



ELAW advocate

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Raising Citizen Voices



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The Canadian-owned Cobre Panama is Panama's largest copper mine. It is in the Donoso District of Colon Province. ELAW has worked for many years to provide CIAM with the legal and scientific information they need to protect the environment from mining pollution. PHOTO: CIAM

Everyone at the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW) is adapting to the challenges of the global pandemic and finding ways to build on our high impact work. For years, we have done much of our work online, so we are well positioned to collaborate with our partners during this difficult time.

In Africa, Latin America, South Asia, and the Pacific, ELAW partners under stay-at-home orders are using new electronic tools to educate communities, raise citizen voices, and ensure that public health, communities, and ecosystems are protected during the global pandemic.

Isaías Ramos, a biologist from Panama, planned to travel to Eugene in March for an ELAW Fellowship to strengthen his work to protect land, air, and waterways. We moved his program online, with good results. In April, advocates from 15 countries joined ELAW for a webinar discussion of our work to rein in plastic and the newly released film: *The Story of Plastic*. We are also providing a weekly virtual meeting space for ELAW partners to discuss and share thoughts about the implications of the pandemic.

We are pleased to share highlights of our work and the work of our partners in Panama, Dominican Republic, Nepal, Australia, Nicaragua, and more.

We will get through this together!

Building Scientific Capacity in Panama

The ELAW Fellows Program is adapting to a new world. We planned to host Panamanian biologist Isaías Ramos for a two-week ELAW Fellowship at our U.S. office in April. COVID-19 made this impossible so we moved his program online.

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Isaías Ramos



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The Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (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 promote grassroots efforts to build a sustainable, just future.

The ELAW Advocate is a publication of ELAW U.S. and does not represent the views of ELAW partners around the world.

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Raising Citizen Voices

Communicating Environmental Risk

ELAW Staff Scientist Dr. Meche Lu completed the “Environmental Health Risk Analysis and Applications” course at Harvard University’s T.H. Chan, School of Public Health (March 9-12, 2020). Meche shared what she learned with the ELAW science team, CIAM (see pg. 4), and ELAW partners around the world, including new methods for:

- Assessing exposure to toxic substances
- Quantifying risks
- Evaluating exposure assessment protocols
- Understanding risk information in benefit-cost analyses and risk management

Africa: Energy Leader Summit & the Triple Crisis

Grassroots leaders from civil society organizations across Africa gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January for the Energy Leader’s Summit, organized by Oil Change International (OCI), Health of Mother Earth Foundation, Oxfam, MELCA-Ethiopia, and Power Shift Africa.

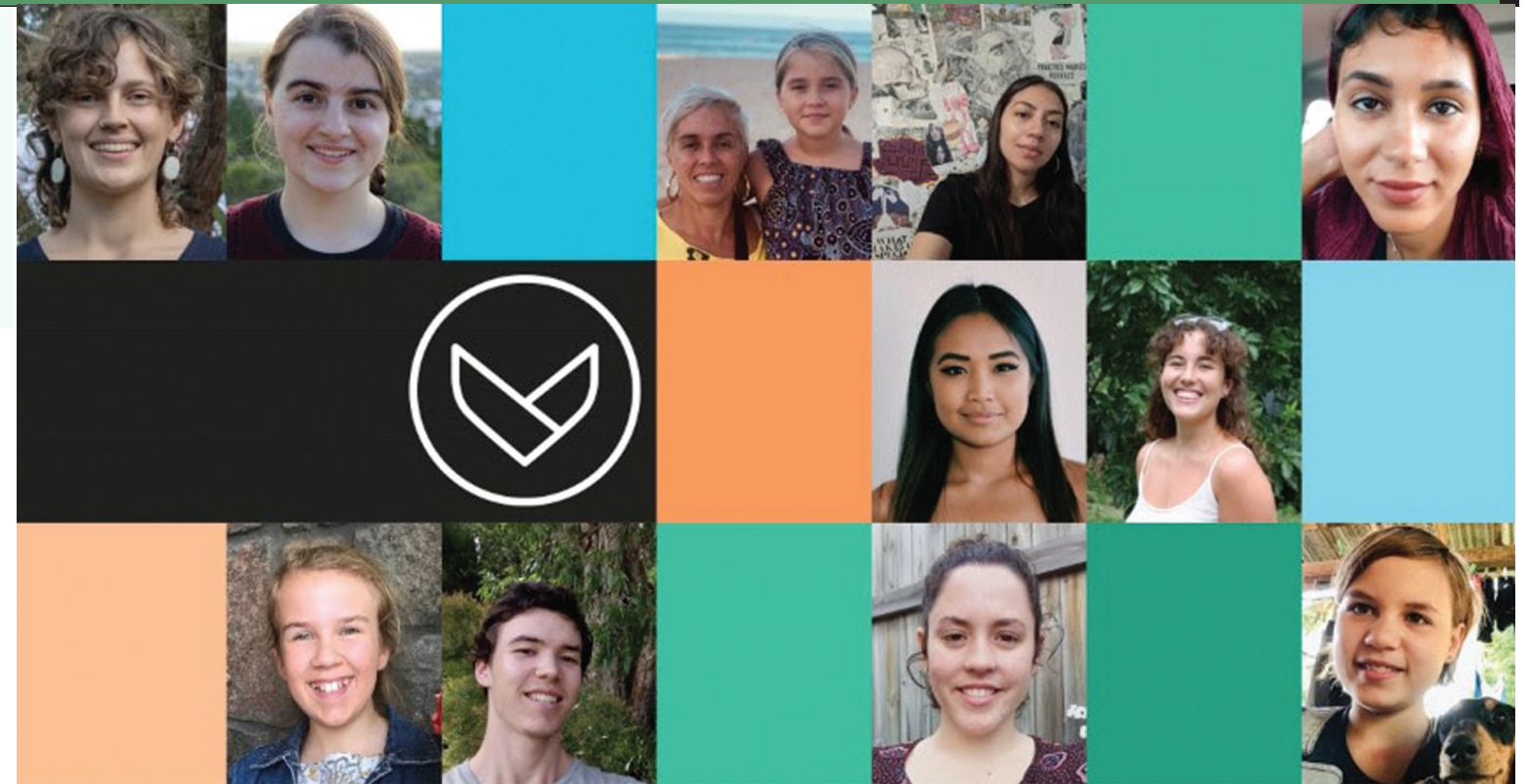
ELAW Staff Scientist Dr. Meche Lu joined 28 representatives of civil society organizations across the continent to discuss climate change, energy governance, and energy finance in Africa.

