

DEFENDING TOMORROW



The climate crisis and threats against
land and environmental defenders

Since the publication of this report new information has come to light resulting on one case from Kazakhstan being removed from our database. Additional information has led to the inclusion of an extra case from Kazakhstan which meets our criteria for inclusion. As such, the figures for 2019 remain 212 killings globally, with no changes to country level or sector statistics. Please contact us at media@globalwitness.org if you have any further enquiries on this or the methodology involved.

DEFENDING TOMORROW

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Executive summary	6
A global analysis and top findings	8
Defenders: on the frontline of the climate crisis	11
Global map of attacks in 2019	14
Colombia: a rising tide of violence	20
Victories for people – and the planet	24
Philippines: criminalised for protecting the environment	26
Agribusiness: attacks on the rise	30
Romania: corruption and murder in the EU	32
Conclusion: business that costs the earth	35
Recommendations	36
Impacts and achievements of the Defenders' Campaign	38
Methodology	40
Acknowledgements	42
Endnotes	43

This report, and our campaign, is dedicated to all those individuals, communities and organisations that are bravely taking a stand to defend human rights, their land, and our environment.

212 of them were murdered last year for doing just that.

We remember their names, and celebrate their activism.

RONALD ACEITUNO ROMERO, BOLIVIA
ALEXANDRE COELHO FURTADO NETO, BRAZIL
ALUCIANO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS, BRAZIL
CARLOS ALBERTO OLIVEIRA DE SOUZA, BRAZIL
CLAUDIONOR COSTA DA SILVA, BRAZIL
DEMILSON OVELAR MENDES, BRAZIL
DILMA FERREIRA SILVA, BRAZIL
EDMAR VALDINEI RODRIGUES BRANCO, BRAZIL
ELIZEU QUERES DE JESUS, BRAZIL
EMYRA WAIÃPI, BRAZIL
FIRMINO GUAJAJARA, BRAZIL
FRANCISCO DE SOUZA PEREIRA, BRAZIL
FRANCISCO SALES COSTA DE SOUSA, BRAZIL
GUSTAVO JOSÉ SIMOURA, BRAZIL
JOSÉ ARAÚJO DOS SANTOS, BRAZIL
MARCIANO DOS SANTOS FOSALUSA, BRAZIL
MARCIO RODRIGUES DOS REIS, BRAZIL
MAXCIEL PEREIRA DOS SANTOS, BRAZIL
MILTON LOPES, BRAZIL
NEMIS MACHADO DE OLIVEIRA, BRAZIL
PAULO PAULINO GUAJAJARA, BRAZIL
RAIMUNDO BENÍCIO GUAJAJARA, BRAZIL
ROMILDO MARTINS RAMIRES, BRAZIL
ROSANE SANTIAGO SILVEIRA, BRAZIL
WILLAMES MACHADO ALENCAR, BRAZIL
FAHADOU CISSÉ, BURKINA FASO
HAMA BALIMA, BURKINA FASO
UON VANNA, CAMBODIA
ALBERT ARMANDO SÁNCHEZ GÓMEZ, COLOMBIA
ALEX FERNANDO SALCEDO, COLOMBIA
ALFONSO CORREA SANDOVAL, COLOMBIA
AQUILEO MECHECHE BARAGON, COLOMBIA
ARGEMIRO LÓPEZ, COLOMBIA
ASDRUVAL CAYAPU, COLOMBIA
BERNARDO CHANCÍ, COLOMBIA
CARLOS ALDARIO ARENAS SALINAS, COLOMBIA
CARLOS BISCUE, COLOMBIA
CARLOS DANIEL OBANDO, COLOMBIA
CARLOS OBANDO, COLOMBIA
CONSTANTINO RAMÍREZ BEDOYA, COLOMBIA
CRISTIAN SÁNCHEZ, COLOMBIA
CRISTINA BAUTISTA, COLOMBIA
DANIEL EDUARDO ROJAS ZAMBRANO, COLOMBIA
DEMETRIO BARRERA DÍAZ, COLOMBIA
DIDIER FERNEY GONZÁLEZ, COLOMBIA
DILIO CORPUS GUETIO, COLOMBIA
EBEL YONDA RAMOS, COLOMBIA
ELIODORO FINSCUÉ, COLOMBIA

EMILIANO CHOCUE, COLOMBIA
ENRIQUE GUEJIA MEZA, COLOMBIA
ERIC ESNORALDO VIERA PAZ, COLOMBIA
EUGENIO TENORIO, COLOMBIA
FERNANDO JARAMILLO, COLOMBIA
FREIMAN BAICUÉ, COLOMBIA
GERSAÍN YATACUÉ, COLOMBIA
GILBERTO DOMICÓ DOMICÓ, COLOMBIA
HENRY CAYUY, COLOMBIA
HERNÁN ANTONIO BERMÚDEZ ARÉVALO, COLOMBIA
HUMBERTO LONDOÑO, COLOMBIA
JAIRO JAVIER RUIZ, COLOMBIA
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JOSÉ GERARDO SOTO, COLOMBIA
KEVIN MESTIZO, COLOMBIA
LEONARDO NASTACUÁS RODRÍGUEZ, COLOMBIA
LILIA PATRICIA GARCÍA, COLOMBIA
LUCERO JARAMILLO ÁLVAREZ, COLOMBIA
LUIS ALBERTO JUMÍ BAILARÍN, COLOMBIA
MAGDALENA COCUNUBA, COLOMBIA
MANUEL GREGORIO GONZÁLEZ SEGURA, COLOMBIA
MANUEL OSUNA TAPIAS, COLOMBIA
MARÍA DEL PILAR HURTADO, COLOMBIA
MARIA NELLY BERNAL ANDRADE, COLOMBIA
MARIO ALBERTO ACHICUÉ, COLOMBIA
MARITZA ISABEL QUIROZ, COLOMBIA
MARLON FERNEY PACHO, COLOMBIA
MIGUEL ÁNGEL ALPALA, COLOMBIA
MILTON HERNÁNDEZ, COLOMBIA
NATALIA JIMÉNEZ, COLOMBIA
PABLO EMILIO CAMPO TEQUIA, COLOMBIA
REINALDO CARRILLO VERA, COLOMBIA
RODRIGO MONSALVE, COLOMBIA
SEFERINO YUNDA CAMAYO, COLOMBIA
TORIBIO CANAS VELASCO, COLOMBIA
UVERNEY VILLANO, COLOMBIA
VÍCTOR MANUEL CHANI, COLOMBIA
VÍCTOR MANUEL TRUJILLO, COLOMBIA
WALTER RODRÍGUEZ, COLOMBIA
WILMER ANTONIO MIRANDA CABRERA, COLOMBIA
WILSON PÉREZ ASCANIO, COLOMBIA
SERGIO ROJAS ORTIZ, COSTA RICA
FREDDY MAHAMBA MULIRO,
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
JOËL IMBANGOLA LUNEA,
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
EMMANUEL ESSIEN, GHANA
DIANA ISABEL HERNÁNDEZ JUÁREZ, GUATEMALA
GABRIEL HUMBERTO CHACÓN GARCÍA, GUATEMALA
ISIDRO PÉREZ PÉREZ, GUATEMALA
JORGE JUC CUCUL, GUATEMALA
JORGE MIGUEL CHOC, GUATEMALA
JULIO RAMÍREZ, GUATEMALA

MANUEL PÉREZ HERNÁNDEZ, GUATEMALA
MATEO RAMÍREZ HERNÁNDEZ, GUATEMALA
MELESIO RAMÍREZ, GUATEMALA
OBDULIO VILLAGRAN, GUATEMALA
PAULINA CRUZ, GUATEMALA
WILLY RENÉ DE PAZ BOJÓRQUEZ, GUATEMALA
ABAD MIGUEL GUILTY, HONDURAS
ADOLFO REDONDO, HONDURAS
EFRAÍN MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ, HONDURAS
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SANTOS FELIPE ESCOBAR, HONDURAS
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GREGORIO CHAPARRO CRUZ, MEXICO
HÉCTOR ARMANDO DOMÍNGUEZ RODRÍGUEZ, MEXICO
ISAÍAS CANTÚ CARRASCO, MEXICO
JOSÉ LUIS ÁLVAREZ FLORES, MEXICO
JOSÉ SANTIAGO GÓMEZ ÁLVAREZ, MEXICO
JOSUÉ BERNARDO MARCIAL SANTOS, MEXICO
JULIO EMMANUEL DOMÍNGUEZ RODRÍGUEZ, MEXICO
LUIS ARMANDO FUENTES AQUINO, MEXICO
NOÉ JIMÉNEZ PABLO, MEXICO
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ANOJ ENOJO RAPADA, PHILIPPINES
ANTHONY TRINIDAD, PHILIPPINES
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BIENVINIDO VEGUILLA JR, PHILIPPINES
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EMEL TEJERO, PHILIPPINES
EMELDA TORRALBA, PHILIPPINES
FELIPE DACAL-DACAL, PHILIPPINES
FRANKLIN LARIOS, PHILIPPINES
GAUDENCIO ARANA, PHILIPPINES
GENES PALMARES, PHILIPPINES
GONZALO ROSALES, PHILIPPINES
GUILLERMO CASAS, PHILIPPINES
HONEY MAE SUAZO, PHILIPPINES
ISMAEL AVELINO, PHILIPPINES
JEFFREY BAYOT, PHILIPPINES
JOASH PEREGRINO, PHILIPPINES
JOEL ANINO, PHILIPPINES
JOSEPHINE EGTOB, PHILIPPINES
KANDATU BANSIL, PHILIPPINES
LEONIDES BACONG, PHILIPPINES
LIOVIGILDO 'NONOY' PALMA, PHILIPPINES
MANOLO MARTIN, PHILIPPINES
MARIO PANARES, PHILIPPINES
MELCHOR PANARES, PHILIPPINES
RANDELL GALLEGO, PHILIPPINES
RICKY RECOMONO, PHILIPPINES
ROBERTO 'BOBBY' MEJIA, PHILIPPINES
ROGELIO RECOMONO, PHILIPPINES
ROLANDO EGTOB, PHILIPPINES
RONALDO CORPUZ, PHILIPPINES
SALVADOR 'BADOR' ROMANO, PHILIPPINES
SANITO 'TATING' DELUBIO, PHILIPPINES
SERGIO ATAY, PHILIPPINES
SONNY PALAGTIW, PHILIPPINES
STEVE ARAPOC, PHILIPPINES
VALENTIN ACABAL, PHILIPPINES
ZENON TEOFILLO GRANADA, PHILIPPINES
LIVIU POP, ROMANIA
RADUCU GORCIOAIA, ROMANIA
SGT PHILEMON ASASIRA, UGANDA
CRISTIAN BARRIOS, VENEZUELA
CRISTÓBAL BARRIOS, VENEZUELA
EDISON SOTO, VENEZUELA
JEREMY MUÑOZ, VENEZUELA
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LUIS FERNÁNDEZ, VENEZUELA
RICHARD RODRÍGUEZ, VENEZUELA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global temperatures reach new highs. Arctic ice continues to melt. Each summer brings news of fires burning through climate-critical forests. If we want to change these headlines, or avoid reading progressively worse ones, it could not be clearer that we are running out of time.

Communities across the world are standing up to carbon-intensive industries and exposing unsustainable business practices wreaking havoc on ecosystems and our climate. **These are the people on the frontline of the climate crisis**, trying to protect climate-critical areas and reverse these devastating practices.

For years, land and environmental defenders* have been the first line of defence against the causes and impacts of climate breakdown. Time after time, they have challenged the damaging aspects of industries rampaging unhampered through forests, wetlands, oceans and biodiversity hotspots. Yet despite clearer evidence than ever of the crucial role they play and the dangers they increasingly face, far too many businesses, financiers and governments fail to protect them in their vital and peaceful work.

MORE KILLINGS THAN EVER BEFORE

This report is based on research into the killings and enforced disappearances of land and environmental

defenders between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2019. It also shows the broader range of non-lethal threats and criminalisation that they face.

The documented number of **lethal attacks against these defenders continues to rise**. Again, we are forced to report that this is the highest year ever for killings – 212 were murdered in 2019. On average, four defenders have been killed every week since December 2015 – the month the Paris Climate agreement was signed, when the world supposedly came together amid hopes of a new era of climate progress. Countless more are silenced by violent attacks, arrests, death threats, sexual violence or lawsuits – our global map provides a picture of the broad array of methods used to deter communities from protecting their land and environment.

Shockingly, over half of all reported killings last year occurred in just two countries: **Colombia and the Philippines**. Reports show that murders of community and social leaders across the country have risen dramatically in Colombia in recent years – and, with 64 activists killed, those protecting their land and the environment were most at risk. The Philippines, a country consistently identified as one of the worst places in Asia for attacks, saw a rise from 30 killings in 2018 to 43 last year.

