

SUMMARY REPORT  
& KEY MESSAGES

# The 4th Asia ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FORUM

*Conservation, Biodiversity and Human Rights*

27-29 OCTOBER 2025  
CHIANG MAI, THAILAND



CONVENED BY



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# 1. Introduction and Context

The 4th Asia Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRD) Forum (“the Forum”) was held from 27 to 29 October 2025 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, with the theme “Conservation, Biodiversity and Human Rights.” The Forum brought together 186 environmental human rights defenders, Indigenous Peoples’ representatives, women and youth leaders, civil society organizations, legal practitioners, and international and regional partners from across 30 (thirty) Asian countries.

Building on previous editions convened in 2021, 2022 and 2023, the 2025 Forum responded to escalating risks faced by environmental human rights defenders across the region, including criminalization, violence, shrinking civic space, and reprisals linked to conservation activities, extractive industries, climate action, and land governance, among other activities.






Discussions were grounded in the recognition that biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, and pollution are not only interconnected planetary crises but also profound human rights challenges, disproportionately affecting environmental human rights defenders and those in vulnerable situations.

The Forum was convened as a closed-door, by-invitation-only meeting to ensure the safety and security of participants and to provide a trusted space for peer-to-peer learning, movement-building, collective strategizing, and mutual support to advance rights-based approaches to biodiversity, land, and climate governance.



## 2. Objectives

The Forum aimed to achieve six interlinked objectives, namely:

-  Serving as a safe and trusted space for environmental human rights defenders to discuss regional trends, challenges, and risks related to the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of environmental and human rights, including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
-  Facilitating peer-to-peer learning, knowledge sharing, movement-building, joint action, and mutual support among environmental human rights defenders across Asia.
-  Promoting the exchange of good practices and success stories, including strategies to address violations of environmental and human rights.
-  Building capacity on the interlinkages between biodiversity conservation, restoration, and sustainable use; land; climate change adaptation and mitigation; and human rights.
-  Strengthening networks, access to justice, legal aid, redress, and effective remedy for environmental human rights defenders across Asia.
-  Supporting inclusive, gender-responsive, intergenerational and Indigenous-led approaches to environmental governance and defender protection.



### 3. Organization



The Forum was convened by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), together with the following co-organizing partners:

- Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact Foundation (AIPP).
- Asia Research Institute for Environmental Law (ARIEL).
- Asia Pacific Network for Environmental Defenders (APNED).
- Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.
- EarthRights International.
- Global Witness.
- Goldman Environmental Prize.
- Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI).
- Resource Justice Network.
- Women4Biodiversity.
- Youth Empowerment Climate Action Platform (YECAP).



The event was made possible by the generous support of the Government of Sweden, the Ford Foundation, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, as well as in-kind contributions from co-conveners and co-organizing partners.



## 4. Programme

The Forum was held from 27 to 29 October 2025 and the programme is available as **Annex I**. It combined plenary sessions, parallel thematic discussions, and an engagement space designed to spotlight the diverse work of organizations operating at the intersection of environmental and human rights. It covered the following overarching subjects:

- Regional situation analysis of environmental human rights defenders.
- Human rights-based biodiversity governance.
- Corporate accountability, extractive industries, and climate action.
- The nexus between climate change, biodiversity, land, and human rights.
- Legal protection, access to justice, and security mechanisms.
- Whole-of-society strategies, alliances, and movement sustainability.

Following the closing of the Forum, two partner-led workshops provided participants with a deeper dive into practical strategies for ‘wellbeing, self-care, and integrated security’ and ‘engagement in multilateral environmental and human rights processes.’ **Annex II** includes the summaries from these workshops.



Day 1 - Setting the stage & legal foundations	Day 2 - Intersections of climate, biodiversity & justice	Day 3 - Whole-of-society strategies & closing
<p><b>Opening Plenary:</b> Welcome, keynote, and opening ritual honoring the land and territory.</p> <p><b>Session 1:</b> Regional situation reflection &amp; report back.</p> <p><b>Session 2:</b> Human rights &amp; biodiversity governance.</p> <p><b>Session 3 (Part 1):</b> Corporate accountability &amp; biodiversity loss.</p>	<p><b>Session 3 (Part 2):</b> Corporate accountability &amp; biodiversity loss.</p> <p><b>Session 4:</b> Climate change, biodiversity, land &amp; human rights.</p> <p><b>Session 5 (Part 1):</b> Legal protection &amp; access to justice.</p> <p><b>Session 5 (Part 2):</b> Security and protection mechanisms.</p> <p><b>Engagement Space.</b></p>	<p><b>Session 6:</b> Power together: Whole-of-society strategies for biodiversity and human rights.</p> <p><b>Closing plenary:</b> Reflections, commitments &amp; next steps.</p> <hr/> <p><b>Workshop 1:</b> Engagement Strategies for Multilateral Processes.</p> <p><b>Workshop 2:</b> The WeSIS (Wellbeing, Self-care and Integrated Security).</p>

Figure 1 – Overview of the 4th EHRD Forum Programme

## 5. Opening Session<sup>1</sup>



The Opening Session included a cultural blessing ceremony, an Opening Plenary, and a cultural performance. The ceremony was led by Akha community from Thailand, and led by indigenous elders who performed a ritual, namely a traditional Akha soul-calling ceremony by Akha elders. In Akha belief systems, this ceremony is conducted to call back the khwan (spirit), restoring balance, protection, and harmony for individuals and communities. The ritual reflects a holistic worldview where care for the environment is intrinsically linked to collective health and continuity.



