



# Biography

**Dr Grethel Aguilar**

**Acting Director General, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**



Dr Grethel Aguilar, born in Costa Rica, assumed office as Acting Director General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in June 2019.

Dr Aguilar brings with her more than 25 years of experience in conservation and sustainable development, having worked extensively on developing and applying environmental law and policy in collaboration with governments and civil society. In particular, she is deeply passionate about the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and has pushed for the inclusion of their knowledge and experience in mainstream conservation policy.

Through her work in field projects, Dr Aguilar has helped communities access clean water, advocated for environmental justice, assisted indigenous peoples in obtaining rights to their natural resources, and championed gender equality in environmental governance.

Most recently, she held the position of IUCN Regional Director for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, a role she took on in 2005. As Regional Director, she oversaw the development and effective implementation of the IUCN Programme throughout the region and managed a wide range of issues, from ecosystem-based resource management strategies and policies to organisational management and financial planning. In 2017 she also began providing support to the IUCN regional office in South America.

Prior to joining IUCN, Dr Aguilar worked at the Costa Rican Environmental Law Center between 1992 and 1996, advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples and for nature conservation. From 1996 to 2005 she worked as a consultant for bodies such as the Central America Commission for Environment and Development, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and various governments. Dr Aguilar provided expert advice to UNEP on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing. She also helped establish the Group of Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries – countries with a great diversity of species and ecosystems.

As a firm believer in educating and inspiring the next generation Dr Aguilar has taught at the University of Costa Rica, the Latin American University of Science and Technology, the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE) and the Metropolitan Autonomous University of Mexico. Dr Aguilar has also authored multiple publications in the fields of environmental law and policy, including *Governance of Shared Waters: Legal and Institutional Issues* (IUCN, 2009) and *Forest Legality in Mesoamerica* (IUCN, 2015).

She served as the 2018 Dorothy S. McCluskey Visiting Fellow in Conservation at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, and in 2001 received the title of Doctor of Law Outstanding *cum laude* from the University of Alicante, Spain for her thesis 'Legal Instruments for Access to Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge in Indigenous Territories'.