Mining was still the most culpable industry – connected with the murders of 50 defenders in 2019. Communities opposing carbon intensive oil, gas and coal projects faced continued threats. Attacks, murders and massacres were used to clear the path for commodities like palm oil and sugar. In 2019, Global Witness documented 34 killings linked to large-scale agriculture – an increase of over 60% since 2018.

* We define land and environmental defenders as people who take a stand and peaceful action against the unjust, discriminatory, corrupt or damaging exploitation of natural resources or the environment. For more detail, see our methodology on page 40.



CLIMATE DEFENDERS



In August 2019, climate activists in Colombia demonstrated in front of the Brazilian embassies over the fires in the Amazon rainforest and the inaction of Jair Bolsonaro's government. Luis Robayo/AFP via Getty Images

A wave of youth activism and climate strikes put the climate crisis at the top of the media agenda in 2019 – just as a series of devastating floods, typhoons and wildfires gave us a glimpse of the consequences of ignoring their demands for change. But it is also local land and environmental defenders who are taking a stand for our climate – and they face potentially fatal consequences for doing so.

Our statistics reveal that a significant number of murdered land and environmental defenders belong to indigenous communities, whose land and water management skills are crucial to combat the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. Research is increasingly showing that indigenous-managed lands have lower deforestation rates and better conservation outcomes than protection zones that exclude indigenous peoples.

A record number of forest fires broke out across the Brazilian Amazon in 2019, with satellite data showing an 84% increase compared to the same period in 2018. Joao Laet/AFP via Getty Images



And at a time when we most need to listen to these voices, governments around the world have been taking a wave of measures to close down the space for peaceful protest. They are deploying tactics ranging from smear campaigns to spurious criminal charges to silence those that are standing up for the climate and humanity's survival.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have intensified the problems land and environmental defenders face. Governments around the world – from the US to Brazil and Colombia to the Philippines – have used the crisis to strengthen draconian measures to control citizens and roll back hard-fought environmental regulations.

HITTING THE MOST VULNERABLE HARDEST

The climate crisis is arguably the greatest existential threat we all face. And as it escalates, it serves to exacerbate many of the other serious problems in our world today. Economic inequality renders communities disproportionately exposed to the force of flooding and fires – driving yet greater inequality. Racial discrimination means people of colour are far more likely to bear the impacts of pollution and droughts.

The sad reality is that those with the least responsibility for causing climate change will be hardest hit. It is often the poorest communities who are more likely to live in the path of storms, on flood-prone coastlines, in places regularly gripped by drought.

Globally, women and girls are often more vulnerable to its impacts. They are more likely to die in natural disasters,

and disproportionately affected by the longer-term impacts of drought and flooding. Women that stand up for their rights to land and a healthy environment face specific threats, on top of those also faced by men. Ensuring that women land and environment activists are supported and protected is vital if we are to successfully respond to the climate crisis.

DEFENDING TOMORROW

Despite facing violence, threats and criminalisation, in 2019 communities across the world defended their rights, environment and our global climate. From safeguarding forests against oil exploration to securing the rights to their ancestral lands, their resilience, strength and determination continues to protect our planet.

If we want to end climate breakdown, then it is in the footsteps of land and environmental defenders we must follow. We must listen to their demands and amplify them. Inspired by their bravery and leadership, we must push those in power – businesses, financiers and governments – to tackle the root causes of the problem, support and protect defenders and create regulations that ensure projects and operations are carried out with proper due diligence, transparency and free prior and informed consent.

With 2019 the most dangerous year on record, it is obvious that both governments and companies have failed in their responsibilities. To address this:

- **Governments** need to urgently address insecure land rights, protect defenders' rights to safety, and investigate and bring to justice those responsible for attacks against them.
- **Companies** must respect defender rights, develop and implement zero-tolerance policies on threats against defenders and ensure full cooperation with any investigations into attacks.
- **Investors** should screen portfolios for defender-related risks, establish early warning systems to detect and prevent potential conflicts, and include contractual provisions in all project contracts requiring compliance with the company's defender policy.

It could not be clearer that the time for structural and lasting change has come. As the world looks to recover from a global pandemic, how we rebuild our world to be greener, more humane and more resilient has become the burning question. Land and environmental defenders have a vital role in answering it.

A GLOBAL ANALYSIS

THE DEADLIEST YEAR ON RECORD

In 2019, Global Witness recorded 212 murdered land and environmental defenders – making it the deadliest year on record for people defending their homes, forests and rivers against climate-destructive industries. On average, four defenders have been killed every week since December 2015 – the month the Paris Climate agreement was created. Countless more were silenced by violent attacks, arrests, death threats, sexual violence or lawsuits.

A SHARP INCREASE IN KILLINGS

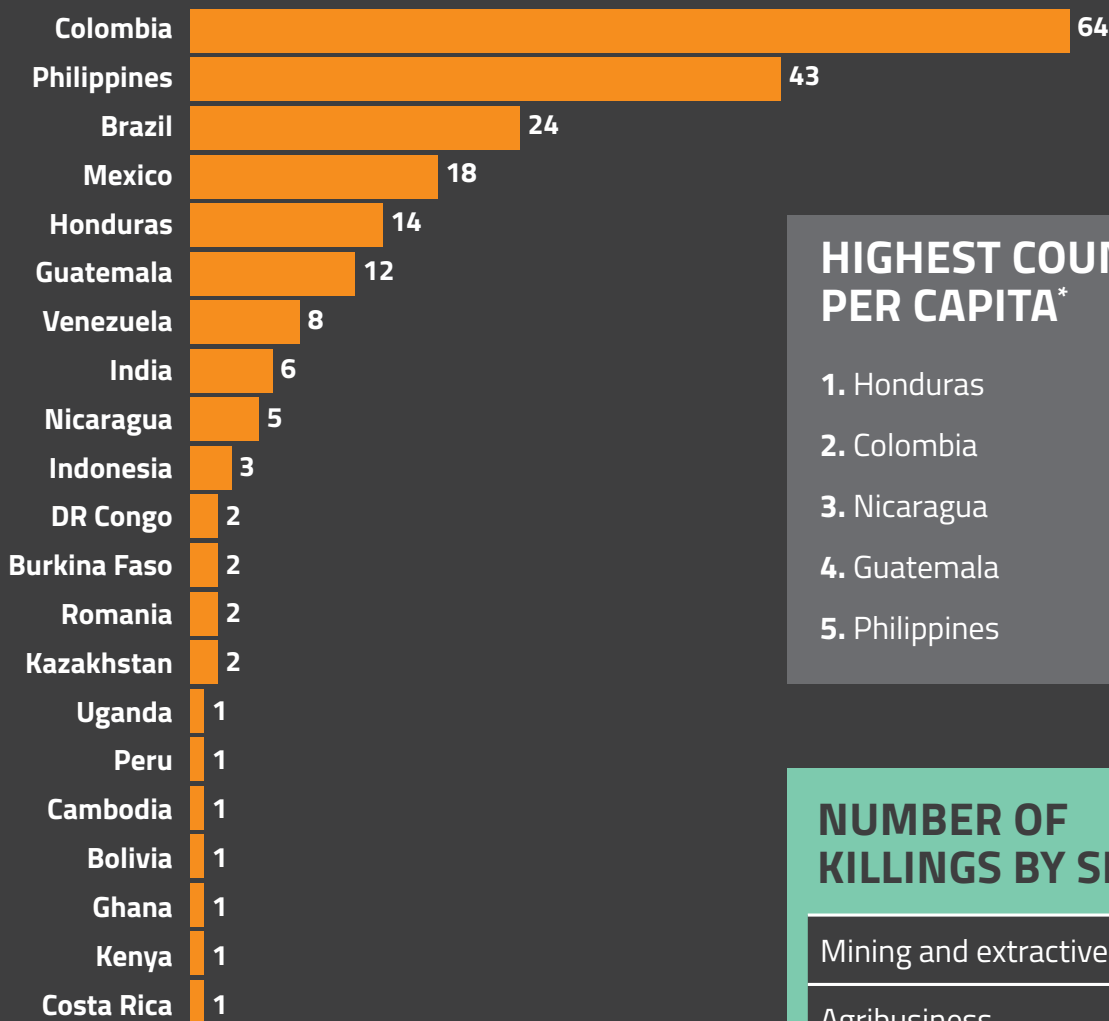
Shockingly, over half of all reported killings last year occurred in two countries: **Colombia and the Philippines**.

Both have seen a rise in attacks against land and environmental defenders since 2018, with killings in Colombia in 2019 peaking at 64 activists – the highest Global Witness has ever recorded in the country. Reports show that the murder of community and social leaders has risen dramatically in Colombia in recent years.¹

The United Nations Human Rights Office points to several reasons for this growing tide of violence, such as the challenges of implementing the 2016 Peace Agreement including land reform and programmes meant to encourage farmers to swap illegal crops for legal harvests. The post-2016 shifts in local power dynamics are driving increased violence.² Rural communities appear to be badly hit, as criminal gangs reposition themselves across regions previously controlled by the FARC-EP guerrillas.³ Escalating land conflict and environmental destruction has pushed communities to become defenders.⁴

Likewise, the **Philippines** has become even deadlier for activists. It has been consistently named as one of the worst places in Asia for attacks against defenders,⁵ and had the highest number of recorded killings – 30 – globally in 2018. But things got even worse in 2019, with the number of reported murders rising to 43. The relentless vilification of defenders by the government and widespread impunity for their attackers may well be driving the increase.⁶

TOTAL NUMBER OF KILLINGS PER COUNTRY



HIGHEST COUNTRIES PER CAPITA*

1. Honduras
2. Colombia
3. Nicaragua
4. Guatemala
5. Philippines

NUMBER OF KILLINGS BY SECTOR

Mining and extractives	50
Agribusiness	34
Logging	24
Illegal crops substitution	14
Land reform	11
Water and dams	6
Poaching	4
Fishing	1
Other	9
No clear link to a sector	71

Our data on killings will never accurately capture the true scale of the problem. In some countries, the situation facing defenders is hard to gauge; restrictions on a free press and the absence of documented abuses by governments and NGOs can lead to underreporting. Land disputes and environmental damage, two of the prominent underlying causes behind communities' activism, can also be very hard to monitor in parts of the world affected by conflict.

These reporting challenges, coupled with the requirement to meet strict verification criteria for recording killings, mean that our figures are almost certainly an underestimate. You can find more information on our methodology on page 40.

* Ranked by number of killings per 1 million citizens

TOP FINDINGS*

- > Global Witness recorded 212 land and environmental defenders killed in 2019 – an average of **more than four people a week**. Reports show that many more were attacked, jailed or faced smear campaigns because of their work.⁷
- > **Colombia saw a sharp rise in the number of deaths** with 64 defenders killed in 2019. This is over double the number killed in 2018, and the highest Global Witness has ever recorded in the country. 14 of these deaths were linked to illegal crop substitution.
- > In **Honduras** killings rose from four in 2018 to 14 last year, making it the most dangerous country per capita for land and environmental defenders in 2019. It is the country with the greatest percentage increase in lethal attacks against activists.
- > Over two-thirds of killings took place in **Latin America**, which has consistently ranked the worst-affected region since Global Witness began to publish data in 2012. In 2019, the **Amazon region** alone saw 33 deaths. Almost 90% of the killings in **Brazil** were in the Amazon.**
- > **Mining** was the sector linked to the most murders, with 50 defenders killed in 2019. More than half of them were from mining-affected communities in Latin America. **The Philippines** was the country with most mining-related killings, with 16 deaths.
- > Asia has consistently been the worst region for **agribusiness**-related attacks. In 2019, 85% of such attacks recorded by Global Witness were in Asia. Of these, almost 90% were in the **Philippines**.
- > **Logging** was the sector with the highest increase in killings globally since 2018, with 85% more attacks recorded against defenders opposing the industry.
- > 19 of the victims killed in 2019 were **state officials** or **park rangers**, people employed to protect the environment.[†] Attacks were documented across eight countries: the **Philippines, Guatemala, Romania, Kazakhstan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Brazil** and **Ghana**.
- > **Europe** remains the least-affected continent. Two people were killed in 2019, both working to stop illegal logging in **Romania**. Reports suggest that 16 state rangers were assaulted there last year.⁸ While the number of murders in Europe is low, defenders in this region face smear campaigns and criminalisation for their activism.⁹
- > Verifying cases from **Africa** continues to be difficult. Limited monitoring of the issue by civil society, media repression and localised conflict mean attacks are probably underreported in some regions, with seven environmental activists reported murdered last year.
- > Indigenous peoples are at a disproportionate risk of reprisals. Last year, **40% of murdered defenders belonged to indigenous communities**. Between 2015 and 2019 over a third of all fatal attacks have targeted indigenous people – even though indigenous communities make up only 5% of the world's population. They are some of the most at-risk communities across the globe.
- > Underreporting, widespread impunity and corruption make it difficult to identify perpetrators, but Global Witness was able to link **state forces** to 37 of the murders. Private actors like hit-men, criminal gangs and private security guards were also suspected of involvement.
- > **Criminalisation and smear campaigns** against activists can leave communities more vulnerable to attack. In 2019, individuals and environmental organisations faced stigmatisation from government figures and local media, using labels like **'anti-development', 'criminals' or 'terrorists'**.
- > Over 1 in 10 defenders killed were **women**. Often the backbone of their community, women tend to take on more of the responsibility of looking after children and elderly relatives, on top of trying to earn a living and work as activists. Women who act and speak out may also face gender-specific threats, including sexual violence. If other members of their household are defenders, they can become targeted too.