“The Summit was a unique opportunity to share experiences with African leaders about climate change, energy, and energy finance,” says Meche.

The group issued a public communiqué expressing concerns about the global impacts of climate change and fossil fuels.

Following the summit, OCI and Oilwatch Africa hosted online conversations about the triple crisis of the global pandemic, economic turmoil, and climate change, and its implications for efforts to phase out fossil fuels and expand clean energy in Africa.

Thuli Makama, 2010 Goldman Prize winner and OCI’s Senior Advisor for Africa, says the webinars brought together activists, researchers, and advocates to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on collective work in Africa for a just and equitable transition to a low-carbon future and energy access for all.



Young Australians take on Clive Palmer coal mine over human rights. PHOTO: EDO

Australia: Keeping a Vigilant Eye on Decision-Making During the COVID-19 Pandemic & Saying No to Coal

ELAW partners at the Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) in Australia are watching as, in response to COVID-19, State and Territory governments across their country have passed laws or made amendments which alter planning and environmental controls and access to courts, tribunals, and planning panels. EDO’s website provides an overview of changes to planning and environmental laws and hearing rights, as well as a downloadable table with links to the new legislation.

EDO’s national team is identifying critical issues in response to the immense scale and significance of the disruption:

- To ensure continued access to justice, open and transparent decision making,
- That key protections for the environment and the community are not removed, and
- That decisions made now seize the opportunity to recover in a way that puts Australia on a pathway to a safe and stable climate.

Emily Long, EDO Senior Solicitor, says EDO is building on its work to protect citizens from polluting coal mining operations with a pioneering case. “For the first time an Australian coal mine is being challenged on human rights grounds,” she says. EDO’s client, Youth Verdict, is a group of brave young Australians who are challenging Clive Palmer’s proposed Galilee Coal Project in Queensland’s Land Court, arguing the mine will contribute to catastrophic climate change and increase the risk of bushfires, drought, floods, heatwaves, and cyclones.

Emily joined ELAW partners from more than 40 countries at the 2019 ELAW Annual Meeting, calling it “informative and inspiring.”

Defending the Disadvantaged in Nepal

ELAW partner Prakash Mani Sharma in Nepal bravely appeared before the Supreme Court of Nepal to ensure that citizens stranded in Kathmandu by the COVID-19 lockdown be provided food, testing, and the right to live with dignity as they sought to reach their homes safely.

“It is the government’s duty to protect citizens, as part of their rights under the Constitution of Nepal,” says Prakash, Executive Chair of the Forum for the Protection of Public Interest (Pro Public).

