

African judges called for a more dissuasive incrimination of environmental law infringements in the continent

(Abidjan/Gland, 30 April 2009). While meeting for a training workshop on environmental law, which was held from 27 to 30 April 2009 in Abidjan, Côte d'ivoire, the judges from French speaking African countries called for a more dissuasive incrimination of environmental law violation.

Facing increased infringements on environmental law on the continent, notably in the area of pollution which effects on public health are detrimental to African countries; and given the important role of magistrates in a society governed by laws, the training seminar aimed to provide participants with legal means to protect the environment so that the Judge, via his decisions, plays his role in the sustainable development process of the region.

The seminar - the first of its kind exclusively for magistrates of Francophone Africa - aimed also to offer participants extensive knowledge in environmental law, in order to allow them to assist their nations to better comply with their obligations toward multilateral environmental agreements, to which they are parties.

It was organized by the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, 1971), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Francophone Institute for Energy and the Environment (IEEF) and the African Institute for Environmental Law (AIEL).

Forty five (45) magistrates practicing in various tribunals, courts of appeal and supreme courts in West and Central African countries took part in the seminar.

The training was articulated around three main axis (i) environmental law characteristics, (ii) analytical presentations of the global MEAs and, (iii) environmental actions/litigation through case-studies.

The Minister of Justice of Côte d'ivoire opened the seminar and proposed the creation of divisions to deal with environmental matters in the country tribunals and also suggested legal aid is provided for environmental cases.

The magistrates formulated a total of 20 recommendations in which they among others committed themselves to play a more importance role in the implementation of the Rio declaration principle 10 which calls for effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings.

The organizers have pledged to follow up with similar and regular training workshops in countries that express such needs.

It's worth noting that most of the law schools of universities and training centers for magistrates of the countries which participated to the Abidjan meeting, do not offer environmental lectures in their curricula.

The workshop was sponsored by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, UNEP, IEPF, the Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions and Star Alliance through its Biosphere Connection program.

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