



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

**Lord Collins of Highbury**  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State  
for Foreign, Commonwealth and  
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Matt Browne  
Director of Policy & Advocacy  
Wildlife & Countryside Link  
Reply to [matt@wcl.org](mailto:matt@wcl.org)

Our ref: MC2024/32472

24 December 2024

Dear Mr Browne,

Thank you for your email and attached correspondence of 22 November on behalf of the Wildlife & Countryside Link to the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary State of Justice, and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I am replying as the Minister responsible for Human Rights. It would be much appreciated if you could pass a copy of the response to your co-signatories.

Thank you for highlighting the vital importance of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. I share your acute concern at the urgency of the triple planetary crisis and recognise the impact on the enjoyment by individuals of their human rights. As emphasised in the Foreign Secretary's Kew Lecture, it is clear to him that the climate and nature emergency is the defining crisis of our time. Tackling this emergency — the most profound and universal source of global disorder — is a foremost priority of this Government.

The UK has consistently supported United Nations resolutions on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including the landmark United Nations General Assembly Resolution 76/300, on which the UK voted in favour. The UNGA Resolution represented a substantial political achievement but does not translate into a legal obligation upon States in international law. Furthermore, there is not yet international consensus on the legal meaning of the right.

At the Steering Committee for Human Rights of the Council of Europe last week, the UK made clear that it sees benefit in exploring a new Council of Europe instrument on the right to a healthy environment of some kind, subject to further work to develop a common understanding of the right.

We are pleased therefore that the Steering Committee recommended that the Committee of Ministers explore the extent of political support for each of the options identified in its Study on human rights and the environment, as well as instructing the Steering Committee for Human Rights to conduct further analysis regarding the nature, content and implications of the right.

We value the rich expertise brought by environmental civil society to the Council of Europe process and beyond. We will continue to engage closely with discussions on the right to a healthy environment at the Council of Europe and to seek a constructive way forward.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ray Collins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ray" and the last name "Collins" clearly distinguishable.

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