to France in early June to represent ELAW and ALLIED at the first European Forum on Environmental Human Rights Defenders, hosted by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and co-organized by OHCHR, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, and the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention.

The Forum offered European environmental and human rights defenders a long-overdue space to connect and coordinate, mirroring the regional gatherings already proven effective in the Asia-Pacific region.

*Luciano Coco Pastrana is an Argentine attorney based in Buenos Aires. He is a member of ELAW's Defenders Team.*



Soledad Cayunao is featured in the *Changing the Story* documentary series.

### ALLIED Board

- ELAW • Earthrights International • Business and Human Rights Centre
- Indigenous Peoples Rights International • International Land Coalition
- Natural Justice • Transparency International • Green Advocates
- Environmental Defenders Collaborative

### Meet Sofía Suárez

Sofía Suárez is an Ecuadorian human rights lawyer, and ALLIED's new Executive Director. "Sofía arrives at a moment when ALLIED's defender-led approach is more important than ever," says Lori Maddox, ELAW Deputy Executive Director and a founding member of the ALLIED Board. "Sofía's leadership will help anchor the next stage of our work."

## Landmark Ruling in Sri Lanka Protects Elephant Habitat



Elephants, forests, and local communities will now be protected. PHOTO: Udara Karunarathna on Upsplash

### Landmark Ruling in Sri Lanka Protects Elephant Habitat

In Sri Lanka's northwest Kurunegala District, forest grounds managed by an ancient Buddhist temple were cleared, destroying valuable elephant territory. ELAW partners celebrated in May when Sri Lanka's Supreme Court ordered the Director General of Wildlife Conservation to replant and restore the forest surrounding the Nakolagane Purana Raja Maha Viharaya temple, with expenses borne by the temple's trustee.

"This landmark judgment ensures that the 'polluter pays' when damaging public and private forest lands, including critical elephant pathways," says Dr. Ravindranath Dabare, co-founder, Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ).

Dr. Dabare and Savanthi Ponnampereuma filed suit on behalf of CEJ, alleging that approximately 1,500 acres of forest in the vicinity

of the Nakolagane Purana Rajamaha Viharaya temple were illegally cleared by the temple monk.

CEJ reports that the monk distributed temple lands among influential individuals and companies, for commercial agriculture, granite quarries, and soil excavation.

Electric fences were erected around the commercial farms, disrupting elephant corridors, forcing elephants to move through villages and cultivated lands during seasonal migration.

"This increased crop raids and conflict with villagers," says Dr. Dabare, who thanked his friends in the ELAW Network for "remarkable legal and scientific assistance made available through the ELAW website" to help him win the case to protect forests, elephants, and local communities.

Congratulations CEJ on this landmark victory!

#### The Sri Lanka Supreme Court ordered:

- The Director General of Wildlife Conservation, the Central Environmental Authority, and the Wayamba (North Western) Environmental Authority must issue a public apology within two months by publishing advertisements in national newspapers in all three official languages.
- The Department of Wildlife Conservation must take steps to restore the destroyed forest areas and the feeder areas of the Palukadawala Wewa, with the cost to be borne by Venerable Walathwewe Rahula Thero.
- Steps must be taken to declare the 55 hectares of disputed forest and cultivated land as either a wildlife sanctuary or an elephant management zone.
- The Commissioner of Buddhist Affairs was directed to initiate legal action to recover lands sold or leased in violation of the Vihara Devalagam Act.
- The Inspector General of Police was ordered to immediately investigate offences related to the incident and to institute legal proceedings against those responsible.

## ELAW Fellows

### Ellie Beranová and Jan Bakule

Frank Bold, Responsible Energy Team  
Czechia | March 9-22, 2026

Prague-based Czech lawyers Ellie Beranová and Jan Bakule completed two-week ELAW Fellowships in March. These young lawyers are on the Responsible Energy Team at Frank Bold, a nonprofit environmental law organization with a vision to speak *frankly* and act *boldly*.

Ellie and Jan are working to help Czechia phase out coal by 2033 by accelerating the adoption of renewables and advancing community-based green energy. While in Eugene, they worked intensively with ELAW's Law Team and met with many energy experts in the Pacific Northwest. They also presented their work at the University of Oregon Public Interest Environmental Law Conference.

