

Slovenia is a global leader in recognising the right to a healthy environment, but faces challenges in protecting this right, such as toxic pollution hotspots, lack of access to safe drinking water for vulnerable populations and poor air quality. More urgent action on climate change is also needed, a UN expert said today.

“Slovenia played a key role in championing the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment at the global level, and was a pioneer in recognising this right in its Constitution in 1974,” said David Boyd, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, after an eight-day visit to the country.

Boyd said he had seen inspiring examples of Slovenian leadership and good practices related to nature conservation, solid waste management, environmental taxation, and the “sparkling green” capital of Ljubljana. In his end-of-mission statement, Boyd issued recommendations on a series of issues.

He said numerous international agencies have identified poor air quality in Slovenia as a major contributor to premature mortality and disease. Air pollution has especially adverse effects on specific vulnerable populations, including children, older persons, and those who suffer from existing respiratory or cardiovascular illnesses.

In a community near the Salonit Anhovo cement plant in the Soča River valley, many residents were exposed to asbestos fibres for decades, resulting in elevated levels of deaths and illness. Now air pollution endangers their health and the right to live in a healthy environment. “In this and other known pollution hotspots, the Government of Slovenia must prioritize actions to improve air quality and refuse to authorize any activities that would increase pollution,” the Special Rapporteur said.

More than 99 per cent of the population in Slovenia can access safe drinking water but Boyd said he was shocked this was not the case for many families at a Roma settlement in the south-east region of Dolenjska. People in Anhovo have also endured ongoing problems with unsafe drinking water. “Ensuring safe drinking water for all Slovenians is a human rights obligation and should be a national priority.”

The expert said that despite the increasingly adverse impacts of climate change, action to increase energy efficiency and boost solar have been slow. The coal-fired power plant that provides about a third of the Slovenia’s electricity is not scheduled to be closed until 2033. “Despite the climate emergency, Slovenia is not addressing this crisis with sufficient urgency”, Boyd said.

During his visit, Boyd met with government officials, representatives of civil society, business, academia, youth, UN agencies and other experts. Places he visited included Anhovo in the Kanal ob Soči municipality, the Dobruška vas settlement in the Škocjan

municipality and the sites of existing and proposed hydroelectric dams on the Sava River near Brežice.

The Special Rapporteur will present a full report to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2023, OHCHR writes.