At the Forum, the ceremony featured traditional chants, symbolic gestures, and the tying of white cotton strings around participants' wrists, signifying protection, unity, and the binding of the spirit to the body. Beyond its spiritual dimensions, the ceremony provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on reciprocity with nature, intergenerational knowledge, and the vital role of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women, in sustaining biodiversity. This opening moment set the tone for the Forum, reaffirming that human rights, environmental protection, and the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity are deeply interconnected with Indigenous knowledge systems, spiritual relationships with land, and community stewardship. It further underscored the Forum's commitment to centering the perspective and leadership of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and other rights holders throughout its deliberations.



In the ensuing Opening Plenary, participants were welcomed by the Forum conveners and co-organizing partners, who emphasized the Forum's purpose as a safe and trusted space for environmental human rights defenders to exchange experiences, build solidarity, and collectively address the growing risks associated with defending land, biodiversity, and environmental rights across Asia.

<sup>1</sup>Photos and media coverage of the Forum are available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unhumanrights/albums/72177720330172153/>.



Keynote interventions from **Batmunkh Luvsandash**, Mongolian Environmental Human Rights Defender and 2025 Goldman Environmental Prize winner, **Astrid Puentes Riaño**, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to a healthy environment, and **AnnaMaria Oltorp**, Head of the Development Cooperation Section, Regional Asia and the Pacific, of the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok, described the need for rights-based conservation practices, the recognition of Indigenous land rights and knowledge systems, corporate accountability, and stronger protection mechanisms for defenders.

Opening Plenary speakers further highlighted that environmental human rights defenders are not only protecting ecosystems, but also advancing the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and supporting peace, social cohesion, and resilience within their communities. They underscored the urgency of addressing escalating threats to defenders, including criminalization, violence, shrinking civic space, and reprisals linked to conservation, extractive industries, and climate-related projects, among other activities. They further reaffirmed the importance of regional and global solidarity networks, multilateral engagement, and inclusive governance in addressing the interconnected crises of biodiversity loss, climate change, and human rights violations.



### Key messages highlighted in the Opening Plenary included:

- Defending environmental human rights is defending people, nature, and dignity. Environmental human rights defenders play a critical role in safeguarding ecosystems, communities, and present and future generations.
- The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is inseparable from the protection of those who defend it. States have a duty to prevent, investigate, and remedy violations against environmental human rights defenders.
- Responsible business conduct, in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, must be informed and consulted with those most affected by environmental and human rights impacts, not imposed through top-down or profit-driven models.

Box 2 – General key messages from the Opening Plenary, as presented at the Closing Plenary and revised based on rapporteurs' input.

The Opening Session concluded with a cultural performance celebrating Indigenous heritage, resilience, and continuity, reinforcing the Forum's emphasis on dignity, diversity, and collective strength as foundations for effective environmental and human rights action.

## 6. Session Summaries

During the Forum, participants engaged in six thematic sessions, including plenary sessions and parallel discussions. This section summarizes the core topics and the key messages and trends underscored by meeting participants in each thematic session. The information contained here builds on the notes taken by volunteer rapporteurs during the Forum and the consolidated key messages presented at the Closing Plenary.



## 6.1) Situation of Environmental Human Rights Defenders in Asia



In Session 1, titled ‘Regional Situation Reflection,’ participants had an opportunity to reflect in sub-regional breakout groups on the situation of environmental human rights defenders in their respective contexts. The session included breakout groups for South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and East and North-East Asia, where participants discussed key threats, challenges, opportunities, and ongoing advocacy efforts. The notes from the sub-regional breakout groups’ discussions are available in **Annex III**.

In general, participants reported worsening conditions for defenders to carry out their legal and peaceful work across sub-regions. Common trends included the misuse of laws to silence dissent against illegal or unsustainable practices; the growing use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs); surveillance; red-tagging; defamation; arbitrary arrests; and violence against defenders, often accompanied by widespread impunity.

Participants further indicated that corruption in natural resource governance, particularly in licensing, environmental impact assessments, and extractive industries, continued to undermine accountability and environmental justice in several contexts. Digital threats – including online harassment, cyberattacks, surveillance, and misinformation – added to that and were reported as risks that contributed to burnout and isolation.

Despite the reported trends and threats, participants identified solidarity networks, youth movements, legal reforms, and regional cooperation as key opportunities to strengthen protection and advance environmental justice.