* The findings in this section, unless otherwise stated, are based on the documented killings of land and environmental defenders that Global Witness has verified according to the methodology on page 40.

** Global Witness' source of data from Brazil is the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). Each organisation uses its own methodology for documenting killings and, as a result, our numbers are different to CPT's. While Global Witness tracks the murder of 'land and environmental defenders', the CPT monitors rural conflicts affecting small-scale farmers, landless communities, indigenous peoples and traditional communities, as well as rural trade unionists. Since 1975, the CPT has been striving to give visibility to the struggle of these people for land, water, and their rights, and for that reason makes use of the social identities that these groups have determined for themselves.

† See methodology on page 40 for more details.



Brazilian Indigenous leader Sonia Guajajara (centre) of the Guajajara tribe and head of the Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil (Brazil's Indigenous People Articulation), calling on EU lawmakers to exert pressure on the Brazilian government to better protect the rights of indigenous communities. Thomas Samson/AFP via Getty Images

DEFENDERS: ON THE FRONTLINE OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

“It’s for our forest and future generations. And it’s for the whole world.” Nemonte Nenquimo, President of the Waorani Pastaza Organisation – an indigenous group who won a legal battle to stop oil and gas exploration on their land in Ecuador

A wave of youth activism and climate strikes put the climate crisis at the top of the media agenda in 2019 – just as a series of devastating floods, typhoons and wildfires gave us a glimpse of the consequences of ignoring their demands for change.

But it is not just high-profile activists we rely on to stand up to the carbon-intensive and unsustainable industries wreaking havoc on ecosystems. It’s also the local land and environmental defenders who live directly in their path. These are people on the

frontline of the climate crisis – and they face potentially fatal consequences for the stand they take.

Global Witness has documented violence against defenders since 2012. Despite concerted efforts from national and international organisations, the number of attacks continues to rise.



Nemonte Nenquimo (centre), President of the Coordinating Council of the Waorani Nationality of Ecuador-Pastaza, celebrates their legal victory to protect their territory in the Amazon from oil exploration. Rodrigo Buendia/AFP via Getty Images

Agribusiness and oil, gas and mining have been the biggest industrial drivers of conflict – and, as they cut down forests and pump carbon dioxide into our atmosphere, they are also the sectors pushing us further into runaway climate breakdown. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), agriculture, forestry and other types of land use account for 23% of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰

Land and environmental defenders play a vital role in protecting climate-critical forests and ecosystems. Recent research shows that indigenous and local communities around the world are managing forests that contain

carbon equivalent to 33 times our current annual emissions – although even this staggering figure is likely to be an underestimate.¹¹ At the same time, research is clearly showing that indigenous-managed lands have lower deforestation rates and better conservation outcomes than protection zones that exclude indigenous peoples.¹²

The dark side of these facts is that indigenous communities also suffer a highly disproportionate number of the documented attacks on defenders. Insecure land tenure, irresponsible business practices and government policies that prioritise extractive economies at the cost of human rights are putting these people, and their land, at risk.¹³ Indigenous and local communities are estimated to hold rights to more than half of the world's land mass, but hold legal title to just 10% of it.¹⁴

Addressing these issues should be at the forefront of the world's efforts to tackle the climate crisis. But as things stand, we are in danger of missing an enormous opportunity. Of the country commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement, only 21 (out of nearly 200) include any pledge to promote community management of natural resources or land tenure.¹⁵

While these issues are playing out across the world, nowhere are they more apparent than in Brazil. President Bolsonaro's aggressive policies to push to expand industrial-scale mining and agribusiness in the Amazon have grave consequences for indigenous peoples, as well as for the global climate. The rate of deforestation in indigenous territories is rising sharply – with a 74% increase from 2018 to 2019.¹⁶ Shockingly, Brazil accounted for a third of the world's tropical forest loss in 2019. As Bolsonaro scales back environmental enforcement, the criminal networks that are driving the Amazon's deforestation have effectively been given the green light.¹⁷

PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

At the same time, governments around the world have been taking a wave of measures to close down the space for peaceful protest – from Bolsonaro's inflammatory calls against environmental activism in Brazil to anti-pipeline protest legislation in the US.¹⁸ They are deploying tactics ranging from smear campaigns to spurious criminal charges to silence those that are standing up for the climate and humanity's survival – notably land and environmental defenders.

According to CIVICUS, only 3% of the world lives in countries with open civic space – the ability to organise and participate in political and social activism. There is

ample evidence that governments are using the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to shut down protest still further.¹⁹

Many of the world's worst environmental and human rights abuses are driven by the exploitation of natural resources and corruption in the global political and economic system. The most direct opposition to this frequently comes from the communities whose lands and rights are under threat, and whose ability to peacefully protest is being systematically curtailed.

There is increasing recognition that the climate crisis is a human rights crisis.²⁰ But unless civil society space for legitimate protest is protected there will be no climate justice. Now, more than ever, it is vital that we stand with those defending our future to turn the tide of violence and change the course of the climate crisis.



Women who stand up for their rights to land and a healthy environment face specific gender-based threats, on top of those faced by men. Systemic inequalities faced by women must be tackled as part of the solution to halt climate change. *Save Our Schools Network*

CLIMATE INEQUALITY

At the 2019 climate conference in Madrid, UN Secretary General António Guterres stated in plain English what was becoming all too apparent from the images of droughts, wildfires and typhoons on our screens: "Climate-related natural disasters are becoming more frequent, more deadly, more destructive, with growing human and financial costs".²¹

The reality is, however, that these costs will not be felt equally by everyone – it is those with the least responsibility for causing climate change that will be hit the hardest.²² It is the poorest communities who are more likely to live in the path of storms, on flood-prone coastlines, in places regularly gripped by drought.



Aerial view of gold mining in the Amazon basin, near the Menkragnoti indigenous territory in Para state, Brazil. Joao Laet/AFP via Getty Images

It is also increasingly clear that women and girls are more exposed to the impacts of the climate crisis than men and boys. They are more likely to die in natural disasters, and disproportionately affected by the longer-term impacts of drought and flooding. For example, women are often responsible for collecting water and will have to walk further to do so with droughts increasing in frequency and severity.²³

Women account for almost half of small-hold food production. However, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in developing countries only 10-20% of all landholders are women, making them more vulnerable to the shocks of a changing climate. Women are often excluded from decisions on land use, denying them a voice in negotiations on mega-projects such as mines, as well as in strategies to adapt to climate change.²⁴

Women who stand up for their rights to land and a healthy environment face specific threats, on top of those faced by men. Smear campaigns often focus on their private lives, with explicit sexist or sexual content. Sexual violence, much of which is underreported, is also used as a tactic to silence women defenders. Women who do gain leadership positions are often stigmatised for going against traditional gender roles.²⁵

To tackle climate change, we must address these systemic inequalities, and make sure women are safe and supported to protect their land, environment and the climate we all share.²⁶

TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

The steep rise in demand for renewable energy around the world is vital to helping us move away from our dependence on fossil fuels and addressing the growing climate crisis. There is a danger, though, that this transition could actually contribute to already massive inequalities if tapping into renewable energy has a negative and disproportionate impact on remote, rural and indigenous communities.²⁷ The shift to renewable energy is critical, but this must be done responsibly by mitigating any potential environmental and human rights impacts.

Mining has consistently rated as one of the biggest drivers of violence against land and environmental defenders. The minerals needed for a transition to a clean-energy future must not be extracted at the cost of people living in mining areas.

A growing body of research is highlighting the human rights impacts of large-scale renewable projects – ranging from a lack of consultation to poor waste-management. Worryingly, this research also found that less than half of the companies surveyed had any public commitments to human rights or community consultation.²⁸ It is vital that these companies act responsibly and operate with the full free, prior and informed consent of the communities surrounding their projects.

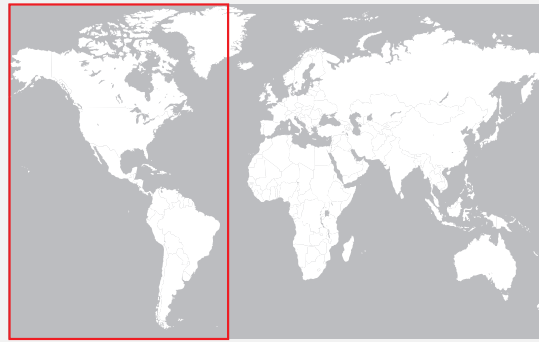
GLOBAL MAP

In 2019, the climate crisis reached a greater level of public attention than ever before. Land and environmental defenders are on the frontline of this crisis, yet the vital role they play is rarely acknowledged, and the attacks against them have continued apace.

Our 2019 world map demonstrates the global nature of threats to land and environmental defenders, as well as the broad range of tactics used against them. Many defenders are attacked and murdered for their activism. Here, we also highlight the way discriminatory laws, intimidation and legal tactics are used against them.

For reasons of space and the limited publicly available information in some regions, the cases highlighted in this section are not intended to be exhaustive. They are instead designed to provide an overall picture of the broad array of methods used to deter communities from protecting their land and our environment.

THE AMERICAS



KEY

- ATTACK
- LAW CHANGE
- INTIMIDATION
- LEGAL ATTACK
- CRIMINALISATION
- UPDATE

CANADA In January, members of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation indigenous group who objected to the construction of a gas pipeline through their territory were forcibly removed from their protest site in British Columbia. Heavily armed police arrested 14 demonstrators, injuring one of them.



One of many solidarity marches held across the world for the Wet'suwet'en First Nations people. Ollie Millington/Getty Images

The police were enforcing an order by the British Columbia Supreme Court requiring the removal of the protestors' barricade, which blocked the access road to the pipeline's proposed construction site. First Nations people claim the project infringes on their land rights. The court order effectively criminalised them for protesting on their own land. In February 2020, talks between Wet'suwet'en leaders and the government broke down and protesters fear another wave of police repression.²⁹

CANADA

MEXICO Otilia Martínez Cruz, 60, and her 20-year-old son, Gregorio Chaparro Cruz, were found dead outside their home in the town of El Chapote in north-west Mexico on 1 May 2019. Hired assassins – allegedly at the behest of loggers – shot the two indigenous Tarahumara defenders in retaliation for their work to stop the illegal deforestation of their ancestral land in the Sierra Madre.

More than a dozen Tarahumara defenders have been killed in recent years, including another member of Otilia and Gregorio's family, Julián Carrillo. His murder in 2018 was highlighted in our report *Enemies of the State?*³¹

US In a short-lived victory for climate activists, a South Dakota law designed to prevent peaceful protest against the Keystone XL oil pipeline was blocked by a federal judge. The so-called 'riot-boosting' law would have allowed the state to sue people for encouraging rioting, even if they themselves did not participate. South Dakota has a broad legal definition of 'riot', which includes some forms of peaceful protest.

The state governor agreed not to enforce the riot-boosting measure following a lawsuit from the American Civil Liberties Union, but in early 2020 the bill was reintroduced and signed into state law. At the time of writing, 15 other states have also passed anti-protest legislation.³⁰

US

MEXICO



GUATEMALA

NICARAGUA
COSTA RICA

COLOMBIA

BRAZIL

ARGENTINA



NICARAGUA

After spending 11 months in one of the Ortega regime's torture prisons in Managua, Medardo Mairena

walked free in June 2019. His interrogators had threatened to murder his three-year-old daughter unless he confessed details of a fictitious plot to overthrow the Nicaraguan government.

Convicted of terrorism, Medardo had participated in an anti-government protest as leader of a rural movement campaigning against the proposed construction of an interoceanic canal through the country. Frontline Defenders claim that his trial and detention were rife with irregularities and ill-treatment, including evidence of witness manipulation by the prosecution. The project's proposed route would put tropical forest and wetlands at risk.³²

Medardo Mairena poses for a selfie while celebrating his release in June 2019. *Maynor Valenzuela/AFP via Getty Images*



GUATEMALA *Update:* Last year, we highlighted a community's struggle to protect its ancestral lands from a hydroelectric dam project in the Ixquis region. In March 2019, the Inter-American Development Bank – one of three multilateral development banks financing the project – announced it would consider a complaint filed by women's groups from Ixquis.

