

73rd Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Statement under Item 6: Activity Report of the Chairperson of the Working Group on Extractive Industries, Environment and Human Rights Violations in Africa

Observer Status No. 359

Honourable Chairperson,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of DefendDefenders and AfricanDefenders, we welcome the report of the Chairperson of the Working Group on Extractive Industries, Environment and Human Rights Violations in Africa.

As this Commission marks 35 years in existence, we call upon States, businesses, and the Commission to take bold steps to ensure that environmental HRDs operate in an environment which is safe and enabling, and free from fear and reprisals.

Environmental human rights defenders (HRDs) often serve as the first defence against violations that stem from climate change, endangered ecosystems, and threats against biodiversity and traditional livelihoods in Africa.

Despite the important role they play, the threats against them continue to intensify with some resulting into killings. In 2021, Front Line Defenders [documented](#) the murder of 211 land and environmental HRDs globally. This number accounts for 59% of the HRDs killed, making environmental HRDs and HRDs working on business and human rights one of the most dangerous categories to be in.

As of August 2022, we recorded the murder of three environmental HRDs in South Africa. They were from the largest grassroots

movement, Abahlali BaseMjondolo. Since the group was established, 24 HRDs were killed.

There has been no accountability or redress in previous notable cases of murder, such as the killing of Mama Fikile Ntshangase in South Africa or Joanna Stansbury in Kenya.

In Tanzania, the Maasai Community living in Ngorongoro Conservation Area and Loliondo were met with brutal repression and arbitrary arrests after protesting against what [Amnesty International](#) described as "unlawful forced evictions" because of the lack of dialogue with the Maasai Communities affected.

Honourable Chairperson,

The use of Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation (SLAPP) suits continue to be a tool of repression deployed by Multi-National Corporations to silence environmental HRDs. We welcome the [ground-breaking judgment](#) by the Western Cape High Court in February 2021, which acknowledged the trend of weaponizing SLAPP suits to silence activists.

We urge the South African Government and other states to build upon this positive step by adopting legislations that protects environmental HRDs from the weaponisation of the judiciary to silence them and hinder their important work.

Honourable Chairperson,

DefendDefenders and AfricanDefenders stand ready to work with the Working Group to ensure that this goal is realised.

