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## **Safeguard the People's Rights and Interests in Environmental Health and Improve the Well-Being of the People's Ecological Environment**

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Human rights are the symbol of progress of human civilization. Respecting and protecting human rights is the common ideal of all states and their people in the world today. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has regarded promoting the development of human rights as an important task of the governance of China. He has answered major questions such as what human rights are, how to promote the development of China's human rights cause, and how to promote global human rights governance. His actions reflect contemporary China's outlook on human rights. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized: "The path of human rights development in each state shall be determined based on its national conditions and the aspirations of its people." Contemporary China's outlook on human rights has a unique cultural tradition, historical background, and development path. It is rich in content and profound in thought. One of its most important aspects is to ensure that people have the right to live in a healthy, safe, and comfortable ecological environment. In 2022, the United Nations General Assembly also adopted a resolution on the right to a healthy environment, recognizing the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a human right. Protecting the people's environmental health rights and interests and enhancing their ecological and environmental well-being are major practices in implementing General Secretary Xi Jinping's human rights concept in the field of ecological civilization. They are also the core purpose of the close integration of Xi Jinping's ecological civilization thought with his human rights concept. I have the following three main understandings of this.

### **I. Environmental Rights Are an Important Part of the Development of the Human Rights Cause in China**

Whether the human rights situation is good or not depends on people's sense of gain, happiness, and security. This is the most important criterion for testing the human rights situation. On December 10, 2018, General Secretary Xi Jinping, in his congratulatory letter to the symposium commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, put forward the important proposition that "living a life of contentment is the ultimate human right," pointing out for the first time the significance of people's happiness to human rights. In the new era, the principal contradiction in Chinese society has shifted to the contradiction between the people's ever-growing

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desire for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development. The people's need for a beautiful ecological environment has become an important part of this contradiction. A clean, beautiful, and good living environment has become the premise and foundation for a happy life and has also become one of the rights that the people actively strive for.

“The environment is people's livelihood. A good ecological environment is the most equitable public product and the most universal public welfare.” These important assertions in Xi Jinping's ecological civilization thought not only accurately summarize the relationship between ecological environmental conservation and the protection of human rights, but also point out the human rights attributes of the ecological environment. Since 2009, China has formulated and implemented four national human rights action plans. Among them, the *National Human Rights Action Plan (2021-2025)* for the first time has made “environmental rights” an independent chapter and comprehensively expounded China's policy system for protecting environmental rights. It has promoted the protection areas to expand from pollution prevention and control to ecological protection and climate change, and the protection measures from government dominance to multi-party governance, and the protection scope from China to the world. In February 2022, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized at the 37<sup>th</sup> group study session of the Political Bureau of the 19<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee that “the level of human rights protection shall be comprehensively improved in the coordinated development of material civilization, political civilization, cultural-ethical civilization, social civilization, and ecological civilization.” The Report to the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC points out that Chinese modernization is a modernization of harmony between humanity and nature. A series of important statements and major deployments have shown that environmental rights have become a human right with the same importance as economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights.

## **II. Environmental Rights Have Rich Theoretical and Practical Connotations in China**

As summarized by the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, the contemporary China's outlook on human rights is a profound summary of the CPC's long-term experience in developing the human rights cause. It is a distillation of the basic propositions and important viewpoints on human rights in contemporary China. It embodies the Chinese Communists' new understanding and overall grasp of the development of the human rights cause in the new era. It is an important part of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. The concept of environmental rights inherits the Marxist concept of the well-rounded development of human beings and the people-oriented thought of “what the people like, we like; what the people hate, we hate” in the fine traditional Chinese culture. It emphasizes that “the environment is people's livelihood, green mountains are beautiful, and

blue skies are happiness.” It embodies the stance, viewpoint, and method of “putting people first” stated in Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, especially his thought on an ecological civilization. It always serves the multiple goals of improving environmental quality and meeting the people’s growing needs for a beautiful ecological environment.