The women argued that the project violated the bank's gender equality policy, among others, as women would be worst affected. The bank's willingness to consider the complaint is an important step, and its final report is expected by mid-2020. If one of the project's key backers does pull out, it would be a significant victory for the community.³³

A 2018 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People raised concerns about the rise in criminalisation of indigenous peoples in Guatemala. *Global Witness / James Rodriguez*

COSTA RICA On 18 March, Sergio Rojas Ortiz went to the prosecutor's office in Yeri, south-west Costa Rica to report threats he had received. Later that night he was shot dead in his home. For over 40 years he had led a movement to reclaim indigenous land and defend his community from land grabbers. This work made him and his fellow Bribri indigenous people the targets of violence, including the burning of homes, and gun and machete attacks. In 2015 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights formally urged the Costa Rican authorities to protect the community, but the police have taken little action to prevent illegal encroachment on indigenous land or prosecute those responsible.³⁵

BRAZIL On 1 November, 26-year-old Paulo Paulino Guajajara was shot dead when a group of at least five illegal loggers ambushed him and another member of the Guajajara tribe in Maranhão state. Both were members of Guardians of the Forest, a group which works to combat illegal logging gangs encroaching on indigenous land.

Between 2000 and 2018, 42 Guajajara indigenous people were murdered in the ongoing conflict with illegal loggers. As the rate of deforestation has risen and the enforcement of environmental regulations has relaxed under President Bolsonaro's leadership, the threat to these communities has grown. As of April 2020, a further four Guajajara community leaders have been killed since Paulo Paulino's murder.³⁶

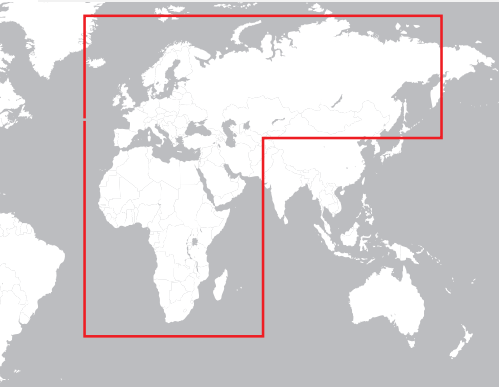


ARGENTINA A committee of government and Mapuche-appointed experts found that Vaca Muerta in Patagonia has been occupied by Mapuche indigenous communities since at least 1927. The area also sits on the world's second largest reserve of shale gas. Local authorities have denied indigenous people the right to their lands, clearing the way for this gas to be extracted.

In September 2019, amid the reported proliferation of private security checkpoints and surveillance, the Argentine government tasked the National Gendarmerie with guarding the fracking operations. This has been interpreted as an attempt to intimidate the Mapuche into giving up their ancestral land rights.³⁴

An indigenous Mapuche woman looks over a gas field in the Vaca Muerta, an enormous oil and gas deposit that provides 43% of the total oil production and 60% of the gas production of Argentina. *Emiliano Lasalvia/AFP via Getty Images*

EUROPE AND AFRICA



KEY

- ATTACK
- INTIMIDATION
- CRIMINALISATION
- LAW CHANGE
- LEGAL ATTACK
- UPDATE

UNITED KINGDOM

Update: Last year we highlighted the case of three activists who were the first to be jailed in the UK for protesting against fracking. Although their sentences were later overturned, instances of criminalising peaceful protest have continued.



In June 2019, another three protestors – Christopher Wilson, Katrina Lawrie and Lee Walsh – were found guilty of contempt of court. They had breached an injunction banning trespassers in order to protest at a site operated by shale gas company Cuadrilla in Lancashire. It was the first time anyone in the UK has been convicted of breaching an injunction requested by an oil and gas company. All three were given suspended sentences, with one having her sentence reduced on appeal.³⁷

In 2018 a UK law on ‘public nuisance’ was used to jail environmental activists for the first time since 1932. *Global Witness*

FRANCE In June, shocking footage of French police spraying tear gas into a group of seated and peaceful Extinction Rebellion climate protestors at close range went viral.

Under the leadership of Emmanuel Macron, France has become increasingly intolerant of civil activism. Sébastien Bailleul, director of the French environmental and social justice charity Crid, said: “There is a real authoritarian slide in France and what has emerged from the tip of the iceberg is police violence. This is a strategy of fear, and the climate movement is now on the frontline.”³⁸

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

In northern DRC, communities living around palm oil plantations have faced criminalisation and police harassment for denouncing land grabbing. Mombulu Boyama Alphonse, chief of the Mwingi community in Tshopo province, has monitored and condemned land grabbing and human rights abuses connected with multinational companies. In September 2019, he was beaten and later arrested by police following a protest by members of the Mwingi community against the palm oil agribusiness Feronia PHC. He reported that the police officers who had previously tried to arrest him told him: “We will shoot all of the villagers and see if RIAO-RDC [a network of NGOs and farmers’ associations in DRC] will save them.”⁴⁰

GHANA Ghana’s industrial overfishing crisis is among the worst in West Africa. Foreign trawlers carry out destructive and illegal fishing in Ghanaian waters, driving some fish species to the brink of collapse.

On 5 July, fishing observer Emmanuel Essien was investigating alleged illegal fishing by a Chinese trawler when he disappeared under suspicious circumstances. According to investigations carried out by the *Observer*, “serious allegations of violence, drug-taking and bribery” have been levelled at trawlers operating in this part of West Africa. “Criminality is ignored, raising questions over whether the lives of observers are being put at risk.”³⁹

As a fishing observer, Emmanuel Essien’s work was part of a government effort to regulate overfishing by foreign-owned trawlers, which has driven small fish populations to the verge of collapse. *Joel Santos / Barcroft Media via Getty Images / Barcroft Media via Getty Images*





RUSSIA

Environmental Watch on the North Caucasus (EWNC) – a Russian NGO – has faced a number of physical and legal attacks in recent years, ranging from beatings and

arbitrary detention to intrusive document checks under the pretext of “public order and morality”. In 2016, the organisation was declared a foreign agent, forcing it to undergo arduous audit processes and declare this status on all its materials.

In May, Aleksandr Savelyev and two other EWNC members were detained by police while inspecting allegedly illegal logging in a Krasnodar forest. Separately, Aleksandr was charged with collaboration with “an undesirable organisation”. EWNC’s office was raided by police in April and July, and the organisation’s head, Andrey Rudomakha, was beaten and pepper sprayed.⁴¹

Almost half of Russia is covered with forests which absorb millions of tonnes of CO₂. These woodlands are under threat from mismanagement, illegal deforestation and corruption. *Vitaly Timkiv/TASS via Getty Images*



POLAND In early September, the world-famous Greenpeace vessel Rainbow Warrior was boarded during a night-time raid, while moored off the port of Gdansk. Heavily armed and masked border guards stormed the ship, smashing windows with sledgehammers and pointing their weapons at the peaceful activists on board. The Rainbow Warrior was stationed outside Gdansk to block the delivery of coal, as part of a protest against the country’s heavy dependence on coal. Despite the fossil fuel’s severe environmental impact, Poland still uses coal for 80% of its energy needs.⁴²

Greenpeace’s Rainbow Warrior ship anchored off the Gdansk port after armed Polish border guards stormed the ship, and threatened the peaceful activists on board. *MATEUSZ SLODKOWSKI/AFP via Getty Images*

RUSSIA

EGYPT

KENYA

SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA When Lucky Shabalala led a community protest against a nearby coal mine operated by the Ikwezi mining company, he didn’t expect to find himself in court charged with assault and intimidation. Ikwezi had interfered with a community grave site in Kliprand, a rural settlement in the Western Cape, in order to expand its operations. Lucky had also discovered that the company’s permit had expired and the elected board was not properly constituted because local people were unrepresented.

The company dropped its lawsuit against Lucky in July 2019, but the use of similar suits* against environmental activists is increasingly common. The aim is often to silence criticism by forcing activists to spend time and money defending themselves against spurious claims.⁴⁴



EGYPT In April, an Egyptian court sentenced 25 Nubian human rights defenders – including indigenous land rights activists Mohamed Azmy and Maysara Abdoun – to a suspended fine of 50,000 Egyptian pounds (~US\$3,100) each. This follows their detention by police in 2017 after taking part in a peaceful protest for land rights. They were charged with “disrupting public order” and “inciting protest”. Historically, the Egyptian government has subjected the Nubian people to land expropriation and forced displacement to make way for state projects such as the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s.⁴³

Mohamed Azmy. *Front Line Defenders*

KENYA One day after she had disappeared, the mutilated body of 57-year-old Esther Mwikali was discovered on 27 August, dumped in a farm near her homestead in Mithini village, Murang’a County, south-west Kenya.

Esther was renowned for her work to prevent community members being evicted from land claimed by tycoons. Local activists had no doubt her murder was related to the area’s ongoing land struggles, a tragic reminder of the alarming regularity with which extra-judicial killings are routinely carried out in Kenya.⁴⁵

* These are known as Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation, or SLAPPs. For more information see: <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/corporate-legal-accountability/special-issues/materials-on-lawsuits-by-companies-against-corporate-accountability-advocates>



KAZAKHSTAN

TURKEY

IRAN

INDIA

INDONESIA



TURKEY Publishing an academic paper doesn't seem like typical criminal behaviour – but it landed academic and human rights defender Bülent Şık in prison. The Ministry of Health had commissioned him to look

into a suspected connection between toxic pollution and high cancer rates in western Turkey. He found environmental pollution in the Ergene River Basin posed a real danger to public health, and presented his findings to government officials.

After three years of inaction, Şık took it upon himself to publish the study. Accused of “disclosing work secrets”, on 26 September he was sentenced to 15 months in prison. He is among the many Turkish scientists who have been fired, prosecuted or imprisoned in a crackdown on dissent following a failed coup in 2016.⁴⁶

“Bülent Şık fulfilled his duty as a citizen and a scientist and he used his right to freedom of expression,” his lawyer, Can Atalay, said in his closing statement before the sentence was handed down by a court in Istanbul in September 2019. *Front Line Defenders*

INDIA India's *Adivasis* – indigenous tribal and forest-dwelling communities – came under a twin threat in 2019, as the country's new citizenship laws and a proposed amendment to the Indian Forest Act put their legal rights and protections at risk.

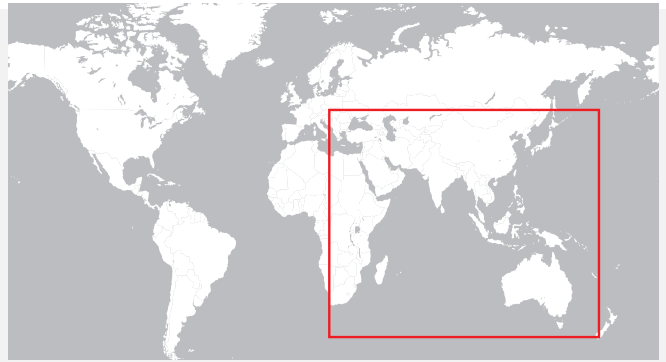
The new citizenship laws also threatened to make forest communities stateless, as many lack the documents to prove their citizenship. Thankfully, proposed legislation that would have seen millions of tribal and forest dwellers evicted, and given officials the power to shoot people in the forest with virtual impunity, was scrapped after international outcry. But more still needs to be done to keep the stewards of India's forests safe.⁴⁸

IRAN Update: In last year's report, we featured the case of nine Iranian conservationists who were arrested and accused of spying during their work to protect the Asiatic cheetah. In November 2019, six of the environmentalists were convicted of collaborating with an “enemy state” – the US – and sentenced to between four and ten years in prison.⁴⁷

INDONESIA Two journalists, Maratua Siregar and Maraden Sianipar, were found stabbed to death on 30 October. They'd been involved in a land dispute between residents of Panai Hilir, North Sumatra, and the Amelia palm oil company which operated a nearby plantation. The palm oil concession where the two men's bodies were found was closed by the government in 2018 for illegally clearing areas of forest.

According to a police statement, some of the suspects arrested for the journalists' murder admitted it was an act of revenge “linked to palm oil plantation land”. Police also arrested the alleged owner of the palm oil plantation operator for allegedly paying US\$3,000 to have Siregar and Sianipar killed, allegations which have been denied. No trial has taken place yet in relation to the deaths of the two journalists.⁴⁹

ASIA AND PACIFIC



KAZAKHSTAN Wildlife ranger Yerlan Nurghaliev had dedicated his life to protecting *saiga* – an endangered ancient species of antelope – from poachers. It was a commitment that cost him his life.

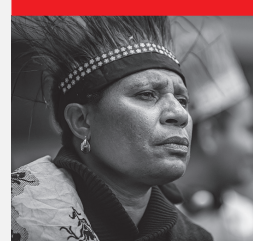
On 13 January, Yerlan and his partner tracked down a group of poachers near Lake Tengiz, 150km south-west of the capital Nur-Sultan. When they approached the poachers to attempt to make an arrest, Nurghaliev was badly beaten and later died of his injuries in hospital. This was the first time since the creation of the country's wildlife protection agency that a state ranger had been killed by poachers. In February, three men were found guilty of his murder and sentenced to life in prison.⁵⁰

KAZAKHSTAN Land and environmental defenders from the organisation Crude Accountability have paid a high price for opposing the environmental pollution of the Karachaganak oil and gas field in north-western Kazakhstan. They have faced criminalisation, arbitrary detention, threats and harassment from local authorities and police, and even an online smear campaign.