Following his Fellowship, Jan wrote:

"We now have a comprehensive picture of how the US energy sector functions and how it is evolving. We learned that the US faces similar issues, even more difficult ones, but that change can be achieved at the regional and state levels, rather than only at the federal level. In this way, I was pleased to learn that many of our main advocacy campaigns are also being pursued by US NGOs, utilities, etc., including community energy, capacity of electricity network for renewables, and wind energy permitting."

Ellie added: "I learned about many innovative regulatory instruments that could support and integrate renewable energy sources into the Czech energy system, such as tax credits or renewable energy goals for utilities."

The ELAW Team is excited to continue working with Jan, Ellie, and the rest of the Frank Bold team as they push for a clean energy transition in Czechia.

**"Thank you so much for preparing a valuable program for Jan and Ellie. I still cherish my memories of my ELAW Fellowship in 2019!"**

Laura Otýpková  
Head, Responsible Energy Team



Ellie Beranová and Jan Bakule at Silver Falls State Park, Oregon.

### Izamar Rivera

Environmental Law Institute of Honduras (IDAMHO)  
Honduras | March 24 – June 13, 2026

Izamar Rivera is a Junior Legal Officer at Instituto de Derecho Ambiental de Honduras (Environmental Law Institute of Honduras, IDAMHO), a nonprofit organization working to protect marine ecosystems in Central America.

Izamar took a sabbatical and traveled to Eugene, where ELAW sponsored her participation in Lane Community College's English as a Second Language Program.

"English is essential for communicating with international lawyers, scientists, and economists who collaborate on global environmental issues," says Izamar, adding: "I want to improve my English to better analyze contracts and international agreements, and translate what I learn for our local communities."

Lauren Herbert and Kenny Watkins were Izamar's Host Family. They provided cultural immersion and helped Izamar practice English in daily life. Izamar joined Lauren and Kenny on outings to many of Eugene's natural areas, including Mount Pisgah, the Willamette River bike trails, and Turtle Flats.

Before departing, Izamar said, "I am grateful for this experience and look forward to using my new English skills."



***"Justice, as a universal right, possesses the power to effect profound changes within humanity; consequently—when applied to environmental matters in the service of people and all living beings—it can transform the structural issues affecting the world today."***

Clarisa Vega, Founder, IDAMHO



Izamar Rivera (left) at the ELAW office with Cleven Mmari, Fellows Program Coordinator.

## Inside ELAW

### Heartfelt Thanks to Maggie for 25+ Years of Service

by Zachary Dolan, ELAW Grant Finance Manager

Maggie Keenan, Partnerships & Communications Director, joined ELAW in August 1999. She has managed ELAW's grant portfolio and complex multi-stakeholder projects, building lasting relationships with our partners and ELAW's individual and foundation supporters. She has served as editor of ELAW's quarterly newsletter, the Advocate, which shares the experiences of public interest environmental lawyers from 88 countries and celebrates countless hard-won victories for ecosystems and communities.

"She brings so much passion to her work," says Jen Gleason, Law Program Director. "Maggie helped ELAW become the strong, stable organization we are today."

As Fellows Program Coordinator, Maggie designed tailored programs for nearly 300 ELAW Fellows from roughly 60 countries



In 2016, Maggie (left) traveled to Lviv, Ukraine, to provide communications training to ELAW partners at Environment People Law (EPL). She has worked with fearless partners in Ukraine throughout her tenure at ELAW. Maggie is photographed here with EPL's Development Director Hanna Khomechko.

to advance their work and build resilient organizations. She has enriched the Eugene community by connecting Fellows with volunteer host families, sparking friendships around the world.

"Maggie has been a wonderful colleague," shares Associate Science Program Director Meche Lu. "From trips to the Oregon coast to field visits and meetings with local experts, Maggie helped Fellows feel that their visits were special."

While at ELAW, Maggie traveled to Bolivia, Chile, Ukraine, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to work one-on-one with partners and participate in ELAW Annual Meetings.

Prior to ELAW, Maggie served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Philippines, completed a master's in international agriculture and rural development at Cornell University, and worked in Uganda for years as a consultant for the Uganda Wildlife Society, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and various USAID-funded maternal health projects. For six years, while at ELAW, she taught a course in Cross Cultural Communication at the University of Oregon.

