

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL46th Session, 8th of March 2021

Item 3: General debate

ORAL INTERVENTION OF PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL*Speaker: Ribka Kenelak*

Ms. President,

Peace Brigades International welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, on human rights and the global water crisis¹. We echo the Special Rapporteur's concerns regarding the impact of extractive industries and hydro-power projects on water supply, quality and the wider environment. In particular we highlight the plight of human rights defenders working to uphold environmental protections in such contexts and urge for their protection.

Human rights defenders working on environmental human rights, including the right to safe drinking water, face ever increasing threats to their lives and livelihoods arising from their crucial work. According to recently published research, 220 land, environmental or indigenous peoples' rights defenders were killed in 2020, representing 69% of all human rights defenders killed in the last year.² Additionally, they face threats, harassment and criminalisation at the hands of both State and non-State actors.

In Indonesia, research conducted by human rights defenders has highlighted how large-scale infrastructure development projects such as the Youtefa Bridge and Jayapura Ring Road have negatively impacted access to water for rural and indigenous communities, and resulted in wider environmental degradation.³

In Colombia, environmental human rights defenders, including in the Putumayo and Magdalena Medio region, receive death threats, physical attacks or are killed due to their legal work against water contamination and supporting environmental protection. In Guatemala, environmental defenders who promote the right to access to water and to healthy water, access limited by agroindustrial sugar farms in Retahuleu, are facing death threats and criminalization processes. Both countries have yet to ratify the Escazú Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters.

In Honduras, in the spirit of several emergency decrees and despite the lack of a national regulatory framework to ensure the right to participation of affected communities, construction and amplification of hydroelectric dams has become a priority lead by institutions such as INVEST, which lack transparency in budget management, leading to the exit of Honduras from the Millennium Challenge Corporation funds. Further, in Honduras all proposed hydroelectric dams are located in indigenous territories, where individuals defending rivers such as the *Guapinol* and *Gualcarque* have been subjected to threats, criminalisation and harassment.

In Mexico, environmental defenders continue to be the most attacked, representing 70% of defenders killed in 2020 and reflecting global trends. Crimes such as the murder of Samir Flores, a member of the *Frente de*

1 <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/46/28>

2 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/fld_global_analysis_2020.pdf

3 <https://elsam.or.id/infrastructure-idols-portraits-and-paradigms-of-development-under-special-autonomy-in-papua/>

Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra y el Agua and an opponent of the Comprehensive Morelos Project, are treated with impunity. Two years after his murder, the aggressors have not been identified but the large scale project was completed without the consent of the affected communities.

We are deeply concerned by the threats experienced by environmental defenders at the hands of both State and non-State actors, and urge for their protection.

Thank you.