In May, Sergey Solyanik was detained by police while taking photos in the village of Berezovka, after the Karachaganak project had forced residents from their homes.⁵¹

KEY

- ATTACK
- INTIMIDATION
- CRIMINALISATION
- LAW CHANGE
- LEGAL ATTACK
- UPDATE



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Cressida Kuala has paid a high personal cost for her activism. As the founder of the Porgera Red Wara (River) Women's Association, she works to help indigenous women and girls who have been displaced by mining operations, or sexually

abused by mining company employees. After speaking out about the devastating impact of mining operations in her community in Porgera, Kuala has received regular threats and suffered repeated rapes and sexual assaults – most recently, she was raped in early 2019.

Yet despite the dangers she faces, she continues to campaign for women's rights to be recognised by the government and mining companies, including the right to be fully involved in decisions that affect their lives.⁵²

Cressida Kuala. *Front Line Defenders*



AUSTRALIA In August, a protracted legal battle over ownership of the proposed site of the Adani coal mine in central Queensland – between indigenous representatives and the mine's owners – was settled in Adani's favour. The legal costs

involved bankrupted one activist, Adrian Burragubba, who was ordered to pay AUD\$600,000.

The Queensland government quashed the claim of the Wangan and Jagalingou people to the land – meaning they can no longer protest on what they claim is their ancestral territory without fear of arrest. "We have been made trespassers on our own country," said Burragubba.

With the wildfires of early 2020 bringing climate change into sharp focus for Australians, the Adani mine will continue to be a source of anger for environmental activists.⁵³

An activist holds a '#Stop Adani' sign. If all the coal in the Galilee Basin were mined and counted as a country, it would rank as the seventh largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. *Michaela Handrek-Rehle/Bloomberg via Getty Images*

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

AUSTRALIA



Angélica Ortiz - Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu. Benjamin Wachenje / Global Witness

COLOMBIA: A RISING TIDE OF VIOLENCE

- **64 defenders were killed in Colombia in 2019 – that’s more than anywhere else in the world and a shocking 30% of documented killings globally.**
- **This is also over a 150% rise on 2018 and the most murders Global Witness has ever recorded in the country.**
- **Indigenous groups were particularly at risk – accounting for half the documented killings, despite making up only 4.4% of the population.**

Francia Márquez was meeting with other environmental and social justice leaders in the town of Lomitas in May 2019 when they were attacked by armed men. Miraculously, no one was killed in an assault that lasted 15 minutes and during which a grenade was launched at the group.⁵⁴

Francia is one of Colombia’s most prominent Afro-descendant human rights and environmental defenders. She won the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in 2018 for her activism. This was not the first time she’s been attacked. Throughout a successful campaign to stop illegal mining in La Toma in the Cauca region of south-western Colombia, she was threatened, harassed and eventually forced from her home.⁵⁵

The Cauca region where Francia and her colleagues were meeting is one of the most dangerous places in the world to stand up for the environment. Over a third of all killings of Colombian land and environmental defenders documented by Global Witness took place there in 2019. But this is a story that is playing out again and again in communities across the country who are on the frontline of protecting the planet, and attacks against leaders have reached crisis point.

A FAILING PEACE AGREEMENT AND ESCALATING ATTACKS

Global Witness recorded more killings of land and environmental defenders in Colombia in 2019 than anywhere else in the world. Indigenous groups in were particularly at risk – accounting for half the documented killings, despite making up only 4.4% of the population.



Francia Márquez accepts the 2018 Goldman Prize for South and Central America. Goldman Environmental Prize

The Constitutional Court declared that several indigenous cultures are at risk of extinction, with the National Organisation for Indigenous People of the Colombian Amazon claiming: “A genocide is being presented against the indigenous communities.”⁵⁶

So why are defender deaths escalating in Colombia? The 2016 Peace Agreement ended the decades-long war between government forces and FARC rebels, but it has not brought peace to large parts of the country. Organised criminal and paramilitary groups – many of which have taken over formerly FARC-controlled areas – are responsible for a high percentage of the killings we document:⁵⁷ Global Witness data⁵⁷ attributed just under a third of defender deaths to these groups in 2019. In a culture of widespread impunity, the perpetrators can be confident of escaping justice – it is estimated that 89% of the murders of human rights defenders do not end in a conviction.⁵⁸ Some argue that this impunity is fuelled by a government that dismisses these killings as localised

* Global Witness uses online, published sources and verifies these with partner organisations in relevant countries to ensure accuracy. For more information, see Methodology on page 40.

crimes, rather than seeing them as part of ‘an attempt by various actors to continue to repress social change in a violent way’.⁵⁹

“Not everything is going well with the peace agreement. There was misunderstanding that putting an end to the situation with FARC rebels would end the violence – but we see the violence is increasing.” Angélica Ortiz⁶⁰

A key part of the peace agreement were incentives to move farmers away from coca cultivation, thereby cutting cocaine production and disrupting a drugs trade that had fuelled the conflict.

Coca growers were offered grants to start growing alternatives such as cacao and coffee.⁶¹ But this crop-substitution programme was badly implemented, with many farmers not receiving their payments, putting the livelihoods of up to 100,000 families in doubt.⁶² Those who supported or participated in the programme have been threatened by criminal organisations and paramilitaries still highly invested in the drugs trade – Global Witness recorded the deaths of 14 people targeted in this way.

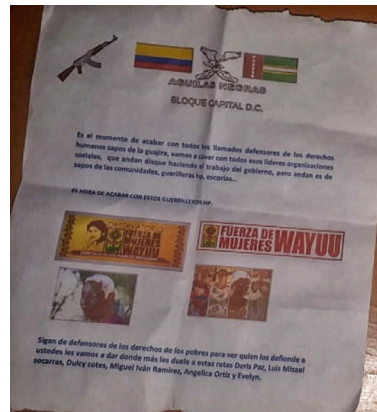
COLOMBIA AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Colombia faces the grim prospect of intensifying floods and droughts, as the effects of climate change continue to bite, according to the UN.⁶³ Many communities are already at increased risk of flooding and landslides.⁶⁴

After years of conflict, the country has one of the highest proportions of internally displaced people in the world, with insecure land rights making many rural communities especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.⁶⁵ The government’s own report under the Paris Agreement underscores the importance of addressing the climate crisis on the country’s road to peace. Yet, the very same government continues to pursue land- and carbon-intensive industries – Colombia is the world’s fifth biggest coal exporter and has sizeable oil, gas and palm oil sectors.⁶⁶

At the same time, the country has reversed steps to allow citizens – including land and environmental defenders – to reject the approval of extractive projects.⁶⁷

CLIMATE OF FEAR



Leaflets threatening violence against defenders in La Guajira, Colombia, allegedly from paramilitary groups operating in the region.

The murder of land and environmental defenders takes place in a wider climate of persecution and non-lethal threats that seek to instil fear in those brave enough to speak out. Angélica Ortiz, a Wayuu indigenous woman from La Guajira in northern Colombia, knows this only too well. She is the secretary-general of the Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu,⁶⁸ who have led protests against the huge coal-mining project, El Cerrejón. According to recent research, this is one of five companies whose operations gave rise to 44% of the attacks on defenders raising concerns about them between 2015 and 2019.⁶⁹

Angélica’s organisation has faced repeated threats – six in 2019 alone – allegedly from paramilitary groups, as well as public smear campaigns. The organisation says the government has given no adequate response to their repeated requests for protection, dating back to 2018.⁷⁰

Riot police in Colombia evict communities from their homes to make way for mining. *Rafael Ríos*





Defenders Janeth Pareja Ortiz and Angélica Ortiz, from the Ipuana clan, in the middle of the Arroyo Aguas Blancas riverbed. Both received death threats after denouncing mining companies that have contaminated their community's land and standing against the violence of the armed actors who control the region. Pablo Tosco / Oxfam Intermón

GROWING THREATS AGAINST WOMEN

Women defenders like Angélica and Francia are facing increasing threats in Colombia – with the UN documenting almost a 50% rise in the killing of women between 2018 and 2019. They are reportedly more likely than men to face verbal abuse and surveillance as tactics to intimidate and silence them.⁷¹

The targeted killing of social leaders, including those protecting their land and environment, was one of the issues that sparked widespread protests in cities across the country during November. The protests were a sign of growing discontent with the lack of progress in implementing the peace agreement and the ongoing violence. So far, however, President Ivan Duque's response has been lacklustre and insufficient, according to the country's civil society groups.⁷²

The day after the attack on her life, Francia Márquez took to Twitter with a call for the future: "The attack that we leaders were victim to yesterday in the afternoon, invites us to continue working towards peace in our territory, in the department of Cauca and in our country, there has already been too much bloodshed."⁷³

DEFENDERS' RECOMMENDATIONS:

Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu and Programa Somos Defensores call on the Colombian Government to:

- Fully implement the provisions of the 2016 Peace Agreement, including a comprehensive rural reform programme that guarantees the economic integration of poor rural communities through land titling and extending state services to rural communities.
- Recognise and support the National Commission of Security Guarantees (NCSG) to function fully, as outlined under the 2016 Peace Agreement. The NCSG should develop a plan (funded and implemented by the government) to investigate and dismantle paramilitary and armed groups.
- Ensure justice by investigating and prosecuting the material and intellectual perpetrators of lethal and non-lethal attacks against defenders.
- Publicly recognise the important role of human rights defenders. Respond to the intensifying threats against them by developing, funding and implementing safety and protection measures – ensuring that any plan builds on the collective experiences and participation of human rights defenders and social leaders.



Waorani women celebrate in Puyo after a court ruled in their favour in their legal challenge to the Ecuadorian government's plan to open up their territory to oil exploration. *Rodrigo Buendía/AFP via Getty Images*

VICTORIES FOR PEOPLE – AND THE PLANET

Despite facing potential backlash, defenders across the world achieved a number of successes in 2019 – a testament to their resilience, strength and determination in protecting their rights, the environment and our global climate.

ECUADOR: The Ecuadorian government has been seeking to exploit the Amazonian rainforest for oil and gas extraction as a solution to its economic problems.⁷⁴ But in April the Waorani indigenous tribe from southern Ecuador won a landmark ruling to prevent the government auctioning their territory for oil and gas exploration.⁷⁵ The three-judge panel ruled that the consultation process undertaken in 2012 was insufficient to guarantee their free, prior and informed consent. The verdict is a vital win for both indigenous rights and the climate – it protects half a million acres of Amazonian rainforest and prevents both the associated deforestation and carbon emissions from the oil.⁷⁶ The legal team representing the Waorani say that the ruling could have an impact on other indigenous nations in Ecuador, whose territories have also been allocated for exploration.⁷⁷ The president of the Waorani Pastaza Organisation claimed the ruling as a “victory for my ancestors. It’s for our forest and future generations. And it’s for the whole world.”⁷⁸

INDONESIA: In November 2019, the Dayak Iban indigenous community of central Borneo in Indonesia secured legal ownership of 10,000 hectares of land, following a decades-long struggle.⁷⁹ The Dayak Iban won the UN Development Programme’s Equator Prize for community-led solutions to climate change in recognition of their protection of the forest against corporate interests.⁸⁰ A 2013 constitutional court ruling mandates the Indonesian government to return previously seized forests to indigenous communities – but so far only 25,000 hectares of land has been given back, out of what the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples (AMAN) estimates to be 7 million hectares.⁸¹

USA: The Standing Rock Sioux won an important case in their ongoing protest against the Dakota Access oil pipeline. Upon taking office in 2017, President Donald Trump ordered the approvals process to be done “in an expedited manner”, but the new ruling states that the government did not adequately assess the risks of spillages from the pipeline. The judge ordered the federal body that oversaw the environmental approvals process to conduct a full review, ruling that the pipeline’s “effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial”.⁸²

CAMBODIA: Indigenous communities in northern Cambodia achieved a major victory when the governor of Ratanakiri committed to return their sacred lands, which had previously been allocated to a company financed by the World Bank. A complaint issued to the bank in 2014, by twelve indigenous communities, related to culturally significant lands that the Vietnamese agribusiness company Hoang Anh Gia Lai had been permitted to take over to develop into rubber plantations.⁸³ Dam Chanty of the NGO Highlanders Association said the decision represents “an unprecedented recognition of indigenous land rights over business interests” in the country.⁸⁴ There are new allegations, however, that the company has been using the COVID-19 lockdown to bulldoze the land.⁸⁵

ZAMBIA: In a case brought to the UK Supreme Court by communities affected by a large-scale copper mine in Zambia, the judge ruled that the complaint can be heard in English courts, following claims that they would not receive a fair hearing in Zambian courts.⁸⁶ The mine is owned by a subsidiary of the UK-based mining company Vedanta. The communities allege that the mine has damaged their environment and health, including contaminating local water sources.⁸⁷ Lawyers for the communities state this significant ruling could have “wider implications for companies who make public commitments relating to their responsibilities to communities and the environment and then fail to put these into practice.”⁸⁸

THAILAND: After a long-running legal battle, the community members of Ban Haeng – a village in Lampang Province, northern Thailand – secured justice as the Chiang Mai Administrative Court ruled in their favour following their complaint against a proposed coal-mining project in their area.⁸⁹ The community has

protested against the planned mine since 2010, and filed numerous legal claims to stop it going ahead. In return, they have faced various forms of intimidation, including death threats, enforced disappearances, surveillance by unidentified men and harassment from military officers. But the community continued to resist and now, with the court ruling that the Thai Ministry of Industry did not follow correct procedure when granting the mining concession,⁹⁰ this could pave the way for a permanent end to coal mining in their area – a victory for the community and the climate.