### Key messages highlighted by participants included:

- Environmental human rights defenders across Asia face escalating criminalization, surveillance, harassment, including through militarization of land and natural resource governance in certain contexts, and shrinking civic space, often driven by State and corporate interests.
- Legal frameworks and international instruments offer potential protection, but gaps in access to information, implementation of laws, and access to legal recourse leave environmental human rights defenders vulnerable. Laws are increasingly misused to silence dissent, including through SLAPP suits, red-tagging, defamation charges, arbitrary arrests, and violence, with impunity remaining a common trend.
- Corruption in resource governance, particularly in licensing, environmental impact assessments, and extractive industries, continues to undermine accountability and environmental justice.
- Digital threats, including online harassment, cyberattacks, misinformation, and surveillance, are intensifying risks for defenders and contributing to fear, isolation, and weakening trust within movements.
- Despite these challenges, solidarity networks, youth movements, legal reforms, and regional cooperation offer critical opportunities to strengthen protection, expand legal support and advance environmental justice.
- Land and natural resource governance in several contexts remains extractive and corporate-driven, reinforcing inequalities, land dispossession, and environmental harm. Carbon credit schemes, critical minerals extraction, and forest finance initiatives were identified as contributing to rights violations where safeguards are weak or absent.
- Reduced funding, limited coordination, and ongoing conflicts in certain contexts are weakening protection mechanisms and contributing to fragmentation, burnout, and trauma within movements.

Box 3 - Key messages on the situation of environmental human rights defenders in Asia, as presented at the Closing Plenary and revised based on rapporteurs’ input.

## 6.2) Biodiversity Governance and Human Rights

Session 2, titled 'Human Rights & Biodiversity Governance,' examined the intersection of international environmental law – with a focus on biodiversity law –, human rights law, and environmental policy and governance, emphasizing the role of environmental human rights defenders in shaping the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity globally and regionally. More specifically, Session 2 included parallel discussions on (a) land rights as a key element in the right to a healthy environment, and (b) strengthening human rights-based approaches in biodiversity policy.

Discussions among participants underscored that the biodiversity crisis was also a human rights crisis, and that the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity are essential for the full enjoyment of human rights. Participants reported that biodiversity loss directly affected the enjoyment of rights to health, food, water, culture, self-determination, and a healthy environment. They further emphasized that Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth were the primary stewards of biodiversity, yet they often remained systematically excluded from biodiversity decision-making and governance.

Participants also raised serious concerns regarding exclusionary and top-down conservation models, including "fortress conservation" and greenwashing practices, noting that these practices, at times, resulted in land grabbing, displacement, forced evictions, and criminalization.

Human rights-based approaches were highlighted as essential for empowering communities to exercise their rights, enhancing accountability of State and non-State actors, ensuring equitable benefit-sharing, and strengthening the resilience of both ecosystems and communities in the face of climate and biodiversity crises. Participants observed that, although international biodiversity and human rights frameworks increasingly recognized rights-based approaches, national implementation remained inconsistent and inadequate. It was stressed that biodiversity policies and conservation practices needed to be fully aligned with international human rights standards and grounded in meaningful participation, accountability, and coherent implementation across all sectors

### Key messages highlighted by participants included:

- The biodiversity crisis is a human rights crisis. It directly affects the enjoyment of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and other human rights, including the right to food, water, culture, health, and self-determination.
- Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth are primary stewards of biodiversity, yet they are often excluded from biodiversity decision-making and governance.
- Policies for the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity recognize and uphold Indigenous governance systems, customary and collective land tenure, traditional knowledge, and community sovereignty.
- Greenwashing and exclusionary conservation models, including those that may be linked to international finance and climate initiatives, have, in some contexts, contributed to land grabbing, displacement, and rights violations.
- Biodiversity-relevant international legal and policy frameworks, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, affirm rights-based approaches, but national implementation remains inconsistent and inadequate.
- In the national policy and practice, biodiversity policy planning and implementation must be fully aligned with international human rights law, supported by policy coherence, inclusive participation, cross-movement solidarity, and accountability and access to remedy.

Box 4 - Key messages on biodiversity governance and human rights, as presented at the Closing Plenary and revised based on rapporteurs' input.



## 6.3) Corporate Accountability, Climate Action and Just Transitions

Session 3 addressed 'Corporate Accountability & Biodiversity Loss.' It provided a space for sharing information and experiences on the impacts of business and industrial operations on biodiversity and the rights of communities, and highlighted strategies to strengthen meaningful public participation, access to information, and access to justice.

Session 3 included targeted parallel discussions on (a) the nexus between food systems, land, and the right to a healthy environment, (b) carbon credit schemes and biodiversity, (c) mining and extraction impacts on biodiversity and defenders, and (d) Indigenous Peoples' perspectives on the just energy transition.

Throughout the discussions, participants identified certain corporate- and State-led extractive, climate, and green transition projects – including mining, agribusiness, renewable energy, and carbon credit schemes – as significant drivers of biodiversity loss, land dispossession, and human rights violations, especially where they were implemented without transparency, accountability and effective oversight. Participants also underscored that duty-bearers, including States and companies, must prevent and address harm, ensure access to remedy, and be held accountable for adverse impacts.

Participants emphasized that Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) needed to be genuine, continuous, and applied throughout the full lifecycle of development projects, from design to implementation, including the right to refuse. Indigenous-led and community-owned data, documentation, and knowledge systems were highlighted as essential for accountability and for safeguarding culture, heritage, and ecosystems.

