

3 DECEMBER 2014

8.00 – 9.30

“Improving protection and ensuring participation of Land and Environment Defenders in all business initiatives and discussions”

Background information

Despite the increased recognition of the important role played by human rights defenders, and women in particular, when confronting adverse impacts of investment projects - including from the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, which called States in its 2014 report to the Human Rights Council to "*ensure the protection of human rights defenders who raise awareness of the impacts of business activities*" - much remains to be done to enhance their protection and participation and to put an end to the abuses they face.

Women and men who promote and protect land and environment-related human rights still face in return a large range of abuses committed by State and non-State actors on all continents. In Latin America, Africa and Asia, those defenders have been under surveillance, criminalised, slandered, attacked, arbitrarily detained, harassed or otherwise threatened, and in some cases killed, in a climate of impunity.

Because of this growing and worrying trend, there is clearly a great need for the international community, States and businesses to seek concrete ways to actively respect and protect land and environment defenders (LERDs).

This side event therefore aims to encourage all stakeholders to take into account the special situation – in terms of protection and participation - of the courageous advocates that focus in particular on land and environmental rights. It will also address challenges faced by women and men human rights defenders to access remedy when their rights are violated and the effectiveness of the remedies on offer.

Objectives

- To contribute to a better understanding of the overall situation of human rights defenders working on land and the environment, their need for increased and improved protection as well as for support to their local action (*protection and recognition*)
- To draw attention on challenges faced by human rights defenders in accessing remedy when their rights are violated and the effectiveness of such remedies especially in relation to the extractive industries and TNCs (*access to justice*)
- To promote a stronger consultation, participation and monitoring by human rights defenders working on land and environment in the design and implementation of all national and international regulations. The Right to information should be informed by human rights principles of non-discrimination and transparency (*meaningful consultations and dialogues*)
- To encourage States to implement the existing protection mechanisms such as guidelines to protect Human Rights defenders in their business-related policies and activities (*policy coherence*) and to assess how an international binding instrument on business and human rights could address these challenges

- To draw attention on the risks of national legislations, which tend to shrink the democratic spaces available to and to reflect on how the international system could monitor and intervene in this trend (*criminalisation vs. enabling environment*)

Format

The side event will be an interactive dialogue between 5 panel-speakers, 1 moderator and the audience. Panellists will briefly address the difficulties and challenges faced by LERDs in their country including to access remedy when their rights are violated, before formulating specific recommendations towards increased and better protection for such defenders and a strengthened dialogue with all stakeholders. Gerald Staberock, as a representative of an INGO will give an analysis of the global trends and Hila Elver, Special Rapporteur on the right to food will share her experience and recommendations taken from her mandate. An open dialogue will then be encouraged with questions/ interventions from the floor. Denise Auclair will moderate the debates.

Target audience

Civil society organizations and human rights defenders who wish to share experiences and good practices, States representatives who wish to increase their knowledge on the specific situation of defenders of human rights in relation to land and the environment, company representatives who wish to engage in an open and fair dialogue with these women and men.

Confirmed list of speakers

- Key Note: Hila Elver – UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food (video message)
- Moderator: Denise Auclair, CIDSE
- Irrael Manuel Aguilar Solano - Governor of the Zenú Indigenous Reserve (*Resguardo*) of Alto San Jorge - Colombia
- Donald Hernández Palma – Honduras Center for the Promotion of Community Development (CEHPRODEC) – Honduras
- Jaybee Garganera – Alyansa Tigil Mina / Tampakan Forum – Philippines
- Gerald Staberock – World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)

Organisers

- Franciscans International –Francesca Restifo: f.restifo@fiop.org
- Peace Brigades International (PBI) –Emilie Aubert : emilie.aubert@peacebrigades.ch
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights – Miguel Martín Zumalacárregui : mmz@omct.org

*Interpretation will be provided in English and Spanish
Coffee and Croissants will be offered before the event*