In April, in response to Pro Public’s lawsuit, Nepal’s Supreme Court ordered the government to arrange free transportation for all citizens heading home on foot, and ensure that they reach their destinations safely. The court also ordered rapid testing for travelers who are suspected ill, and for the government to distribute seeds, fertilizers, and necessary equipment to farmers for free or at subsidized rates.

Prakash (far right) distributes food with Pemba Dorje Sherpa (green shirt) and Kanchi Maya Tamang (far left). Pemba has climbed Mount Everest 20 times. Kanchi has conquered Mt. Everest three times. Pemba joined Prakash and other ELAW partners in 2004 to submit a petition to the UN World Heritage Committee, endorsed by Sir Edmond Hillary, seeking to protect Mt. Everest from the impacts of climate change. The petition forced the World Heritage Committee to commission a study to identify the impacts of climate change on natural and cultural heritage.



Prakash (left) with Kathmandu resident.



Zimbabwe: Coal-Fired Power Project Challenged

The Sengwa coal-fired power project in Zimbabwe has been in the pipeline since the 1990s, but never launched due to lack of funding. The project has now attracted Chinese investors. ELAW partners at the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) are challenging the short-sighted project. ZELA’s May 21 webinar included Jen Gleason, ELAW Law Program Director, who shared decisions from around the world in which courts have ruled that agencies weighing proposals for coal-fired power plants must consider the external costs of the projects and give citizens an opportunity to participate effectively in decision making.

Raising Citizen Voices: Webinars, Online Discussions

Building Scientific Capacity in Panama CONTINUED

Isaías is Staff Scientist at Centro de Incidencia Ambiental (Center for Environmental Advocacy, CIAM), based in Panama City. ELAW has worked with CIAM for many years to defend local communities and ecosystems from polluting gold and copper mines.

This spring, ELAW Staff Scientist Dr. Meche Lu launched an online ELAW Fellowship for Isaías through Zoom.

“He wanted CIAM staff to learn how other organizations in Latin America are raising public awareness about the impacts of climate change and mining industry abuses,” says Meche.

Panama has 16 mining concessions approved and 142 applications pending. The country’s regulatory framework for mining is not well developed and hundreds of high biodiversity areas and local communities are vulnerable to mining pollution. And Panama is already experiencing social and environmental impacts from climate change. Residents of the San Blas archipelago, home to the Guna people and other coastal communities, are affected by rising sea levels, and the nation has experienced unusually high temperatures, changes in rain patterns, and a higher incidence of vector-borne diseases.

Meche helped Isaías explore a communications strategy for CIAM’s climate and mining work by hosting a Zoom meeting with CIAM staff and communications experts Jimena Cucho and Liliana García of Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Law, Environment and Natural Resources, DAR). DAR is a Peruvian NGO with many years of experience running public awareness campaigns on the impacts of extractive industries, threats to indigenous rights, and short-sighted infrastructure projects.

Linking CIAM and DAR through ELAW creates a valuable opportunity to exchange South-to-South experiences and knowledge, between colleagues working in similar conditions.

“Our landscapes, culture, language, societies, and environmental legal and institutional frameworks in Panama and Peru are similar,” says Meche. “Sharing communication skills between people who understand local conditions is crucial for effective communications strategies.”



Meche was a special guest in the CIAM webinar: Open Pit Metal Mining. She joined two panelists from CIAM, attorney María Gabriella Dutari and biologist Isaías Ramos. The webinar had more than 60 international participants.



Dominican Republic Impact of COVID-19 on Environmental Law & Public Policy

In May, more than 200 people participated in a webinar hosted by Euren Cuevas in the Dominican Republic on the impact of COVID-19 on environmental law and public policy. Euren is Executive Director at Instituto de Abogados para la Protección del Medio Ambiente (Institute of Lawyers for the Protection of the Environment, INSAPROMA). Euren co-hosted the webinar with the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD) where he is a law professor.

Panelists included legal and scientific experts from the Dominican Republic, Peru, and Argentina who shared their views on the global pandemic and links to habitat fragmentation, the rise of strong-arm

governments, and the importance of ratifying the Escazú Agreement, a new treaty that deepens the link between environmental protection and human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean.

“The time is here for transformative change in the relationship between nature and the economy,” says Euren. “We must strengthen the rule of law to create harmony between society, the State, and nature, because healthy ecosystems make healthy communities.”

INSAPROMA and UASD will continue to work together, virtually, to educate decision makers and ensure that the COVID-19 crisis does not erode environmental protection.

“We must strengthen the rule of law to create harmony between society, the State, and nature, because healthy ecosystems make healthy communities.”