Concerning food systems, participants noted that Indigenous women play a central role as custodians of seeds, holders of traditional knowledge, and champions of food security and nutrition. Despite this, they highlighted that Indigenous women faced persistent threats, including land grabbing, lack of formal land and land tenure rights, forced evictions, exposure to hazardous chemicals, intimidation, and gender-based violence. Violations were reported to involve both State authorities and private actors, including agribusinesses and extractive industries.



Regarding carbon credit schemes, participants expressed concern that they could intensify land rights abuses, commodify forests, and create financial incentives that result in the displacement of communities.

Overall, participants stressed that a just transition needs to prioritize people over profit, ensure gender equality and Indigenous leadership, and support community-led solutions that do not compromise livelihoods or ecosystems.

### Key messages highlighted by participants included:

- Corporate- and State-led extractive, climate, and “green transition” projects including mining, agribusiness, renewable energy, and carbon credit schemes are driving biodiversity loss, land dispossession, and human rights violations, often framed in the name of sustainability.
- Carbon credit schemes, mining, and renewable energy projects frequently lack transparency, genuine FPIC, fair benefit-sharing, and effective grievance mechanisms.
- FPIC must be genuine, continuous, and applied from project design throughout the full project lifecycle from design to implementation, including the right to withhold consent.
- Indigenous-led data, documentation, and knowledge systems are essential for accountability, safeguarding culture, and environmental protection.
- A just transition must prioritize people over profit, ensuring gender equality, Indigenous leadership, community-led solutions, and protection of ecosystems and livelihoods.
- Regional and international solidarity is critical to uphold justice and protect defenders.

Box 5 - Key messages on corporate accountability, climate action, and just transitions, as presented at the Closing Plenary and revised based on rapporteurs' input.

## 6.4) Climate, Biodiversity, Land and Human Rights Nexus



Session 4 addressed the nexus between 'Climate Change, Biodiversity, Land, and Human Rights.' It discussed how human rights frameworks could guide integrated environmental protection in the context of the three interconnected planetary crises of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, including land degradation, and pollution and waste. The session further emphasized the instrumental role of environmental human rights defenders in leading and shaping inclusive and sustainable solutions, as well as the importance of coherent implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and other instruments.

Participants underscored the need to transform the relationship between people, land, and nature from one of ownership to one of kinship, as a foundation for rights-based and sustainable environmental action. They expressed that decolonizing environmental governance required recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems, customary and collective land tenure, and community governance as central to integrated climate and biodiversity solutions.

Participants further identified community-driven approaches, combined with awareness-raising, education, and technical capacity-building, as essential to enabling meaningful participation and effective advocacy. According to participants, legal and policy frameworks for protecting environmental human rights defenders needed to be accompanied by robust implementation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms, including access to remedy and protection against reprisals.

### Key messages highlighted by participants included:

- The three interconnected planetary crises, including climate change and biodiversity loss, disproportionately affect groups already in vulnerable situations. This calls for strengthened meaningful public participation, access to information, and access to justice for all.
- Community-driven approaches play an important role in overcoming systemic challenges and ensuring inclusive, effective climate and biodiversity governance. Empowering communities through education, awareness-raising, and technical capacity-building creates an enabling environment for meaningful co-creation, engagement and advocacy.
- The relationship between people, land, and nature is key to the full realization of human rights. Transforming this relationship from ownership to kinship is essential for right-based environmental action across the climate and biodiversity nexus.
- Indigenous Peoples and communities are caretakers of ecosystems and nature. The road to decolonizing environmental governance requires moving away from fortress conservation practices and promoting rights-based approaches in conservation, recognizing Indigenous knowledge, voices, and customary & collective land tenure as central to integrated climate and biodiversity solutions. FPIC and legal recognition of Indigenous governance are essential in this process.
- Several international and regional environmental frameworks safeguard the rights of environmental human rights defenders with mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) under the Human Rights Council, creating entry points for advocacy and civil society coordination. At the domestic level, legal and policy frameworks for protecting defender are essential and must be complemented by robust implementation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms to ensure their effectiveness.

Box 6 - Key messages on the climate, biodiversity, land, and human rights nexus, as presented at the Closing Plenary and revised based on rapporteurs' input.

## 6.5) Legal Protection, Access to Justice, and Movement Sustainability



Session 5 focused on ‘Legal Protection and Access to Justice.’ It discussed the systemic risks and challenges faced by environmental human rights defenders, including numerous forms of threats, intimidation, and harassment. In this context, the session explored gaps between law and practice, as well as the legal tools, institutional mechanisms, support networks, legal aid and pro bono options available to support environmental human rights defenders. It further highlighted defenders’ resilience and solidarity networks.

Session 5 included parallel discussions on (a) protection mechanisms for environmental human rights defenders, (b) legal frameworks and grievance mechanisms for access to justice, (c) access to legal aid and legal support, and (d) addressing environmental challenges through protecting Indigenous Peoples’ rights.