INTERNATIONAL POLICY: There have also been some promising international developments. The UN Human Rights Council unanimously adopted a landmark resolution to protect environmental human rights defenders – it is now the primary duty of states to guarantee its implementation.⁹¹ Canada updated its guidelines on supporting human rights defenders and must now apply them consistently.⁹² The number of businesses publishing statements and policies on the protection of human rights defenders continued to grow.⁹³ Alongside the publication of *Uncalculated Risks*,⁹⁴ a civil society guide to how development banks can prevent reprisals against those protesting against or engaging with their project, international finance institutions like the Inter-American Development Bank⁹⁵ and the International Finance Corporation⁹⁶ continued to improve their mechanisms to prevent violence against defenders. However, governments and business must do much more – the Zero Tolerance Pledge, drafted in Geneva in November by community representatives, indigenous leaders and NGOs from around the world, should guide what they do and how they do it.⁹⁷

A demonstrator holds a “Water Is Life” sign in front of the White House in Washington DC during a protest organised by the Standing Rock Sioux against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). Andrew Harrer/Bloomberg via Getty Images





PHILIPPINES: CRIMINALISED FOR PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

- **Global Witness documented 43 defenders killed in 2019.**
- **Six of them were state employees – the highest number of attacks globally against environmental workers employed to protect some of the most iconic landscapes in the Philippines.**
- **Criminalisation and threats from new draconian legislation increases the risks for activists.**
- **Highest share of global killings related to agribusiness, with 26 murders last year.**

Bai Bibyaon Ligkayan Bigkay, the only woman chieftain in the history of the Talaingod-Manobo people, has dedicated her life to protecting the rainforests of the Pantaron Mountain Range – home to the Talaingod-Manobo people of Mindanao. Straddling across six provinces, the rainforests are one of the largest biodiverse areas in the Philippines – a haven for endangered species like the Philippines eagle.⁹⁸ Protecting them should matter to us all.

For decades, Bai Bibyaon led the Talaingod-Manobo against the corporate plunder of this climate-critical landscape by commercial logging and mining industries.⁹⁹ At first, their efforts were fruitful, forcing a powerful logging company to withdraw their plans to expand into their village.¹⁰⁰ But as more companies moved in, so did the military – making the struggle even more dangerous for indigenous defenders and causing many to flee their land.¹⁰¹

Manobo leaders Bai Bibyaon Ligkayan Bigkay (right) and Datu Kaylo Bontolan before the latter was reportedly killed during a military bombardment in Kitaotao, in northern Mindanao. *Save Our Schools Network*



On 7 April, Datu Kaylo Bontolan – a Manobo leader and friend of Bai Bibyaon – was reportedly killed during a military bombardment in Kitaotao, northern Mindanao.¹⁰² He had returned to the mountains to help document violence against fellow Manobo members when community representatives say he was caught in the attack. He was one of 43 land and environmental activists killed in the Philippines last year.¹⁰³

Like Datu Kaylo, many of those killed were indigenous people asserting their right to self-determination and their ancestral lands.

BEARING THE BRUNT OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Rising temperatures, landslides and increasingly dangerous typhoons make the Philippines the country most at-risk of multiple climate hazards, and communities like the Talaingod-Manobo are bearing the brunt.¹⁰⁴ Even the government has acknowledged the impact of climate change on biodiversity, “water resources, forestry, agriculture, coastal resources, and health and well-being of the people.”¹⁰⁵

The Philippines’ remaining virgin forests, like those protected by the Manobo, are being felled for the sake of mineral extraction and profit, decimating precious biodiversity and fuelling climate-related conflict.¹⁰⁶ This reality is ‘business as usual’ for President Duterte and his government who are also forging ahead with policies that prioritise fossil fuels, and have passed draconian laws that can be used to silence those trying to stand in their way.

CRIMINALISATION AND THE CRACKDOWN ON ACTIVISTS

Just days after Datu Kaylo’s death, a photograph of his body was posted online by the Armed Forces of the Philippines alongside claims that he was killed during an encounter between soldiers in the Eastern Mindanao Command and communist rebels.¹⁰⁷ Community members dismissed this as an attempt to frame him as a political criminal. Instead, they pointed to the long history of violence inflicted on Talaingod-Manobo communities by military forces.¹⁰⁸



The Manobo people are one of the 18 Lumad groups found on the island of Mindanao. The different Manobo tribes are semi-autonomous from the Philippines government and have their own laws, practices and judgements given by tribal chieftains. *Jacob Maentz/Corbis Documentary*

Criminalising activists as ‘rebel’s or ‘terrorists’ or labelling defenders as ‘anti-development’, is part of a broader global trend used by governments and the media to delegitimise communities’ concerns. In the Philippines, individual activists and environmental organisations have been accused of being rebels or communist sympathisers – a practice commonly known as ‘red-tagging’.¹⁰⁹ Inflammatory calls by Duterte’s government to kill activists deemed to be ‘obstructing justice’, as well as his direct threats to bomb indigenous schools puts defenders at much greater risk of attacks.¹¹⁰

It is not surprising, then, that the number of defenders murdered since Duterte took office in 2016 has risen dramatically – 119 in the first three years of his government. This is almost double the figure for the three years prior to his election.¹¹¹

The UN Human Rights Council’s recently published report concluded that the government’s “overarching focus on public order and national security”, including countering terrorism and illegal drugs, has permeated new and existing legislation “often at the expense of human rights, due process rights, the rule of law and accountability”.¹¹²

One example of such legislation is the government’s Anti-Terrorism Act.¹¹³ Its broad-ranging definitions of terrorism can be easily manipulated by authorities to target, arrest and detain government critics – including those working to protect the land and natural environment.¹¹⁴ This draconian new legislation leaves the door open for the prosecution of people who speak out, just at a time where press freedoms and journalists are under attack.¹¹⁵

ARMY OCCUPIES RESOURCE-RICH REGIONS

For many years, successive governments in the Philippines have implemented counter-insurgency operations against the New People’s Army (NPA) – the armed wing of the Philippines Communist Party. But now many indigenous communities living in highly militarised regions say they are often the target of attacks and are being silenced, in a process of criminalisation that appears to go hand in hand with protecting private interests.¹¹⁶

Disturbingly, almost half of the documented murders under Duterte’s government were linked to armed forces or paramilitary groups.

The island of Mindanao has been subjected to a large-scale military crackdown – with deadly consequences for land and environmental defenders. Almost half of all Filipino defenders killed last year lived on Mindanao – a trend that Global Witness has recorded since the start of Duterte’s presidency. Large numbers of defenders have also been killed on Negros, another heavily militarised region.¹¹⁷ Defenders living in Mindanao and Negros made up almost 90% of land and environmental activists murdered in the country in 2019. Indigenous groups in these regions are also being forced from their land – Bai Bibyaon was one of over 700 residents who fled Talaingod after military attacks on indigenous schools intensified in 2015.¹¹⁸

A NEW GENERATION OF DEFENDERS

Even as the onslaught against defenders in the Philippines intensifies, indigenous schools – which teach children about their culture and the ecology of their ancestral land – are creating a new generation of activists to take up the cause. But now these schools are coming under attack too.

In October, the Department of Education ordered the closure of indigenous schools, alleging that many were failing to comply with government regulations and that they have links with rebels.¹¹⁹ The directive – specifically targeting Salugpongan indigenous schools – affected the same Talaingod-Manobo communities that unified decades earlier, and continue to protect the Pantaron Mountain Range.¹²⁰

“For all indigenous people around the world, our culture is rooted in our land,” says Rius Valle, a spokesperson for Save Our School Network.¹²¹ “If these lands are taken away from us, it will not just hurt our tribe and culture, but also our future. That is why the creation of our indigenous schools is an expression to defend our ancestral land and the environment.”

Enabling a new generation of defenders to speak out is vital for preventing more damage to the rainforest. According to government records last year, at least three mining applications were granted in the region,

allowing companies to operate over 20,000 hectares – an area the size of 28,000 football pitches, now under threat from silver, gold and copper projects.¹²² Two more mining companies are attempting to set up operations in Talaingod, and as of March 2019 are appealing the decision after being denied by the Philippines Mines and Geoscience.¹²³ Mining has consistently been linked to attacks against defenders in the Philippines.

GOVERNMENT WORKERS NOT SPARED

Last year, across the world, 19 government employees and park rangers responsible for protecting the environment were killed. Of these murders, eight took place in the Philippines alone – making it the country with the highest number of documented state-employee killings. Forester Kandatu A. Bansil was shot by an unidentified gunman.¹²⁴ Gaudencio Arana was killed after obtaining information that led to the seizure of illegal sources of wood and chainsaws.¹²⁵ And Bienvenido Veguilla Jr. was hacked to death after encountering illegal loggers.¹²⁶ All six were employees of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Five of them were killed by hitmen.

In response, the Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu called for DENR officials to carry firearms – a proposal opposed by environmental activists who fear the creation of another set of paramilitary units.¹²⁷

Indigenous students protest to stop extrajudicial killings, as well as calling for justice on human rights violations. *Save Our Schools Network*



HYDRO-POWER: A NEW THREAT TO TALAINGOD-MANOBO LAND

As commercial interests, often backed by the Philippines military, are put before the rights of indigenous communities, the Manobo now face a new threat – a US\$800 million China-backed hydropower dam. A reservoir is being constructed along with the 143-metre-high dam that will flood 2,924 hectares of indigenous land, displacing over 700 households. These communities claim that they were not consulted as required under law.¹²⁸

The dam is just another example of ‘business at all costs’ in the Philippines. Despite warnings from many organisations, including Global Witness, large companies, influential politicians and established landowners continue to make money with brazen disregard for the rights and wellbeing of local communities, and the lives of activists.

Now, more than ever, we need concerted action by the state to recognise and protect defenders. Business, too, must step up and demonstrate zero-tolerance for reprisals against activists. They must operate transparently and involve local communities in the decisions that directly affect their lives. Finally, with defenders facing greater pressures, it is more vital than ever that diplomats in the Philippines use their position to advocate against harmful threats to communities and defenders who speak out.

DEFENDERS’ RECOMMENDATIONS:

Save our School Network SMR, Kalikasan PNE and Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM) call on the Philippines Government to:

- Ensure accountability by conducting an independent investigation into attacks on indigenous schools, dismantling paramilitary groups and removing military units from indigenous land.
- Repeal the existing Anti-Terrorism Act 2020 by Presidential decree and ensure safeguards for rights defenders by passing the pending Human Rights Defender Bill (Senate Bill 179).
- Implement the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative standard and require mandatory human rights due diligence in all mining operations, and rule on the cancellation or suspension of mining operations started in 2017 under former General Secretary Gina Lopez.
- Cooperate with the United Nations Human Rights Council and implement the recommendations in its 2020 report on the Situation of Human Rights in the Philippines. Member states should support civil society calls for an independent inquiry into the country’s environmental and human rights situation.

