

WCC-2020-Res-115-EN

Protecting environmental human and peoples' rights defenders and whistleblowers

RECOGNISING that loss of global biodiversity is linked with increasing violence toward people who put their lives at risk to defend nature and related human rights;

NOTING that environmental human and peoples' rights defenders and whistleblowers are any individual or group working to protect or promote human rights in the context of the environment, such as the defence of land rights, access to natural resources and the evolving discussions on the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and that they are often members of indigenous and traditional communities who can play a key role in combating environmental crime and should be legally recognised and protected; in accordance with national and/or international laws.

ACKNOWLEDGING increasing human rights abuses against environmental defenders, especially women, their families and associates, including killings, threats, intimidation, harassment, gender-based violence, smear campaigns, criminalisation, and forced displacement, such that in 2020 alone, at least 331 environmental and human rights defenders were killed for defending their homes, lands and natural resources, with more than half of the cases occurring in Latin America (from *Front Line Defenders Global Analysis 2020*); and ALSO ACKNOWLEDGING that mining, forestry or agro-industrial projects, and in some places, even conservation, have led to abuses;

NOTING resolution 8/12 of the Conference of States Parties (COSP) under the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) which encourages States Parties, and in conformity with national legislation, to consider establishing and developing, where appropriate, confidential complaint systems, whistleblower protection programmes, including protected reporting systems, and effective witness protection measures, and to increase awareness of such measures;

CONSIDERING that the protection of environmental defenders, their territories and rights is at the heart of IUCN's rights-based approach to conservation as recognised in Resolutions 4.052 *Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 4.119 *Protection of rangers within and in areas adjacent to protected areas*, and 4.056 *Rights-based approaches to conservation* (all adopted in Barcelona, 2008) and Resolution 5.97 *Implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Jeju, 2012);

APPLAUDING the efforts undertaken by environmental defenders as an essential contribution to conservation for present and future generations and welcoming national, regional and global developments to address the needs and rights of defenders, such as the Aarhus Convention, Escazú Agreement and the cooperation agreement signed by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to promote and protect environmental and human rights;

RECOGNISING that environmental defenders under threat are found across the full range of IUCN fields of activity and regions and a more comprehensive approach is needed to support their protection especially in regions and areas of activity with high degrees of vulnerability; and

STRESSING that it is crucial to ensure the security of environmental defenders, within and outside their territories, and that all forms of arbitrary violence and criminalisation against defenders must be stopped and recurrence prevented;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, at its session in Marseille, France:

1. ENCOURAGES the Director General to work with State and non-State Members, including Indigenous Peoples Organisations, women organisations and national NGOs, Commissions, Regional Offices, National Committees, the Secretariat and International Organisations, including International Financial Institutions, to:

- a. enhance knowledge, collection of disaggregated data and awareness concerning environmental defenders and whistleblowers, and protection mechanisms linked to other current efforts, such as civil society organisations and networks, the UNEP policy on promoting greater protection for environmental defenders, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and national governments;
 - b. review the IUCN Programme 2021–2024 in terms of intersections with environmental defender issues including in its programme on business and biodiversity engagement;
 - c. develop an IUCN policy and action plan on environmental human rights defenders and whistleblowers, in collaboration with defenders and whistleblowers and their organisations;
 - d. as part of the IUCN Annual Report, report on the development and implementation of the activities related to the policy and action plan on environmental defenders and whistleblowers;
 - e. engage in direct dialogue with individual State Members to conduct independent fact finding, when relevant, and to improve systematic protection of defenders; and
 - f. mobilise resources with interested donor countries to finance activities in support of environmental defenders and whistleblowers;
2. REQUESTS the Commission on Education and Communication (CEC), the Commission on Environmental Law (CEL) and the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), in collaboration with defenders and whistleblowers and their organisations, to initiate a campaign to promote and support the work of environmental human rights defenders and whistleblowers as a way of protecting them from threats and attacks and showing the importance of their work;
 3. REQUESTS National Committees to engage Members, raise awareness and build capacity concerning protection needs of environmental human rights defenders, and opportunities to meet those needs in their respective countries;
 4. URGES states to adopt and uphold laws aimed at the protection of defenders and whistleblowers, and to put in place holistic protection measures for, and in consultation with, defenders and whistleblowers, thereby seeking to ensure accountability and prosecution for threats and attacks against environmental human rights defenders;
 5. CALLS ON financial institutions and businesses to implement human rights due diligence including with the use of free, prior and informed consent for indigenous peoples, and further establish and strengthen grievance and redress mechanisms, and hold meaningful and inclusive consultations with defenders, potentially affected groups and other relevant stakeholders as part of a zero tolerance approach to violence within supply chains; and
 6. CALLS ON NGOs and others within the IUCN community to respect, defend and uphold human rights, and to undertake human rights due diligence and commit to the use of free, prior and informed consent for indigenous peoples.