Participants reported that access to justice for environmental human rights defenders remained constrained by complex legal systems, weak implementation and enforcement of laws, shrinking legal aid, and impunity. They further stressed the need for holistic protection strategies that integrated legal, physical, digital, psychosocial, and community-based approaches. Legal empowerment, including paralegal training, legal literacy, documentation, and defender networks, was highlighted as critical to enabling access to justice.

Participants also underscored that structural environmental and human rights challenges could not be addressed in silos. They emphasized the importance of whole-of-society approaches, engaging communities, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, scientists, media, donors, and progressive private-sector actors including business actors willing to uphold human rights due diligence and support rights-based approaches. Indigenous women’s leadership and ecological knowledge were highlighted as indispensable, while youth were recognized as present-day change agents. Wellbeing, self-care, and collective care were identified as political and strategic priorities for sustaining defenders and movements over the long term.

## Key messages highlighted by participants included:

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- Environmental human rights defenders, including Indigenous Peoples and public interest lawyers, contribute directly to the promotion and advancement of environmental rule of law, including by monitoring the implementation and enforcement of environmental law, promoting public participation in environmental affairs and facilitating access to justice.
  - In the region, the legal protection of environmental human rights defenders can be undermined by inadequate implementation and weak enforcement of environmental legal frameworks, as well as the use of laws to criminalize activism and silence dissent. Other barriers may include the shrinking of civic space, political harassment through red-tagging, limited access to legal aid, and the growing use of SLAPP suits.
  - Indigenous women's leadership and ecological knowledge are instrumental to environmental rule of law. Despite that, Indigenous women face compounded marginalization and structural violence, including gender-based violence, land loss, and displacement.
  - International and regional human rights mechanisms and instruments can play a key role in protecting environmental human rights defenders and advancing environmental justice, including through frameworks like the ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment.
  - At the domestic level, strengthening legal protection and access to justice for environmental human rights defenders requires concerted efforts across different levels and stakeholder groups. Approaches may include legal empowerment of communities and defenders; leveraging the constitutional rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable development where appropriate; developing anti-SLAPP laws and mechanisms; legal reform, including advancing laws that recognize Indigenous Peoples' rights; strategic litigation; and the strengthening of and engagement with National Human Rights Institutions where available.
  - Knowledge management and capacity building are key enablers of access to justice. This includes paralegal training, legal literacy, and defender networks, as well as strengthening documentation and data collection on the recognition, status, and implementation of Indigenous Peoples' rights.
  - Access to justice for environmental human rights defenders remains severely constrained in certain contexts. Challenges include navigating complex legal systems, weak implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, and limited legal aid.
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Box 7 - Key messages on legal protection, access to justice, and movement sustainability as presented at the Closing Plenary and revised based on rapporteurs' input.

## 6.6) Whole-of-Society Strategies for Biodiversity and Human Rights



Session 6, titled 'Power Together: Whole-of-Society Strategies for Biodiversity and Human Rights,' reflected on expectations placed on environmental human rights defenders, paying particular attention to the unequal and often invisible labour carried out by women, girls, young people, and gender-diverse persons within movements and communities. Participants discussed the need for systemic support, shared responsibility, and redistribution of care and protection.

Session 6 served as a space for reflection, imagination, and collective strategy. Through interactive mapping, storytelling, and a thematic world café, participants identified allies, confronted barriers to collaboration, and co-created ideas for bridging silos across identities, geographies, and knowledge systems. The session intentionally centered the participation of Indigenous Peoples, women, LGBTIQ+ persons, youth, persons with disabilities, and other groups frequently pushed to the margins, while inviting all participants to reflect on what meaningful solidarity and shared responsibility could look like in practice. The session ultimately provided a space for participants to build and strengthen alliances both within and beyond their usual circles.

Throughout the discussions, participants and speakers highlighted that environmental human rights defenders were on the front lines of protecting biodiversity, ecosystems, and communities' rights. They further reported that, in some contexts, defenders played

informal and often invisible roles in community cohesion and peacebuilding, mediating tensions, managing conflicts over diminishing resources, and supporting collective safety. These contributions remained largely unrecognized and unsupported within systems that shaped access to protection, resources, and decision-making.

Participants emphasized that defenders could not and should not bear such struggles alone. They reiterated that transforming extractivist systems that drive biodiversity loss and human rights violations required a whole-of-society approach, particularly by engaging Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors, rural and urban communities, scientists, educators, lawyers, media, faith leaders, local authorities, feminist movements, youth, and others. It was underscored that such an approach moved away from 'isolated struggles' and 'generational silos' towards collective power and intergenerational solidarity.

Participants stressed that whole-of-society approaches were effective when rooted in the lived realities of environmental human rights defenders and when those who were most marginalized within movements were centered and supported. They added that this also included critical reflection on power and privilege, access to conservation and policy spaces, and the structural barriers that continue to exclude marginalized communities.