Euren Cuevas
Executive Director, INSAPROMA

Protecting Indigenous Communities in Nicaragua

“Nicaragua is in a deep human rights crisis,” says ELAW partner Lottie Cunningham Wren, who spoke before nearly 200 viewers at a May 15 webinar hosted by the Oakland Institute on the release of their new report: “Nicaragua's Failed Revolution: The Indigenous Struggle for Saneamiento.”

Lottie has worked for many years to protect the lives and lands of indigenous communities in the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Regions. Recent attacks against the Alal, Wasakin, and Miskitu communities, with COVID-19 intensifying land invasions, has made Lottie’s work even more urgent.

The Oakland Institute report reveals that the actors behind the humanitarian crisis include foreign gold mining firms, national and international actors in the logging and cattle ranching industry, as well as prominent Nicaraguan officials.

At the end of the webinar, Lottie received the 2019 Paul K. Feyerabend Award for her work making community solidarity possible.



ELAW Hosts Virtual Screening of *The Story of Plastic*

Many thanks to everyone who joined us for a virtual screening of *The Story of Plastic*, a sweeping look at the crisis of plastic pollution and the worldwide effect it has on people and the health of our planet. The film also documents the work of members of Break Free From Plastic, a global movement of 8,000 organizations, including ELAW, and individuals tackling plastic pollution across the whole plastic value chain from extraction of oil and natural gas to disposal of plastic products.

Participants from 15 countries joined us for a discussion after the movie with Executive Director Bern Johnson, Law Program Director Jen Gleason, and ELAW Staff

Scientists Drs. Mark Chernaik and Heidi Weiskel sharing strategies to stop plastic pollution.

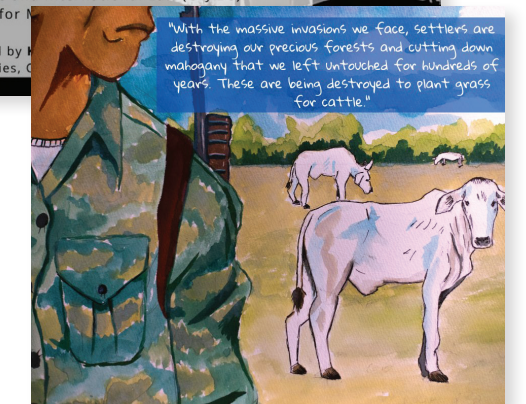
ELAW staff emphasized the need to focus on prevention instead of “clean up,” and to reject false solutions being pushed by fossil fuel companies and plastic manufacturers such as “Waste to Energy” schemes, which release toxic pollutants.

“The vast majority of plastic that has been created can’t and won’t be recycled,” says Jen. “Oil and gas and petrochemical companies want to produce and sell more plastic, and they are trying to shift the blame to avoid responsibility for a global crisis that they are profiting from.”

As a core member of Break Free From Plastic, ELAW is collaborating with partners around the world to strengthen and enforce laws to move us toward a world free of plastic pollution.

To join the movement, please check out: breakfreefromplastic.org.

To watch the film, see: storyofplastic.org.



2020 ELAW Fellows

Olivier Ndoole

Democratic Republic of the Congo, (January 1 – March 14, 2020)

Dickens Kamugisha

Uganda, (February 18 – March 8, 2020)

Olivier Ndoole (left) from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Dickens Kamugisha from Uganda wrapped up ELAW Fellowships mid-March. They arrived home just before travel shut down due to COVID-19.

Olivier is Executive Secretary at Alerte Congolaise pour l'Environnement et les Droits de l'Homme (Congolese Alert for the Environment and Human Rights, ACEDH), based in Goma and Dickens is CEO at the Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO), based in Kampala.

"What I learned will forever remain a deep mark in my life," writes Dickens, who is collaborating with ELAW's law and science teams to advance AFIEGO's work protecting communities from oil schemes that displace communities, and threaten national parks and fragile ecosystems.

"Oil exploration began in Uganda in 1990s," says Dickens. "Since then, British, Chinese, and French companies have signed production licenses with our government to commence oil exploitation. This threatens community lands and livelihoods, as well as Murchison Falls National Park, the River Nile, Lake Albert, Budongo Forest, and other critical biodiversity."

Dickens's ELAW Fellowship was concurrent with Olivier's, to enhance their collaboration on work near DRC's shared border with Uganda to help communities speak out against risky energy schemes, including oil production.

Olivier spent more than two months in Eugene, advancing his courageous work defending landless communities near Virunga National Park, a region plagued by civil unrest and home to some of the world's few remaining mountain gorillas. He also completed the Intensive English Program at the University of Oregon American English Institute.

