



Women Human Rights and Environmental Defenders¹

Monday, July 16, 2018

Women Human Rights and Environmental Defenders (WHREDs) act in defense of women's human rights and fundamental freedoms, encompassing civil, political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, LGBT, sexual and reproductive rights. Despite the growing focus on violations against WHREDs in global spaces, and increased attention to protection mechanisms, violence against WHREDs has continued to increase in all parts of the world. Hundreds of WHREDs globally have faced increased crackdowns by state and non-state actors in their work. The growing proliferation of laws that limit freedom of expression, association and assembly, a marked increase in restrictions for human rights organizations, continued shrinking of civil society and democratic spaces, and increased violence, threats, intimidation and murder of WHREDs.

Key data

- On 4 March 2018 –the “Escazú Agreement¹, a groundbreaking environmental rights agreement was adopted in Latin America and the Caribbean
 - Article 9 puts an obligation on Parties to “guarantee a safe and enabling environment for persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters”
 - It is the first ever legally binding regional agreement of Latin American and Caribbean countries to set new standards on Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and protect the rights of access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters.
- 2017 saw 197 people killed, an average of four people a week, in their struggles against mines, plantations, poachers, and infrastructure projects, among others.

Key messages

1. No women should have to die to protect our environment, challenge land grabbing and/or avoid extractivism and exploitation of natural resources.
2. We honor the sacrifice of women that have given their lives to protect the environment, but we can no longer accept this. We will fight like hell for the living to honor the dead.
3. Militarization, conflicts over resources, neoliberal globalisation and all forms of fundamentalisms and extremisms are factors in the growing repression of women who stand up for their rights and for the rights of their communities.
4. Latin America is the region where more Environmental Defenders are murdered each year, especially indigenous women leaders. Escazu, which carries on the spirit of every WHRED and takes inspiration from Honduran activist Bertha Caceres and her struggle to protect the rivers and

¹ The Escazu Convention on Access to Information, Participation and Access to Justice, <https://accessinitiative.org/resources/escazu-convention-access-information-participation-and-access-justice>

forests on behalf of her indigenous community, should be a turning point for human rights and environmental defenders' activities and activism.

5. WHREDS continue to take a stand for freedom of expression, land rights and rights of indigenous and rural communities, rights of political participation, reproductive rights including the right to abortion, sexuality-related rights, and rights of communities facing discrimination because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.
6. Despite calls from civil society, and recent progress on commitment to WHREDS at a global level, the 2030 agenda fails to highlight the important and legitimate role of WHREDS working on development-related issues, and the need for WHREDS to be central to the agenda. Global progress includes the first UN General Assembly resolution on WHRDs in 2013, and subsequent resolutions passed by the UN Human Rights Council and the GA in 2014 and 2015, that specifically reference the important work of WHREDS, and the need for states to take appropriate steps to protect them.
7. We make a call to Latin American and the Caribbean Governments to sign and ratify the Escazú Agreement on September 27, 2018 so it could enter into force as soon as possible, and so it becomes a true tool for environmental defenders to access information, public participation and especially justice on environmental issues, and at the same time guarantee the lives of every person who struggles to defend nature.

Recommendations

- Support and provide comprehensive protection to women human rights and environmental defenders, at all levels, to enable them to do their work free from violence, fear of imprisonment, or other human rights abuses.
- An enabling environment should be in place to Legal frameworks should find synergies between the Agenda 2030 and human rights and environmental defenders work (or the agreements).
- Agenda 2030 as well as SDGs should take into account the efforts of local WHRED defenders in order to achieve SDGs.
- UN member states must translate their SDG commitments into action by establishing accessible and clear protection and justice mechanisms to
 - protect women human rights defenders and others (including whistle-blowers, tax justice activists) that expose tax abuse, land grabbing and report corruption.
 - hold state and non-state perpetrators accountable, particularly bearing in mind the state's human rights obligations to regulate multinational corporations and other business activities.
- Commit to accountability from the local level to the global. None of the SDGs will be achieved without addressing closing spaces for civil society at all levels; protecting women human rights defenders, including environmental defenders; ensuring that women's and feminist groups are at accountability tables, and ensuring rigorous and transparent review at all levels, including at the HLPF.
- Support the UN Human Rights Council's proposed Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with respect to human rights.

¹ For reference: See the Women's Major Group HLPF 2018 Position Paper at <https://tinyurl.com/y7bry64r>