

To the attention of Special Rapporteurs:

Michel Forst, Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Annalisa Ciampi, Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association

Distinguished colleagues,

In advance of the 36th session of the UN Human Rights Council and the 71st session of the UNGA Third Committee,

We, the undersigned 39 human rights defenders from 29 countries participated in a workshop on the *'Protection of Environmental, Land and Indigenous Rights Defenders'* in Johannesburg from 7-9 August 2017. We are reaching out to you with our concerns regarding our work and serious threats to human rights and the environment. In this statement, we aim to highlight the closure of civic space and the risks we face in our daily lives as we defend the environment and speak out against unjust incursions by corporations who collude with our governments.

On the 2nd of August, the world officially went into deficit on the amount of energy we can consume in 2017. This day, Earth Overshoot Day (EOD), keeps coming earlier each year as we are using more natural resources than our planet can produce in a year. It is well documented that the global North enjoys the majority of the benefits of resource overconsumption while the global South bears the brunt of the costs.

Lately, and most worryingly, the cost of this scramble for resources has been human lives. Many studies published in recent years show increasingly glaring evidence of the persecution which we, the people who defend natural resources against unscrupulous exploitation have frequently faced. The year 2016 surpassed 2015 as the deadliest year on record for those among us who want to have a say in the stewardship of our natural endowment. Global Witness an international NGO that exposes risks between corruption and environmental abuse reports that the number of deaths has risen to 200 (from 185 in 2015) and that the phenomenon is continuously spreading to new countries.

In the current climate, where repression is increasingly becoming the norm globally, environmental and land defenders, particularly those of us with indigenous backgrounds, are vulnerable. Living and working in remote areas, we tend to suffer from social and economic marginalisation, which makes it even harder for us to be heard and to stand up to powerful vested interests of national and transnational corporations who often operate with the State. When we express concerns over the collusion between States and corporate actors, we face opposition - dissent is stifled and criminalised, and our lives are threatened. Often our work is discredited and we are labelled 'anti-national' and 'anti-development'. This constant pushback is evidence that the State-corporation nexus, fuelled through corruption, is one of the biggest enabling factors for the persecution we face.

This statement is our collective call for help. We need global action to counter the threats we face. We need space to make ourselves heard and greater support from actors with global clout who can amplify our voices. Our fight extends well beyond our respective lands and

communities. Ultimately, we are fighting for a world in which all benefit fairly and sustainably from the natural resources that are conserved for the future generations.

This is not just a struggle for resources, it's a struggle for justice and social equality, for which we all share responsibility. As Oxfam demonstrated in its 2017 report, "An Economy for the 99 Percent", the loss of land or access to resources like water or forests greatly contributes to inequality worldwide. It deprives communities and citizens, like us, of our sources of income and threatens our survival.

When we protest peacefully against this attack on our resources and livelihoods, we face violence from state forces, private security groups and state-sponsored vigilante groups. When we stand up to defend the rights of our communities, we face unfounded criminal charges, unlawful arrests, custodial torture, threats to life and liberty, surveillance, judicial harassment and administrative hurdles, among other actions. Our families are threatened into silence and many of us have had to take the difficult decision to flee our homes and go into exile, retreating from a fight that has become too dangerous.

In light of the increasingly dangerous situations and conditions we are currently faced with, we call on you to :

- Urge UN Human Rights Council member states to clarify national legislation dealing with rights related to natural resources in accordance with international law
- Develop guiding principles for governments to draft legislative provisions for improved protection of human rights defenders, including those working on the management of natural resources.
- Emphasise the need for governments to comply with international standards with regards to human rights and development, in particular the ILO Convention 169 on the right of indigenous and tribal peoples, by ensuring that communities are fully consulted and that their full consent is granted prior to the development of infrastructure or extractive projects.
- Urge governments in countries where environmental and land defenders are most at risk to establish emergency crisis funds to better protect those activists.
- Prioritise country visits to those countries where the lives of environmental and land defenders are most threatened such as Honduras, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Brazil, Philippines, Colombia, Nicaragua and India, in order to draw attention to their plight and encourage their governments to ensure an enabling environment for environmental and land defenders to continue their struggles safely.
- Mobilise increased resources and draw on existing UN staff in various countries to assist you in pursuing individual cases.
- Publicise follow-up actions taken on those countries you have already visited, such as Mexico in 2017.

We thank you for your kind attention.

Signatories

Acción Ecológica - Ecuador
Amadiba Crisis Committee - South Africa
Associação Justiça, Paz e Democracia -Angola
Association Africaine de Défense des Droits de l'Homme - Democratic Republic of the Congo
Association des Amis de la Nature - Burundi
Association Jeunesse Verte du Cameroun - Cameroon
Association Tunisienne de Droit du Développement - Tunisia
Arab Youth Climate Movement - Jordan
Badia East Community - Nigeria
Brainforest - Gabon
Center of Studies and Initiatives for Development - Equatorial Guinea
Collectif Tany - Madagascar
Consejo Nacional para la Defensa de la Tierra, Lago y Soberanía - Nicaragua
Fundar - Mexico
Global Rights Alert - Uganda
Justiça nos Trilhos - Brazil
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law - Kazakhstan
Livanningo - Mozambique
Maasai Women at rural communities - Kenya
Marange Community Development Trust - Zimbabwe
Mozambique Bar Association - Mozambique
Nash Vek Public Foundation - Kyrgyzstan
National Center for Advocacy Studies - India
National Organisation of Andean and Amazonian Indigenous Women of Peru - Peru
National Training and Support Center for NGOs - Tajikistan
Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme - Philippines
People's Watch - India
Rede Terra - Angola
Red Sombra Observadores Glencore - Argentina
Regional Central American Association for Water and the Environment - Costa Rica
Rim Climate Movement - Mauritania
Sustaining the Wild Coast - South Africa
Tanzanian Human Rights Defenders Coalition - Tanzania
Tanzania Pastoralist Community Forum - Tanzania
Wahli Riau - Indonesia