AGRIBUSINESS: ATTACKS ON THE RISE

In October, journalists Martua Parasian Siregar and Maraden Sianipar were stabbed to death near a palm oil concession after supporting local communities in a dispute with the company operating the land. Police have arrested a senior palm oil businessman suspected of paying for their murder, who has denied the allegation (see page 18).¹²⁹ Congolese activist Joël Imbangola Luneza, was murdered allegedly by a security guard in the employ of the Canadian palm oil company Feronia Inc. – close to their Boteka plantations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).¹³⁰ The dead body of Demilson Ovelar Mendes, a member of the indigenous Avá Guarani community, was found on a Brazilian soy plantation a few kilometres from the village where he lived.¹³¹

In 2019, Global Witness documented 34 killings like these linked to the agricultural sector – an increase of over 60% since 2018.*

Half of all the world’s habitable land is used for agriculture.¹³² Within this sector, alongside the provision of basic everyday needs, is a large commercially-driven industry ranging from the production of palm oil for shampoo and beauty products, to tropical fruit plantations and cattle ranches.¹³³ Nearly half of cultivated land is located in Africa and Asia, supplying about 60% of the world’s agricultural production.¹³⁴ But this expanding industry is destroying homes, communities and the global environment. Estimates suggest that agricultural projects are responsible for just under a third of global emissions contributing to climate breakdown - with things set to worsen.¹³⁵

In Brazil, ministers want to legalise agribusiness companies expanding across previously protected indigenous reserves, opening up over 3 million hectares for industry.¹³⁶ Communities are increasingly caught in violent herder-farmer conflicts, as desertification and climate change shrink access to arable land. It is estimated that over 3,640 people were killed in less than three years in clashes over access to pasture in Nigeria’s Middle Belt.¹³⁷ As consumer demand grows and industrial agriculture expands, destructive projects are imposed on communities without their consent, driving increased conflict between big business, landowners and local communities.¹³⁸

* Philippines (26), Brazil (3), Indonesia (2), Cambodia (1), Honduras (1), Democratic Republic of Congo (1)



In the Philippines, almost half of the documented murders of land and environmental defenders under Duterte's government are linked to armed forces or paramilitary groups. In March 2019, 14 farmers were killed – many were land rights activists linked to the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW).
Romeo Gacad/AFP via Getty Images

HIGHEST NUMBER OF ATTACKS LINKED TO AGRIBUSINESS TOOK PLACE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Last year, 85% of reported attacks against land and environmental defenders opposed to agribusiness projects occurred in Asia – making it by far the region with the highest number of killings. Of these, 90% were in the Philippines.

On the sugar plantations of Negros, police operations and counter-insurgency programmes cracked down on small-scale farming communities, leading to the massacre of 14 farmers in March – many were land rights activists linked to the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW).¹³⁹ Five months earlier in Negros Occidental, nine farmers, also members of the NFSW, were killed following a harvest.¹⁴⁰

The region is infamous for feudal relations between labourers and landlords – amidst fighting between communist insurgents and government forces, both implicated in countless human rights abuses. This is an ongoing legacy of colonial injustices, where formal land rights were concentrated into a small number of hands. Peasant labourers and farmers' groups have long campaigned for land reform over the island's vast sugar plantations, to address inequality and poverty across the region.¹⁴¹

Despite promises, the Philippines government has done little to support these communities, frequently putting the interests of big agribusiness first.

BIG AGRI-BRANDS PUSHED TO TAKE FIRST STEPS

Following the Global Witness publication *Defending the Philippines* in 2019, two of the biggest agribusiness brands in the country have acknowledged the need for clear and concrete internal policies to address the issue of reprisals against those speaking out about their projects.

In April, Dole Philippines announced that the company has “undertaken a review of its internal processes to better ensure that it shall not be a party to... violence against environmental defenders and/or indigenous people”, and committed to “outlining more concrete company policies”.

Del Monte Philippines have gone a step further, engaging with civil society organisations as they review their “impact assessment and due diligence processes”, while “identifying areas of no compromise or zero tolerance”. The company committed to “preventing and responding to any reprisals against persons who voice out issues about any of the businesses our company is involved in,” and to translating these commitments “into concrete action steps”.¹⁴²



ROMANIA: CORRUPTION AND MURDER IN THE EU

- Romania has over half of Europe's remaining old-growth and primeval forests – dubbed the 'lungs of Europe'.¹⁴³
- Three hectares of this forest is degraded every hour according to Greenpeace Romania, much of it to illegal logging worth an estimated €1 billion per year.
- Two forest rangers were killed in 2019, both working to stop illegal logging, and hundreds of threats and attacks on rangers have been recorded.
- In late 2019 thousands marched in Bucharest and cities across Romania to protest against illegal logging and demand that the attacks be investigated thoroughly.

Protecting these forests is vital to efforts to curb runaway climate change. According to one estimate, a single 150-year-old beech tree absorbs enough carbon to offset a 56,000km car trip,¹⁴⁴ with estimates that Romanian beech forests cover almost 2 million hectares.¹⁴⁵ The forests are also home to some rare and endangered wild animal species, including a third of Europe's brown bear population and a quarter of its wolves.¹⁴⁶

Environmental organisation Agent Green was set up by Gabriel Paun to protect this vital wilderness, and expose the illegal logging trade¹⁴⁷ which threatens it.

As a result of his work, Gabriel has faced intimidation and violent attacks. In November 2014 he was attacked with pepper spray when filming a truck full of timber from Retezat National Park entering a saw-mill.¹⁴⁸ In May 2015 he and a colleague were set upon by a large group of men, and seriously injured.¹⁴⁹ The following year, Paun was the victim of a targeted cyber-attack that wiped seven years' worth of data and destroyed his computer.¹⁵⁰ Late last year, he was acting as a guide in Domogled National Park for a Netflix crew filming an episode of the docuseries *Broken* when they were threatened by illegal loggers, who allegedly attempted to block their exit with fallen trees.¹⁵¹

DYING TO DEFEND THE FOREST

The violence associated with the illegal logging trade gained increased prominence in 2019 with the murder of two park rangers. On the evening of 16 October, forest ranger Liviu Pop* received an anonymous tip off about



Top: The Făgăraş Mountains in central Romania is one of the regions affected by illegal logging and destruction of Natura 2000 protected areas. *Agent Green*. Bottom: Forest rangers stand next to wooden crosses bearing the names of their murdered colleagues, including Liviu Pop, during a protest in Bucharest on 29 October 2019. *Daniel Mihailescu/AFP via Getty Images*

illegal logging in the forest he was employed to protect. After calling his manager, he went to investigate. What happened next has been the subject of speculation ever since, but what is clear is that Liviu was shot, and died, protecting the forest he loved.

Liviu's death came just one month after Răducu Gorceaia was found dead in his car in Iaşi County, east Romania.¹⁵² Media have reported that Răducu, another state forestry employee, confronted three illegal loggers in the Pascani forest district and suffered fatal axe wounds to the head.¹⁵³

These murders are not isolated incidents. According to the Romanian forestry union four other forest rangers have been killed for their work in recent years,¹⁵⁴ and it has

* For further details on how we include attacks against people who are employed to protect the environment, see our methodology on page 40.

recorded over 650 different incidents of physical assaults, death threats and destruction of property aimed against rangers.¹⁵⁵ It is clear that protecting these vital forests is dangerous work, and Romania's environmental defenders urgently need to be better protected.

DISAPPEARING FORESTS AND ENDEMIC CORRUPTION

Romania's forests are under increasing threat – with Global Forest Watch estimating that 349,000 hectares were lost between 2001 and 2019. That's equivalent to over 4% of the country's tree cover since 2000.¹⁵⁶ Greenpeace Romania thinks that up to three hectares of forest cover are destroyed every hour by legal and illegal logging.¹⁵⁷

The trade of illegally cut timber in Romania is huge – with some estimates putting its worth at €1 billion per year.¹⁵⁸ In 2015, according to EU research, more than 40% of the wood taken from Romania's forests was from unaccounted sources¹⁵⁹ – however a report released in 2019 from the National Forestry Inventory put this figure at over 50%.¹⁶⁰

Organised crime syndicates – the so-called 'wood mafia' – are at the heart of the illegal logging trade, but the corruption that maintains it spreads far and wide, from public officials down to community members. The network sustains whole communities, and forest rangers are also implicated in this.¹⁶¹

DEMANDS FOR JUSTICE

There are some signs that things are changing – following the murders in late 2019, thousands marched in Bucharest and other cities across the country to protest against illegal logging and demand that the attacks on forest workers be investigated thoroughly.¹⁶² Agent Green, in coalition with other environmental groups, submitted a complaint to the European Commission detailing



Gabriel Paun (centre) meets with Romania's Minister of the Environment, Waters and Forests, Costel Alexe. *Agent Green*

Romania's failure to curb illegal logging.¹⁶³ As a result, the commission threatened legal action against the government in February this year.¹⁶⁴

However, justice for the victims of the wood mafia appears hard to come by. The perpetrator who in 2017 shot Sorin Jiva, a ranger from western Romania, is still free.¹⁶⁵ And in the months following the murder of Liviu Pop, there have been no arrests.

DEFENDERS' RECOMMENDATIONS:

Agent Green calls on the Romanian Government to:

- Strictly and immediately preserve the last remaining primary and old-growth forests (525,000 hectares or 8% of the country's forest cover).
- Increase the Natura 2000 network¹⁶⁶ from 23% to 30% of the country and ensure genuine implementation of European Union nature directives.
- Combat illegal logging by strengthening controls and increasing fines. Ensure traceability and transparency by operationalising the Forest Inspector app¹⁶⁷ that publicises forestry plans, logging concessions, wood transport routes and destinations.



An aerial shot of a sawmill in central Romania. *Agent Green*



An aerial photograph shows where forests were cleared for a palm oil concession in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Romeo Gacad/AFP via Getty Images

CONCLUSION: BUSINESS THAT COSTS THE EARTH

Our report this year could not be clearer: at a time when we most need people to protect the planet against destructive, carbon-intensive industries, we are seeing the highest number of killings of land and environmental defenders since Global Witness started tracking these murders.

Despite knowing how critical rainforests are for the climate, we are seeing an escalation of deforestation, and defenders who challenge logging continue to be ‘disappeared’. Despite growing awareness of how indigenous land is grabbed for commercial mining projects, banks still rubber-stamp operations without proof that the human rights of people living locally have been protected. Despite the perilous threats to marine life and freshwater, those defending our rivers and oceans are marginalised and silenced.

In many countries, people’s rights to their land and natural resources are either unprotected, undocumented or not recognised, and environmental protections are poorly enforced. The situation in Colombia and the Philippines highlights this with terrible results. The reports shows that violence, intimidation and harassment towards land and environmental defenders happens when states fail to tackle the root causes of these infringements and companies fail to respect human rights in their global operations as required under prevailing international standards.¹⁶⁸ States must ensure accountability, and companies and their investors must mitigate these risks and redress harm as they relate to their supply chains.

Furthermore, protecting the environment and human rights makes good business sense. There are strong indications that ethical investments are starting to outperform traditional funds.¹⁶⁹ Protecting indigenous communities’ rights to land and resources can reduce risks to companies and investors – as our recent report *Responsible Sourcing* highlights. If businesses, including financial institutions, are serious about stopping climate breakdown and ending the senseless violence against those who stand on the frontline of the crisis, concerted efforts are needed.

During the current COVID-19 crisis, some companies are extending their attacks on defenders, and governments are reducing protections. When you take this all together with the increased number of attacks on defenders during 2019, this a more worrying time than ever. The trends are clear, the statistics are global, the causes lie with irresponsible business practices and the governments that support them.

Global Witness has been reporting on defender rights since 2012, in 2015 states came together to sign up to the Paris Agreement and around the world people are increasingly taking to the streets to demand urgent climate action. Yet the number of defenders killed and intimidated is rising. We must listen to them and put them front and centre of our climate response plans. Governments and industries must take immediate action to tackle the root causes of conflict, safeguard defender rights and ensure accountability across the supply chain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Land and environmental defenders will only be able to carry out their activism safely when states, companies and investors take action to tackle the root causes of conflict, safeguard defender rights and ensure accountability when attacks occur. In the section below, we talk through what governments and companies should do to address these issues.

GOVERNMENTS

States (through their governments) have the primary duty, under international law, to guarantee that defenders' human rights are protected and that they can carry out their activism safely. This includes guaranteeing many relevant human rights, such as the right to life, to freedom of assembly and expression, and to an adequate standard of living.¹⁷⁰ In addition, there is growing momentum to recognise people's right to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including the right to a safe climate.¹⁷¹

To tackle the root causes, governments should:

- Resolve outstanding land claims and formally secure, including through legal means, the land rights of communities and indigenous peoples.
- Commit to addressing land inequality, including in regards to gender.
- Guarantee that no business project goes ahead without the free, prior and informed consent of potentially and affected indigenous communities at every stage of the project cycle or operation.
- Require the prior full assessment of the possible environmental and social impacts of proposed business operations and policies. The results of any assessment should be made public and used to mitigate against adverse impacts experienced by communities.

To safeguard defender rights, governments should:

- Legally legitimise the role of land and environmental defenders and publicly condemn any threats against them, with specific attention to gender-based violence and attacks.
- Ensure national policies safeguard the rights of defenders and protesters to free assembly and speech, as well as potential recourse to civil disobedience.



This includes scrapping legislation used to criminalise defenders.

- Via diplomatic and trade missions, raise concerns with host governments over environmental and human rights concerns, and use policies and legislation to hold their national companies with operations overseas to account.

To ensure accountability, governments should:

- Provide effective accountability mechanisms at every level that deliver tangible results in defenders' lives, in line with international laws and standards.
- Bring to justice those responsible for ordering or carrying out any threat or attack against a land or environmental defender.
- Prevent, investigate, punish and redress corruption, human rights abuses and environmental damage through effective policies, legislation, regulations and reparations, including holding companies and investors to account on their obligations when operating projects or sourcing land-based goods, both at home and abroad.
- Make foreign aid and investment in projects conditional upon whether specific measures for the security of land and environmental defenders are in place or not.

