



Earth Jurisprudence Update

Earth-centred News and Inspiration

Greetings Friends,

As the Earth embarks on a fresh cycle around the Sun – our local star, “our second heart” in the words of Thich Nhat Hanh – we wish you a soul-nourishing year ahead.

Today, Benin’s people celebrate their ancestral religion, Vodun, or Voodoo as others know it. Demonised by the colonialists and Christians, Benin’s traditional religion is in fact a celebration of Air, Earth, Fire and Water: an elemental hymn to Mother Earth. On this Fête du Vodoun, the African Earth Jurisprudence Collective is delighted to launch [the fourth animation](#) in the ‘Decolonising Stories’ series. Meet Appolinaire, Chief and Prince of Avrankou in Benin, where he and his community are restoring the sacred forest groves that once rooted people to place.

As well as celebrating the launch of this 4-minute animation, our first Earth Jurisprudence Update of 2023 spotlights the latest ecocentric legal developments and offers a global perspective on sacred groves. Finally, we honour one of Gaia’s Ancestors from Africa – Margret Kagole – who passed on this November. May the memory of her life be our inspiration for a new year.

With warm, wild wishes,

Carlotta, on behalf of the Gaia Team

Animation Launch: Rooting for the Future

In this latest animation from the African Earth Jurisprudence Collective, Appolinaire OUSSOU LIO tells of his work with communities in Benin to restore their sacred forest groves. “*We have been walking a long road towards restoring both our forests and the communities that should be looking after them. We have to heal both at the same time.*”



“When you don’t see something as sacred, you don’t protect it in the same way... Benin’s ancestral religion of Vodun is a religion of the Earth. All of our beliefs ultimately go back to the sacred forests where we have lived, prayed and cured ourselves for generations... I want our ancestral way of living in and protecting our forests to be carried into the future...”

The animation is accompanied by [a feature story](#) published today by *Where the Leaves Fall* venturing further into the thickets of Appolinaire’s journey with communities. You can explore deeper reflections on indigenous Vodun cosmology in a chapter written by Appolinaire and published in the recently launched [Faith Voices for Ecocide Law](#) book, with a focus on a sacred watering hole named the ‘Zekpon Adono pool’.

Sacred Forests: A Global Perspective

[Sacred Groves: How the Spiritual Connection Helps Protect Nature](#)

Fred Pearce reports on sacred forests for Yale Environment 360. *“From Ethiopia’s highlands to Siberia to the Australian rainforest, there are thousands of sacred forests that have survived thanks to traditional religious and spiritual beliefs. Experts say these places, many now under threat, have ecological importance and must be saved.”*



Photo by Sebastian Unrau on Unsplash

Ecocentric Legal Developments

International: Global Biodiversity Agreement Recognises Rights of Mother Earth and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Approved by nearly 200 countries on 19 December 2022, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted at COP15 *“recognizes and considers ... diverse value systems and concepts, including, for those countries that recognize them, rights of nature and rights of Mother Earth, as being an integral part of its successful implementation.”* Delegates from Bolivia championed the inclusion of Rights of Nature and Rights of Mother Earth with support from Ecuador and New Zealand. The international treaty also acknowledges the importance of Indigenous Peoples and territories for conserving biodiversity, and recognises the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as well as the human right to a healthy environment. The nonbinding agreement is intended to guide the restoration of biodiversity by 2030 and now focus turns to implementation.

Ireland: Citizens’ Assembly Seek Referendum to Give Nature Rights

A Citizens’ Assembly – the first in the world to consider biodiversity loss – has recommended a referendum on Ireland’s Constitution to enshrine the Rights of Nature and the human right to a healthy environment. *“I think the Citizens’ Assembly is a good temperature check and, if this is the case, this is*

very much a resounding yes in this room,” commented Assembly chair, Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin.

United States: Two Towns in Washington Take Steps Toward Recognising the Rights of Southern Resident Orcas

Two US city councils in Washington have declared the legal rights of the Southern Resident Orca whales at a time when the resident population in the Salish Sea numbers only 73. *“The rights of the Southern Resident Orcas include, but are not limited to, the right to life, autonomy, culture, free and safe passage, adequate food supply from naturally occurring sources, and freedom from conditions causing physical, emotional or mental harm, including a habitat degraded by noise, pollution and contamination,”* both towns’ non-binding proclamations state.



Photo by Tim Cole on Unsplash

Recent Papers on Earth Jurisprudence and the Rights of Nature

During COP27, WECAN, Movement Rights, and the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature released a *White Paper on the Rights of Nature Framework*. Towards the end of 2022, the Wild Law Institute has circulated two papers as part of its Earth Jurisprudence series, *Earth Jurisprudence, Land & Property* and *Earth Jurisprudence & Human Rights*. Meanwhile, the Interdisciplinary Network on the Study of the Rights of Nature has launched its [website](#) and the results of its interdisciplinary scoping analysis, *The Future of the Rights of Nature*.

On the Horizon

International Conference: Transitioning to an Ecological Civilization through the Rights of Nature and Ecological Economics

From 16 to 18 January, the Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS) at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) hosts its third international conference in partnership with the UN Harmony with Nature Programme. It will be held in a hybrid format with both on-site and online attendance. Livestreaming of the main program will be available on ILAS HK+ Group's YouTube channel, *PachamamaTV*. Speakers include many members of the UN Harmony with Nature Knowledge Network. On Tuesday 17 January from 5pm GMT, Simon Mitambo, Dennis Tabaro and Gaia's Carlotta Byrne will join a plenary session to share more about the African Earth Jurisprudence Collective.

Honouring our Ancestors

In Memory of Margret Kagole Byarufu

Farmer, leader, custodian of sacred natural sites and seed: for members of the African Earth Jurisprudence Collective, Kagole has been a shining light, embodying the dignity, confidence and joy that traditional knowledge engenders in communities who choose to re-embrace their rich cultural, ecological and spiritual heritage. We will miss her dearly, but her spirit lives on through the inspiring legacy she leaves and our fond memories.



Photo by Ben Gray for The Gaia Foundation