Olivier presented ACEDH's work in Virunga National Park at a February event at the ELAW office that included a film screening of the award-winning 2014 documentary *Virunga*, followed by Q&A.

"What I learned will forever remain a deep mark in my life. I have lived and enjoyed the Eugene community culture of love, the ELAW staff practice of working as a team and ever willing to help everyone in and outside the office. These lessons will have a lifetime impact on my work and my family. Long live ELAW and keep up with the great approaches to promoting environmental justice worldwide."

Dickens Kamugisha



This powerful combination of film and Olivier's narrative on his organization's work to advance the rights of the landless living in and around the Park left his audience inspired and humbled.

Many thanks to The 11th Hour Project for making it possible to host Dickens and Olivier for capacity-building ELAW Fellowships, and to the American English Institute for providing Olivier with a Director's Distinction Scholarship. Thanks also to Lauren Herbert and Kenny Watkins, Rosie Hammond and Magnus Persmark, Ralph and Patty Jaszowski, and Ginnie Lo and Paul Nicholson for serving as ELAW Host Families.



Olivier, Dickens, Hugo, and Gligor toured the Wayne L. Morse U.S. Courthouse and sat in on a jury trial. They were joined by visiting lawyer Asma Hameed Khan from Pakistan. PHOTO: Paola Eisner, ELAW Law Associate

Hugo Echeverría

Ecuador, (March 1 – 14, 2020)

Gligor Radecic

Croatia, (March 1 – 14, 2020)

ELAW Fellows Hugo Echeverría (left) from Quito, Ecuador, and Gligor Radecic from Zagreb, Croatia, completed the team of four ELAW Fellows in Eugene this spring, also leaving on the last flights before the COVID shut down.

"Concurrent visits of Fellows from Africa, South America, and the Balkans provided an invaluable opportunity for sharing lessons across borders," says Jen Gleason, ELAW Law Program Director.

Hugo is an attorney and leading scholar on the novel concept of the "rights of nature." He studies how this and other rights can protect communities and biodiversity around the world, thereby promoting peace both among peoples and with nature. He worked for five years in the Galapagos Islands where he monitored enforcement of laws protecting marine species, with a focus on sharks.

Hugo is new to ELAW. His visit helped ELAW's legal team learn about his pioneering work and explore ways to collaborate.

Gligor is also new to ELAW. He is Legal Officer at Biom Association (BirdLife Croatia) where he works to challenge a large and controversial wind farm, tackle wildlife crime, and advance access to information, access to justice, and public participation in decision making.

"It may seem wrong to challenge a source of renewable energy, but the wind farm is proposed for a high-value conservation area for birds and bats, and does not benefit the energy needs of Croatians," says Gligor.

Gligor traveled to Corvallis, Oregon, to meet with ELAW board member Manuela Huso, a Research Statistician with the US Geological Survey with a courtesy appointment in the Statistics Department at Oregon State University. Manuela's research is directed at developing statistical tools to accurately measure the effects of renewable energy development on wildlife and to design experiments to test novel approaches to reduce those impacts. She had invaluable information to share with Gligor, while they went bird watching in the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge.

Many thanks to the Trust for Mutual Understanding for making Gligor's ELAW Fellowship possible. And thanks to the University of Oregon Global Justice Program of the Savage Endowment for International Relations and Peace for making Hugo's ELAW Fellowship possible.



"In these uncertain times, it is reassuring to know that there are people on the other end of the world on which you can rely and call for help. Thank you for showing me that we are not alone in our fight for a better, fairer world."

Gligor Radecic



Welcome New ELAW Team Member

PEDRO LEÓN GUTIÉRREZ, Attorney

ELAW is thrilled to announce that Pedro León Gutiérrez is rejoining the ELAW team!

Pedro is a great, committed lawyer from Guadalajara, Mexico, who worked on contract with ELAW US for years before moving to Washington D.C. to work as a case officer at the Independent Consultation and Investigation Mechanism (MICI) of the InterAmerican Development Bank. He has moved back to Mexico and rejoined the ELAW team.

"It feels great to be back at ELAW," he said. "I hope my time away will help me better contribute to ELAW's work around the world."

Welcome Pedro!



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All of us at ELAW US send our compassion and support to our friends and partners around the world facing the COVID-19 pandemic. We are working from our homes and doing all we can to stay safe and protect our communities. We appreciate the solidarity of the ELAW network, which connects strong advocates all over the world who are meeting this challenge and remain committed to building a greener, more just future.



We will get through this together!