

WFWP VP Barlaan: Need to Balance Environmental Laws with People's Right to Sustainable Development

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Barlaan shares her WFWP intervention at the Expert Management of the Right to Development conference.

New York - At the three-day United Nations meetings on the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development (EMRTD), the Women's Federation for World Peace International contributed its intervention in a statement on creating a balance between environmental protection and the right of people to development.

Merly Barlaan, WFWPI Vice president and director for UN Relations Offices cited the need to create a balance between environmental regulations and the right of local communities to engage in the economic activities that promote self-sufficiency and sustainability. Citing a lived experience at the Chocolate Hills in Carmen, Bohol, Barlaan focused on her hometown in the Philippines. The geological wonder in Carmen is declared a UNESCO Geopark where the government created protective regulations on Bohol Island which have curtailed local communities to develop their own farms and businesses.

Barlaan said that the conflict lies in regulating or limiting development in protected areas, such as the Chocolate Hills, to comply with UNESCO standards. It looks like the Geopark declaration has become more punitive than a blessing, she said. Barlaan emphasized the need to balance livelihoods with conservation, particularly in agricultural and fishing sectors, to limit activities that could cause ecological degradation that potentially impact immediate income in favor of long-term sustainability.

Another contentious point which needs a balanced regulation is on Tourism Development and nature's carrying capacity. Strict guidelines, including visitor limits and restrictions on new tourism projects on

Chocolate Hills are to be crafted to prevent degradation. The Provincial Government of Bohol has introduced the Bohol Sustainable Tourism Development Code of 2025 (signed in January 2026) to manage growth while upholding the Geopark status.



The EMRTD conference at the UN NY Hq. on April 21-23, 2026.

Barlaan opined that a sound environmental and social plan could guide the code which has to be done in a thorough consultation process with communities and experts. She believes that environmental protection need not clash with people's right to live sustainably, with people-centered development in mind. Earth regenerative technologies must be introduced and institutionalized, hence ensuring sustainability for Mother Nature and everyone.

The EMRTD conference was held on April 21-23, 2026 at the UNHQ, New York. It is one of the UN processes of tedious consultations and discussions to finalize the Draft Covenant of the Right to Development documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/128/17/pdf/g2312817.pdf with a goal for adoption by the General Assembly later this year in September on the occasion of the Right to Development's 40th anniversary since its declaration in 1986.

WFWPI engages in climate action as one of its major programs. It undertakes sustainable development projects in the Philippines, Asia, and Africa. In Bohol particularly, WFWP is partnering with local women's organizations and government agriculturists in promoting regenerative farming through permaculture practices. Women leaders in the communities are encouraged to design and develop their agricultural farms to respond to food security and environmental challenges.