## Key messages highlighted by participants included:

### **WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACHES AND ALLIANCES**

- Structural environmental and human rights challenges cannot be addressed in silos; whole-of-society approaches are essential.
- While communities often provide the most consistent support to environmental human rights defenders, broader engagement and support from decision-makers, academia, media, workers, faith actors, and private-sector actors committed to human rights due diligence is needed.
- Building intersectional and intergenerational alliances is key, particularly across Indigenous, women's, youth, labour, scientific, and human rights movements.
- Sustained change requires persistence, strategic alliance-building, and shared responsibility beyond frontline defenders.

### **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS, GENDER AND INCLUSION**

- The legal recognition of Indigenous governance and Free Prior Informed Consent creates an enabling environment for robust climate and biodiversity policies that strengthen rights-based conservation, land tenure and self-determination.
- Indigenous women are custodians of Indigenous knowledge and biodiversity and play an instrumental role in environmental governance. Yet, they face compounded and intersectional marginalization.
- Conservation and development must protect, not criminalize, Indigenous defenders and customary livelihoods.
- The conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity and Indigenous rights are mutually reinforcing; protecting Indigenous Peoples is a prerequisite for protecting nature.
- Inclusive environmental action requires addressing barriers related to gender, age, disability, language, geography, and digital access, and investing in culturally appropriate, accessible participation and leadership.

Box 9 - Key messages whole-of-society strategies for biodiversity and human rights, as presented at the Closing Plenary and revised based on rapporteurs' input.

## 7. Closing of the Forum



The Closing Plenary created a space for collective reflection and forward-looking action. Participants revisited the key insights from the six thematic sessions, shared commitments, and identified collaborative pathways to sustain momentum beyond the forum. Key messages were presented (see **Boxes 2-9**), followed by a reflection segment and closing remarks from the co-conveners and co-organizing partners.



The 4th Asia Environmental Human Rights Defenders Forum reaffirmed that biodiversity, climate, land and human rights action are inseparable. Across thematic sessions, participants underscored that environmental degradation and biodiversity loss are not only ecological crises, but also systemic human rights challenges that disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, persons with disabilities, and communities in vulnerable situations. Environmental human rights defenders remain at the forefront of responding to these interconnected crises, often at significant personal risk amid shrinking civic space.



Discussions highlighted persistent gaps between international commitments and their national implementation, including weak accountability, exclusionary governance models, and the misuse of laws to criminalize defenders. At the same time, the Forum documented resilience, innovation, and solidarity across the region. Rights-based approaches to conservation, recognition of Indigenous land rights and knowledge systems, holistic protection mechanisms, and whole-of-society alliances emerged as essential pathways to address environmental harm and prevent human rights violations.

Participants emphasized that protecting environmental human rights defenders is a prerequisite for effective, inclusive, and sustainable environmental governance. Legal frameworks, policy reforms, and international standards must be accompanied by meaningful participation, adequate resourcing, access to justice, and protection mechanisms that respond to defenders' lived realities. Equally, transformative change requires moving beyond siloed responses toward integrated, people-centered solutions, grounded in equity, intergenerational justice, and shared responsibility.

As the Forum concluded, participants called for sustained engagement, strengthened regional and global cooperation, and continued efforts to translate collective knowledge into action. The Forum reinforced a shared commitment to advance the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, ensuring that those who defend nature and human rights are recognized, protected, and supported.



## 8. Annex

### Annex I – Forum Programme

#### DAY 1 - MONDAY 27 OCTOBER 2025

09:00-09:30	Registration (Thongkhaw Room)
09:30-10:30	<b>Opening Plenary:</b> Welcome, Keynote, and Opening Ritual Honouring the Land and Territory (Thongkhaw Room)
10:30-10:45	Coffee Break
10:45-12:15	<b>Session 1: Regional Situation Reflection &amp; Report Back</b> (Thongkhaw Room) Subregional Discussion: South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia & East Asia.
12:15-13:30	Lunch Break
13:30-15:15	<b>Session 2: Human Rights &amp; Biodiversity Governance</b>
13:30-14:15	<b>Plenary Panel</b> (Thongkhaw Room)
14:30-15:30	<b>2A: Land rights as a key element in the right to a healthy environment</b> (Thongkhaw 1 Room) <b>2B: Strengthening human rights-based approaches in biodiversity policy</b> (Thongkhaw 2 Room)
15:30-15:45	Coffee Break
15:45-17:30	<b>Session 3 (Part 1): Corporate Accountability &amp; Biodiversity Loss</b>
15:45-16:30	<b>Plenary Panel</b> (Thongkhaw Room)
16:30-17:30	<b>3A: Nexus between food systems, land and the right to a healthy environment</b> (Thongkhaw 1 Room) <b>3B: Carbon Credit Schemes &amp; Biodiversity</b> (Thongkhaw 2 Room)
17:30-18:00	Wrap-up of Day 1

#### DAY 2 - TUESDAY 28 OCTOBER 2025

09:00-09:15	Recap of Day 1 / Housekeeping announcement (Thongkhaw Room)
09:15-10:15	<b>Session 3 (Part 2): Corporate Accountability &amp; Biodiversity Loss</b> <b>3C: Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives on the Just Energy Transition</b> (Thongkhaw 1 Room) <b>3D: Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives on the Just Energy Transition</b> (Thongkhaw 2 Room)
10:15-10:30	Coffee/Tea Break
10:30-12:15	<b>Session 4: Climate Change, Biodiversity, Land &amp; Human Rights</b> (Thongkhaw Room)
12:15-13:30	Lunch Break