COMPANIES AND INVESTORS

Violence, intimidation and harassment towards land and environmental defenders can occur when companies fail to respect human rights in their global operations as required under prevailing international standards.¹⁷² Companies and their investors are responsible for mitigating risks and redressing harm as they relate to land and environmental defenders across their supply chains, operations and investments. Likewise, they should exercise their leverage over national and international policymaking to advocate for better safeguards for defenders and push for stronger state commitments to secure community land rights in their Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement.

To tackle the root causes, companies and investors should:

- Develop and publish a policy position on land and environmental defenders that includes a zero-tolerance stance on threats and violence against defenders, and illegal land acquisition.
- Identify, prevent, address and account for any adverse impacts of their operations, value chains and business relationships on human rights and the environment by conducting regular due diligence assessments of risks to affected communities and defenders.
- Ensure transparent and accessible publication of human rights impact assessments and due diligence processes.
- Regularly monitor the effectiveness of reprisal prevention and due diligence processes through consultation with communities, defenders' representatives and independent experts, including as part of regular human rights impact assessments.

To safeguard defender rights, companies and investors should:

- Publically condemn threats and attacks against defenders wherever they occur, and disclose the due diligence measures used to identify and address them.
- Implement and adequately resource specific policies and practices that support key positions or calls made by human rights defenders.
- Take deliberate action to consult with women defenders, and local and/or national women's rights organisations that represent their interests, and ensure that due-diligence processes and protection mechanisms do not replicate structural discrimination or barriers faced by women.

To ensure accountability, companies and investors should:

- Cooperate with, assist, and in no way hinder investigations by state authorities into instances of attacks on land and environment defenders.
- Provide for or cooperate in remedy and reparations for defenders, organisations and communities affected by threats and attacks.
- Take immediate action to suspend business projects and relationships with business partners in situations where defenders have been threatened, until robust measures are taken to protect those at risk and prevent further harm.¹⁷³

IMPACTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE LAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS CAMPAIGN

Around the world, land is being violently grabbed and natural habitats destroyed to produce the goods we consume every day. Meanwhile, countless people are being killed, attacked or jailed for daring to take a stand. These are land and environmental defenders – ordinary people trying to protect their homes, livelihoods, and the health of our planet from the harmful impacts of industries like mining, oil and gas, and agribusiness.

Since 2012 Global Witness has campaigned to stop the assault on land and environmental defenders, and to ensure they can live and work without fear or intimidation.

The Global Witness Land and Environmental Defenders Campaign aims to raise awareness of the broader threats and attacks facing land and environmental defenders and their communities. It strives to give a greater voice and support to the work of defenders and their support networks.

We push for government, industry and investor reforms aimed at stopping the global trade in land and natural resources from stoking conflict. We investigate the root causes of violence in the worst-affected countries, pushing governments to halt abuses and bring perpetrators to justice. And we work hard to force this hidden crisis onto political agendas.

Our **new campaign** focuses on addressing one of the key drivers of attacks and reprisals against land and environmental defenders – agribusiness supply chains.

Working with defenders and the organisations that support them, we:

Raise awareness of the broad range of threats and challenges facing defenders around the world

➤ Our data and investigations into the threats that defenders face has been widely cited by national and international civil society and media, academics, governments and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations.

➤ Our campaign has put threats against land and environmental defenders higher on the agendas of international and national policy makers.

➤ Our annual reports have shown that threats against defenders continue to increase.

Raise defender voices and support their campaigns and advocacy

➤ A 2018 campaign evaluation concluded that Global Witness's work with defenders is highly valued – adding an influential voice, and raising the voices of grassroots defenders, so that is much more difficult for national decision-makers to ignore the issues.

➤ We have helped persuade national and international media outlets to cover the threats facing land and environmental defenders. According to our partners in the Philippines, the international coverage we help generate increases the pressure on the government to cease extra-judicial killings of defenders and closure of NGOs. Our partner in Mexico – CEMDA – held a press conference the day after our 2019 annual report launch, which saw 15 Mexican outlets cover it, and ensured that the local media reported on proposals being made by Mexican NGOs and not only the analysis of Global Witness.

➤ We have provided security, advocacy and communication training to organisations that support defenders around the world. In 2019 we developed a programme to support key partner organisations in their data-collection and communications activities.

Pressure companies to adopt and implement policies and practices throughout their supply chains that protect and respect defender rights

➤ In 2019, we ended a seven-year campaign targeting the rubber industry, including two of Vietnam's largest corporations, investors such as Deutsche Bank and the International Finance Corporation – the private lending arm of the World Bank Group – and international brand-name tyre companies. Our advocacy persuaded global tyre companies to upgrade their sourcing policies and work together to launch the Global Platform on Sustainable Natural Rubber.

➤ In 2019, Global Witness's investigative report *Defending the Philippines* uncovered the vested interests, political failures and multiple actors behind land grabs, environmental destruction and threats against



This banana plantation on the Filipino island of Mindanao is at the heart of a long-standing land dispute. The local indigenous population says that fraud was used to fake their consent in the licensing process for the land, which was later leased to Dole Philippines. *Global Witness / Jeffrey Maitem*

activists in Asia's deadliest country for defenders. As a result, agribusiness companies named in *Defending the Philippines* have committed to review and strengthen their due-diligence policies and commitments to human rights defenders. These companies must now finalise these policies and begin reporting on their implementation.

➤ Over the life of our new campaign we'll build on these successes and push for companies involved in global agricultural supply chains to take action to support land and environmental defenders.

Campaign for governments and international organisations to adopt regulations that respect and protect land and environmental defenders:

➤ Our publication *Honduras: The Deadliest Place to Defend the Planet* exposed state links and corrupt officials involved in large-scale business projects imposed upon communities. Campaigning alongside national NGOs, we helped push the government to actively investigate Berta Caceres's murder and the corruption case surrounding it. Seven men have been sentenced. The government must now investigate and prosecute those who ordered the killing.

➤ Working in coalition with other organisations, our campaign has successfully pushed for:

> Canadian and UK government policies to support human rights defenders around the world. These policies must now be implemented consistently and effectively.

>The International Finance Corporation (IFC) published a zero-tolerance position statement on reprisals, publicly affirming its support for civil society organisations engaged in or protesting against their development projects. The IFC must now implement practical and effective policies to operationalise this commitment.

>The Dutch development bank FMO developed an early-warning system to prevent and avoid reprisals against human rights defenders. The FMO must now report on how this system is being implemented effectively.

METHODOLOGY

The Global Witness Land and Environmental Defenders Campaign aims to raise awareness of the broad range of threats and attacks facing land and environmental defenders and their communities. It strives to give a greater voice to defenders and support their work and that of their networks.

We define land and environmental defenders as people who take a stand and carry out peaceful action against the unjust, discriminatory, corrupt or damaging exploitation of natural resources or the environment.

This covers a broad range of people. Defenders often live in communities whose land, health and livelihoods are threatened by the operations of mining, logging, agribusiness companies or other industries. Others will be defending our biodiverse environment. Others will be supporting such efforts through their work – as human rights or environmental lawyers, politicians, park rangers, journalists, or members of campaigns or civil society organisations, for instance.

Global Witness has produced a yearly account of murdered land and environmental defenders since 2012. We maintain a database of these killings so that there is a record of these tragic events and we can track trends and highlight the key issues behind them.

Research into the killings and enforced disappearances of land and environmental defenders between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2019:

Global Witness identifies cases of killings by searching and reviewing reliable sources of publicly available online information, through the following process:

- **Opportunistic:** We identify datasets from international and national sources with details of named human rights defenders killed, such as the Frontline Defenders annual report and the Programa Somos Defensores annual report on Colombia, and then research each case.
- **Systematic:** We set up search-engine alerts using keywords and conduct other searches online to identify relevant cases across the world.
- **Verified:** Where possible or necessary, we check with in-country or regional partners to gather further information on the cases.

To meet our criteria, a case must be supported by the following available information:

- Credible, published and current online sources of information.

- Details about the type of act and method of violence, including the date and location.
- Name and some biographical information about the victim.
- Clear, proximate and documented connections to an environmental or land issue.

Sometimes we will include a case that does not meet the criteria outlined above, where a respected local organisation provides us with compelling evidence that is not available online, based on their own investigations.

Global Witness includes friends, colleagues and the family of murdered land and environmental defenders in its database if a) they appear to have been murdered as a reprisal for the defender's work, or b) they were killed in an attack that also left the defender dead.

Our data on killings is likely to be an underestimate, given that many murders go unreported, particularly in rural areas. Our set of criteria can't always be met by a review of public information like newspaper reports or legal documents, nor through local contacts. Having a strict methodology means our figures do not represent the scale of the problem, and we are constantly working to improve this.

In summary, the figures presented in this report should be considered only a partial picture of the extent of killings of environmental and land defenders across the world in 2019. We identified relevant cases in 21 countries in 2019, but it is likely that attacks affecting land and environmental defenders also occurred in other countries where human rights violations are widespread. Reasons why we may not have been able to document such cases in line with our methodology and criteria include:

- Limited presence of civil society organisations, NGOs and other groups monitoring the situation in the field.
- Government suppression of the media and other information outlets.
- Wider conflicts and/or political violence, including between communities, that make it difficult to identify specific cases.

We conducted searches in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Due to the large number of countries and potential sources, we concentrated our searches on those countries where initial alerts indicated that there were potentially relevant cases to investigate. Due to the manner in which this work has evolved over the years, Global Witness has well-established links in some countries but lacks them in others.

Our data may also differ from that being gathered by other NGOs due to variations in methodologies and verification techniques. Some NGOs document attacks against all human rights defenders, while Global Witness data only covers defenders working on land or environmental issues.

PARK RANGERS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Our statistics reveal that a significant number of murdered land and environmental defenders belong to indigenous communities, whose land and water management skills are crucial to combat the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. In some areas of the world, indigenous peoples have been, and continue to be, expelled from their land for the creation or maintenance of conservation reserves. Global Witness clearly does not endorse this approach to environmental protection. We do not include in our data cases of individuals linked to violence against indigenous or local communities in their efforts to protect natural reserves. We do, however, include cases of government officials and park rangers who have been specifically threatened or targeted while trying to protect forestland and biodiversity, where there is no known conflict with indigenous or local communities.

Research into the broader range of attacks against land and environmental defenders:

In our efforts to highlight the full range of attacks that defenders face, we include details of these in the global map and case study sections of this report. Due to capacity constraints, we do not systematically document the broader range of threats that defenders face as we do for killings, but aim to report on emblematic cases that show regional and thematic trends.

In selecting cases to document for both of these sections, we used the following criteria:

- Balance across countries and regions.
- Balance between non-lethal attacks and criminalisation.
- Highlighting a range of different industries causing conflict – for example, mining and extractives, agribusiness, and logging.
- Responsive partner organisations/ local organisations following the case.

We use the same criteria on whether or not to include a case as above, namely: Credible, published and current online sources of information; details about the type of act, including the date and location; name and some biographical information about the victim(s); and clear, proximate and documented connections to an environmental or land issue.

Similarly, the cases we have included all refer to events taking place in 2019, however we have included updates where significant developments have taken place in the first half of 2020.

To document the in-depth case studies across Colombia, the Philippines and Romania, we have worked directly with national and local organisations in each country. This included in sourcing additional information. We also ensured that relevant individuals and organisations checked these case studies for accuracy. Accompanying each case study are a set of defender-led recommendations that aim to amplify the voices of those with whom we work. These are either long-standing partners or those contacted specifically for their involvement or connection to the specific issue involved.

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- Programa Somos Defensores, Colombia
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Colombia
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- Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu, Colombia
- Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos (UDEFEQUA), Guatemala
- Aci-Participa, Honduras
- Diakonia, Honduras
- Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental (CEMDA), Mexico
- Comité Cerezo, Mexico
- Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), Philippines
- Kalikasan PNE, Philippines
- Karapatan, Philippines
- UMA – Philippines
- Paghidaet Sa Kauswagan Development Group (PDG) Negros NGO – Philippines
- National Federation of Sugar Cane Workers – NFSW – Philippines
- Save our School Network SMR, Philippines
- PASAKA SMR, Philippines
- Agent Green, Romania
- Greenpeace, Romania
- People’s Watch – India
- Witness Radio – Uganda
- Amnesty International
- Business and Human Rights Resource Centre
- Front Line Defenders
- Human Rights Watch
- Peace Brigades International (PBI)
- Protection International, Indonesia
- Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, Peru

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173 For more detailed recommendations for companies and investors, please see our report: '*Responsible sourcing: the business case for protecting land and environmental defenders and indigenous communities' rights to land and resources*' available here: <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/responsible-sourcing/>.

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