Specifically, environmental rights can be divided into three aspects. The first one is the right to enjoy the environment. People have the right to breathe fresh air, drink clean water, eat safe food, live in a livable environment, enjoy the beauty of nature and life in a beautiful environment, and truly experience the tangible environmental benefits brought about by economic development. At the same time, we shall stick to the systematic management of mountains, rivers, forests, fields, lakes, grasslands and deserts, increase efforts in ecological protection and restoration, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance our ability to adapt to climate changes, and build a safe ecological and environmental barrier for the people. The second one is the right to environmental information. Departments and enterprises responsible for ecological and environmental protection have the obligation to proactively disclose ecological and environmental information to the public. It is necessary to establish a sound system for the legal disclosure of corporate environmental information, strengthen industry management of mandatory disclosure of environmental information, establish an environmental information sharing mechanism, and effectively protect the public’s right to know. The third one is the participation right to environmental issues. Ecological civilization is a cause that the people participate in, build, and enjoy together. Everyone has the right to participate in protecting the ecological environment. We shall constantly stimulate the endogenous motivation of the whole society to jointly protect the ecological environment, improve the public’s rights to participate in, supervise, and report on the environment, promote the public’s effective participation in environmental decision-making, and ensure that all citizens enjoy the right to participate in the environment.

### **III. Actively Explore New Practices to Protect Environmental Health Rights and Interests**

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: “With a good ecological environment, people will have a more tangible sense of happiness.” Since the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has regarded the building of ecological civilization as a top priority for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation. It has planned and carried out a series of fundamental, pioneering, and long-term work to promote historic, turning-point, and overall changes in the building of ecological civilization. China’s sky has become bluer, the land has become greener, and the water has become clearer again. The quality of the ecological

environment has continued to improve. People's sense of gain, happiness, and security have continued to increase. Their environmental health rights and interests have been effectively protected. Their ecological environmental well-being has been significantly improved.

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "There is always scope for protecting human rights." The Third Plenary Session of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee pointed out that we shall adhere to a correct outlook on human rights. The comprehensive improvement of human rights requires the comprehensive improvement of environmental rights. Today, we have embarked on a new journey of promoting the modernization of harmony between humanity and nature. Our goal is to fundamentally improve the ecological environment and basically achieve the goal of realizing a beautiful China by 2035. The Third Plenary Session of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee emphasized that we shall focus on building a beautiful China, deepening reform of the ecological civilization system, and promoting harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. Therefore, we shall continue to improve the quality of the ecological environment, further strengthen the protection of environmental health rights and interests, effectively transform the great vision of building a beautiful China into the rights demands and conscious actions of the people, and promote the healthy and comprehensive development of China's human rights cause.

First, in terms of ideology and theory, we shall study and implement Xi Jinping's thoughts on ecological civilization and the rule of law, promote and practice contemporary China's outlook on human rights, further explain the profound connotation of environmental rights as a new human right from the theoretical, historical, and practical dimensions, and actively build a theoretical and discourse system for an ecological civilization and human rights with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

Second, in terms of systems and mechanisms, we shall further deepen the reform of the ecological civilization system, use the rule of law thinking and methods to provide strong guarantees for comprehensively promoting the building of a beautiful China and effectively safeguarding the environmental rights and interests of citizens, and integrate the people's demand for a beautiful ecological environment and a better life into the entire process of legislation, judicial work, and law enforcement.

Third, in terms of improving the ecological environment, we shall focus on coordinating the promotion of carbon emissions reduction, other pollutant reduction, green expansion, and growth and emphasize the battle to protect blue skies, clear waters, and clean land. We shall promote breakthroughs in pollution prevention and control, ecological protection, and the climate change response in key areas, fields, and indicators, comprehensively advance the building of a beautiful China, and provide the people with a more beautiful ecological environment and high-quality ecological products.

Fourth, in terms of international cooperation, we shall uphold the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, promote states around the world to fulfil their corresponding obligations while enjoying environmental rights, promote the well-being of all mankind through ecological and environmental fairness and justice, and contribute Chinese wisdom, solutions, and strength to the development of the international human rights cause.

(Translated by *JIANG Yu*)