13:30-15:15	<b>Session 5: Legal Protection &amp; Access to Justice</b>
13:30-14:15	<b>Plenary Panel</b> (Thongkhaw Room)
14:15-15:15	<b>5A: Access to Legal Aid &amp; Legal Support for EHRDs</b> (Thongkhaw 1 Room) <b>5B: Legal Frameworks &amp; Grievance Mechanisms for Access to Justice</b> (Thongkhaw 2 Room)
15:15-16:15	<b>5C: Protection Mechanisms</b> (Thongkhaw 1 Room) <b>5D: Protecting Indigenous Peoples Rights: Addressing Environmental Challenges</b> (Thongkhaw 2 Room)
16:15-16:30	Engagement Space: Coffee Corners & Organizational Presentations (Thongkhaw Room)

#### DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY 29 OCTOBER 2025

09:00-09:15	Recap of Day 2 / House Keeping Announcement (Inthanin Room)
09:15-12:00	<b>Session 6: Power Together: Whole-of- Society Strategies for Biodiversity and Human Rights</b> (Inthanin Room)
12:00-13:30	Lunch Break
13:30-15:00	<b>Closing Plenary: Reflections, Commitments &amp; Next Steps</b> (Inthanin Room)
15:00-15:15	Coffee Break

## Annex II – Summaries of the partner-led workshops

Annex II outlines the summaries and key messages from the partner-led workshops held on Wednesday, 29 October 2025. The messages are presented as submitted by volunteer rapporteurs to the Forum Secretariat and have not been formally edited. The views expressed reflect exclusively those of the rapporteurs and meeting participants.



### Workshop 1 – Engagement Strategies for Multilateral Processes

The workshop was co-organized by the Alliance for Land, indigenous and Environmental Defenders (ALLIED) and EarthRights International.

#### **Summary:**

Multilateral processes, such as those under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), offer important opportunities for environmental human rights defenders to draw global attention to their work and engage directly with government representatives. Yet, defenders face significant barriers to meaningful participation in these processes, including accreditation to meetings, engaging effectively at them, and managing security risks and reprisals. This workshop provided participants with an opportunity to share knowledge about multilateral processes and strengthen their skills and strategies for advocacy in these spaces.

#### **Key messages from participants included:**

- **Balancing cost/risks and “return on investment”:** Balancing the costs/risks that defenders take on to engage in these spaces with the return on investment. Engagement by defenders in meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COPs) of biodiversity-related conventions resulted in recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, inclusive participation, and gender equality in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
- **Different ways to engage depending on your level of risk:** For example, (a) “early bird,” that is, preparatory meetings for COPs that are lower profile, (b) “don’t attend” and monitor the policy commitments that are made, (c) “attend” but engage in safe spaces for defenders within or parallel to official processes.
- **The way we frame our messages matters:** how to frame our message to give an action/value opportunity. Try to avoid recycling the language of what we are trying to fight. Shift from problem to solution.
- **Even if the language in multilateral instruments is watered down and you don’t get everything you want,** defenders can play an important role in interpreting the language in these instruments, pushing for revisions. For example, the civil society version of the ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment, and monitoring and shaping implementation, e.g., through the implementation plan and the national biodiversity strategy and action plans (NBSAPs) under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
- **There are other ways defenders can engage with these processes, even if they are not involved in legal discussions.** For example, forging local to global alliances, accessing your own and other countries’ government officials. Need to consider risks of visibility/engagement.

## Annex II – Summaries of the partner-led workshops (Continued)



### **Workshop 2: The WeSIS (Wellbeing, Self-care and Integrated Security).**

This workshop was convened by Global Witness and Peace Brigades International (PBI).

#### **Summary:**

The WeSIS (Wellbeing, Self-care and Integrated Security) workshop aimed at empowering environmental, land, and Indigenous defenders with practical tools to resist burnout and remain resilient leaders for change. Through mindfulness, self-care practices and collective reflection, it sought to strengthen resilience across physical and emotional dimensions — helping defenders stay grounded, healthy and effective in the face of reprisals. Beyond individual healing, the workshop intended to create a space for solidarity and collective power. By unpacking experiences of risk and oppression, defenders got the opportunity to build shared strategies of care and protection.

#### **Key messages from participants included:**

- Importance of defining wellbeing as caring for oneself, and also of integrating wellbeing into one's active work on the defence of human rights and into each one's communities.
- Identify the 5 categories of wellbeing: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and relational.
- Self-care is also a part of collective care to sustain the movement.
- WeSIS is a political form of care for women human rights defenders.

## Annex III – Notes from the Regional Situation Reflection

Annex III outlines the key messages from the sub-regional breakout group discussions held on Monday, 27 October 2025. These messages are presented as submitted by volunteer rapporteurs to the Forum Secretariat and have not been edited or reviewed for accuracy. They have been summarized and lightly formatted to ensure consistency with the format of the present report. The views expressed reflect exclusively those of the rapporteurs and meeting participants.