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*"Maggie brought her lived experience and top-notch communications skills to ELAW and built our communications strategy from the ground up. Equally important are the deep relationships Maggie built with ELAW Fellows, the ELAW Team, ELAW host families, and across our global network. We are grateful for her sensible, smart leadership over these decades.*

*We'll miss her!"*

Lori Maddox  
Deputy Executive Director

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**Kevin De Vriendt**  
Scientist, Hydrogeology

Kevin joined ELAW in May as a hydrogeology consultant, bringing expertise in groundwater sustainability and protection, numerical modeling, and science-based environmental decision-making. He brings experience working on interdisciplinary groundwater management projects across Africa and the Middle East, including four years at the German Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources, where he focused on climate resilience and sustainable water resource management. His Ph.D. research at the Institute of Environmental Assessment and Water Research in Barcelona, Spain, examined groundwater salinization and reactive transport processes. He holds a master's degree in hydrogeology and environmental geoscience from Göttingen University, Germany.

**Languages:** English and French (native), German and Spanish (proficient)  
**Based in Germany**

## Inside ELAW



**Emanuelle Buzin DeCola**  
Program Assistant

Emanuelle joined ELAW in May to provide administrative support to the Law, Science, and Defenders Teams. She recently earned a bachelor's degree in environmental science from the University of Oregon, with a focus in earth and physical sciences. Previously, she studied at the University of Brasília in Brazil and interned with ELAW's Science Team in 2025. She brings 10 years of experience in English and Portuguese translation and data analysis.

**Languages:** Portuguese (native speaker), English (fluent/advanced)  
**Based in Oregon**



Romi Fischer-Schmidt



Yarema Pukhalyk



Skye Chen



Mercè Martí

### Defenders Team Interns

The Defenders Team welcomes two Canadian law student interns this year, who will support the team in its main areas of work, including creating resources and knowledge products for ELAW partners who face strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), criminalization, and various forms of regulatory restrictions on their organizations.

**Romi Fischer-Schmidt** is a trilingual organizer and educator in their first year of law school at McGill University (Juris Doctor and Bachelor of Civil Laws), with experience contributing to struggles for justice, particularly working alongside Indigenous communities in Canada and Guatemala resisting abuse from mining and other extractive industries.

**Yarema Pukhalyk** is a first-year law student (Juris Doctor) at Western University. He recently participated in a joint task force with the Standards Council of Canada, the International Organization for Standardization, and the Young Politicians of Canada, contributing to a policy framework focused on incorporating intergenerational equity principles.

### Law Interns

This year's Law Team interns will help ELAW partners protect biodiversity, challenge fossil fuel projects, and advance a sustainable and just energy transition. They will help the team identify strategies for building legal capacity to protect oceans. Interns contribute to updating and strengthening ELAW's online resource libraries, including a comparison of environmental impact assessment laws and a database of plastic laws.

**Skye Chen** is a second-year law student at Columbia Law School in New York. She has recent experience externing at the United Nations and collaborating with All Rise Attorneys for Climate and Environmental Justice in South Africa to support climate litigation.

**Mercè Martí** is pursuing an LL.M. at the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University in New York. While completing her law degree in Spain, she worked with Pace's Environmental Legal Clinic on a case before the Spanish Supreme Court challenging administrative permits for Barcelona Airport's expansion that would affect EU-protected natural areas.



# ELAW

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## Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide

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As partners like Henry Carhuatocto from Peru shared during the ELAW Annual Meeting,  
***"We are not alone. We are many.  
And that, today more than ever, means everything."***

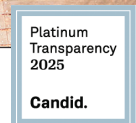
This collective power is the engine that drives ELAW's ability to:

- **Defend the Front Lines:** Launch and support global coalitions like ALLIED, which connects defenders to urgent legal, scientific, security, and organizational expertise to counter escalating attacks and win cases like Soledad Cayunao's acquittal.
- **Transfer Critical Knowledge:** Connect new advocates like Brigadier Siachitema (Zambia) with seasoned practitioners to receive "invaluable guidance and case examples from legal experts from different jurisdictions," which he is already drawing on in his submissions.
- **Mentor the Next Generation:** Train lawyers and connect them with valuable allies and resources to bolster their work, such as Ellie Beranová and Jan Bakule, who are working to phase out coal in Czechia, and Izamar Rivera, who is protecting marine ecosystems in Honduras.

Please make a gift today to strengthen ELAW, ensuring our partners are never alone in their fight, and growing the collective power of our movement.



### 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](http://elaw.org/give) to make a tax-deductible gift.