

PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL NETWORKS OFFER GREATER SECURITY

Violence against environmental human rights defenders is a symptom of the growing competition for natural resources such as minerals, timber and palm oil. IUCN NL supports local civil society organisations and indigenous communities in defending the natural environment, through local security measures and by calling for improved (international) legal protection.

In countries with large reserves of natural resources but poor land rights, more and more land is being lost to extraction. Even untouched conservation areas are now in the sights of developers. Environmental human rights defenders and indigenous communities wishing to halt these developments are often criminalised and threatened with physical and psychological violence. According to the annual Global Witness report, four environmental human rights defenders were killed every week, in 2019.

NATURE DEFENDER: A DANGEROUS OCCUPATION

According to the [Civicus Monitor](#), which measures civic space available to citizens in each country, only a small percentage of the world's population lives in an 'open country'. More than 80% are at least seriously obstructed. Governments abuse antiterrorism legislation and the COVID-19 pandemic to make life more difficult for environmental human rights defenders working in the Southern Hemisphere. Companies also employ serious physical intimidation methods against environmental defenders, as well as challenging them in the courts, and bogging them down in costly legal proceedings.

HALTING ABUSE

IUCN NL supports local civil society organisations and indigenous communities to protect themselves and nature. We help them identify the broader context of the threats and their position in the playing field. We also help them develop a lobbying strategy and improve their lobbying capacities. We provide them with tools, including apps, that help them monitor abuse and join us in tackling the problem.

Our particular focus is on women. According to the traditional role model, they are responsible for providing the family with food and water, which makes them more dependent on a biodiverse and healthy living environment. Women environmental human rights defenders are also vulnerable to other

"Nature cannot protect itself; it needs people to act on its behalf. These environmental human rights defenders need to be able to operate in safety. Not only today but also in the future."

Antoinette Sprenger, senior expert environmental justice at IUCN NL

forms of threat; for example they run the risk of being labelled bad mothers and becoming isolated within their own communities.

SECURITY TRAINING

We offer training to environmental defenders to help them stand up for their rights. We assist them by establishing personal networks to enable them to respond rapidly when threatened. Digital security is also of vital importance: if a person's online communication channels are well protected, they can communicate about abuse, without fear or threat.

Example of our work

Network of women leaders in Bolivia

In Bolivia, forest exploitation is constantly expanding. Across the country we work closely together with women leaders of indigenous communities. For them, a healthy living environment is essential and non-negotiable. For and together with them, we have developed an app via which they can exchange information and learn from each other's experiences. Using this digital network they can contact UN bodies and other reliable organisations to report threats. If businesses and government initiate legal proceedings against them, for example in the face of threatened reputation damage, they can call upon legal aid services, thanks to an emergency fund.

COLLABORATING WITH IUCN NL

Do you want to help IUCN NL increase the safety of environmental defenders? Visit our [website](#) for detailed information and more example projects or contact our expert [Antoinette Sprenger](#).

We establish emergency funds so that if necessary we can physically place environmental defenders in safety or finance legal aid. We exchange experiences via the Defend the Defenders network.

LOBBYING FOR COMPLIANCE

IUCN NL supports its local partners in ensuring that businesses comply with existing environmental protection laws and regulations, and that governments enforce those regulations. We are also lobbying in favour of a UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, and due diligence regulations at EU and Dutch level, because many businesses fail to comply with the (voluntary) OECD Guidelines. As a consequence, binding regulations are needed in order to prevent human rights violations.

We use the possibilities available within UN covenants and conventions, such as the Universal Periodic Review to report on human rights violations and to place them in the international spotlight.

More examples of our work

More protection for environmental defenders

- On the Philippines, one of our partners was labelled 'communist'. As a result, members are liable to be arrested, thrown into prison without trial and run the risk of being beaten and even killed. IUCN NL assists them via an emergency fund, and collaborates with the Dutch embassy.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, an app group has improved the safety of park rangers. Via the app they keep in touch with their families, so that they can immediately sound the alarm if they are threatened.
- In May 2019, IUCN NL organised a major conference for 29 environmental defenders from 9 different countries in the Southern Hemisphere. At the conference they were able to exchange experiences and [lessons learned](#) as well as establishing new networks.