### ***Key messages from the Central Asia breakout group included:***

- Civic space is rapidly shrinking, with increased surveillance, censorship, and legal restrictions placing environmental human rights defenders under growing pressure and risk.
- Funding cuts are weakening protection mechanisms at a critical time, leaving defenders more exposed and highlighting the urgency of cross-border solidarity, coalition-building, and resource-sharing.
- The green agenda offers potential entry points for civil society engagement, including through initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, international financial institution consultations, and climate finance programmes, provided civil society is able to claim space and manage risks.
- Private sector accountability must be central to solutions. As investments in mining and infrastructure increase, human rights due diligence and responsible business standards, including Business and Human Rights frameworks, ESG principles, and full value-chain due diligence, must guide private-sector action, with civil society empowered to monitor impacts, report abuses, and support access to remedy.

### ***Key messages from the East and North-East Asia breakout groups included:***

- Following recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Mongolia adopted a law on the promotion and protection of environmental defenders, along with related institutional mechanisms. However, several gaps hinder effective implementation, including:
  - Limited dissemination of information about the law, particularly in rural and remote areas, where many defenders may not self-identify as such or be aware of available protections;
  - Insufficient resources to train defenders on how to use the legal framework;
  - Barriers to access to justice, including new Supreme Court requirements for public interest litigation that disadvantage less-established organizations. Participants also identified Environmental human rights defenders as among the most at-risk human rights defenders, alongside journalists documenting corruption.
- Mining-related corruption remains the principal threat to the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment in Mongolia. As coal revenues decline, pressure is increasing to promote new mining operations, including critical minerals, often accompanied by corruption in licensing and environmental impact assessments.
- Revoking mining permits is extremely difficult in practice. While authorities are formally responsible for enforcement, civil society organizations often bear the burden of challenging permits, with limited success.
- Greenwashing narratives, including proposals for “climate-smart mining,” are emerging, shifting attention away from the actual environmental and social impacts of mining activities.
- Opportunities exist through progressive legal frameworks, including environmental rights protections and the Business and Human Rights Plan adopted in 2023. However, implementation remains weak due to political instability and limited resources. Community resistance to exploratory mining has nevertheless prompted some public hearings and engagement.

## Annex III – Notes from the Regional Situation Reflection (Continued)

### **Key messages from the South Asia breakout group included:**

- Corporate investments are frequently located on Indigenous Peoples' lands, resulting in displacement of Indigenous Peoples and marginalized communities, and severe impacts on ecology, biodiversity, and food security.
- Environmental human rights defenders are often criminalized and labelled as anti-government for defending forests and ancestral lands from corporate investments.
- There is widespread impunity for crimes against EHRDs, committed by corporations, government agencies, and powerful political actors, often in violation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- Affected communities increasingly seek justice through national courts and international legal mechanisms.
- Indigenous and marginalized communities were encouraged to build common platforms and solidarity campaigns to protect their rights.

### **Key messages from the South-East Asia breakout groups included:**

- Environmental human rights defenders face systemic criminalization and State repression.
- Governments across the region continue to use laws, surveillance, and militarization to silence defenders through SLAPP suits, red-tagging, defamation, arrests, and violence, with limited access to legal protection and justice.
- Land and natural resource policies remain extractive and corporate-driven.
- Carbon credit schemes, rare-earth mining, and forest finance projects are contributing to land grabbing, displacement of Indigenous Peoples and rural communities, and reinforcing militarized development models that prioritize profit over people and ecosystems.
- Digital and information-related threats are increasing.
- Defenders face growing risks from cyberattacks, online harassment, AI-driven misinformation, and surveillance, undermining safety and trust within movements.
- Fragmentation and burnout are weakening movement resilience.
- Limited funding, lack of coordination, and ongoing conflicts have deepened trauma and isolation among defenders, underscoring the need for collective care and stronger protection networks.
- Despite these risks, new opportunities are emerging through alliances and advocacy.
- Expanding regional and global solidarity networks, youth movements, legal reforms (including anti-SLAPP initiatives), and emerging "green" political spaces offer momentum to strengthen environmental justice and institutionalize protection for defenders.
- There is a need for more spaces for dialogue and strategic exchange to strengthen accountability of governments and businesses for the implementation of international laws and policies.
- Participants emphasized the importance of a distinct Pacific EHRD voice and platform.
- Comprehensive support for EHRDs is needed, including legal assistance, dedicated funding, and the development of anti-SLAPP legislation.

## Annex III – Notes from the Regional Situation Reflection (Continued)

- The situation of EHRDs in Myanmar was highlighted as particularly grave, with the political crisis requiring stronger international attention as both a human rights and environmental crisis.
- Participants raised urgent concerns regarding West Papua, linking forest protection to the survival of Indigenous Peoples and global environmental protection.
- Civic space continues to shrink due to sustained and intensified pressure from State and corporate actors, including the criminalization of EHRDs.
- Participants challenged the framing of geothermal energy as “clean” in contexts where projects have resulted in serious harm to communities and ecosystems.

