

Statement at 38th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on business and human rights

As prepared - check against delivery.

Statement on behalf of the International Service for Human Rights, developed in collaboration and with the support of Botswana Watch Organization, Botswana, Kalikasan – People’s Network for the Environment, Philippines, Dawei Probono Lawyer Network, Myanmar and environmental defenders from Peru.

Thank you Mr Vice President,

Madame Chair of the Working Group on business and human rights, ISHR delivers this statement as a message from a group of environmental defenders and accountability advocates from Botswana, Peru, Myanmar, and the Philippines. With them we express our grave concern at the increase of violence, threats, intimidation, defamation, criminalization and extrajudicial killings against defenders of the land and the environment around the world. We welcome your latest report on economic diplomacy, and its affirmation that the situation of human rights defenders is an important benchmark when considering whether to provide diplomatic or export credit support.

In Botswana, despite massive economic contribution from mining operations, various rights of local communities and the general citizens are often violated. The challenges experienced including lack of community consultations, no free prior and informed consent, forced displacements with no just compensation, and limited access to critical information such as environmental impact assessments, mining contracts, mineral revenue payments and expenditure.

Peru, according to the 2016 Global Witness Report, is the world’s fourth most dangerous country to be an environmental and land defender. While we recognize that the Peruvian Government has instituted specific public measures to protect defenders in its National Human Rights Plan for the first time, it must also directly protect them from imminent risk and address the root causes of their insecurity.

In Myanmar, the resource-rich lands of various ethnic minorities are faced with armed conflict, forced displacement, land grabbing, illegal arrests, and other human rights violations at the hands of the military. Behind this, mining and other corporate investments from Thailand and China, among others, are pouring in. All investors should reconsider their involvement in these industries and efforts must be taken to ensure all companies operating in Myanmar comply with laws and regulations and are held to account for their human rights abuses.

In the Philippines at least 54 cases of environment-related killings, occurring in the context of an extensive government crackdown on critics, dissenters, and checks and balances has prompted Global Witness to declare it the world’s second most deadly place in 2017. Madame Chair, what can the Working Group do, perhaps in collaboration with other mandate holders such as the Special Rapporteur on the Environment, to address the worsening plight of Filipino environment defenders?

In the context of these attacks, which occur on a global scale, we call for systematic solutions from a united international community. In particular, we:

1. We call on our own States to combat impunity for attacks on human rights defenders, promote good governance and ensure full civil society participation in the development and the management of national resources;
2. We urge all States to work towards the elaboration and ratification of an international treaty that will legally bind corporations to ensure the protection of human rights and human rights defenders;
3. We reiterate our call for a more systematic investigation into the environmental and human rights situation of our countries by the Council and its mechanisms;

Finally, as the Working Group continues to develop its Guidance on Human Rights Defenders, we recommend that it concretely reflect the realities confronted by environmental defenders.

Thank you.