

ASIA – PACIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FORUM

17 –19 November 2021

*Building safe spaces for
dialogue and support among
environmental human rights
defenders.*

Convened by:



with support from:



In partnership with:



BACKGROUND

In recent decades, increased natural resource extraction has encroached upon the remaining intact ecosystems of countries in the Asia Pacific region, home of some of the world's richest biodiversity. This includes mining operations, the construction of large dams, and the conversion of forests into agribusiness plantations. These together with infrastructure development and other activities often result in negative impacts on the livelihoods, homes and other needs of the natural resource-dependent poor and marginalized communities and vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples, farmers, fisherfolk and women. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated already existing inequalities. These groups are also among those worst impacted by both COVID-19 and environmental harms such as climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation that threaten full and effective enjoyment of all human rights. Indigenous peoples and women, in particular, are disproportionately affected.

Resource conflicts and environmental crises have increasingly caused local and indigenous communities to unite and take action to uphold their human rights, including the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, rights to water, rights to participate in environmental decision making and access to information, among others. However, these rights are often ignored or repressed. Democratic and civic spaces across the region continue to shrink and actions used to pacify dissent have been increasing in frequency and severity.

The people who strive to protect and promote human rights related to the environment are those who we call environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs). Despite their vital role in supporting conservation, protecting vital natural habitats and calling for development that is sustainable, the 2021 Global Witness report stated that 227 EHRDs were killed in 2020, many of which are indigenous peoples. Eighteen percent of the killings were from the Asia Pacific region, with 29 killings taking place in the Philippines. Most of the killings were reportedly related to environmentally damaging activities such as mining and extractives, agribusiness and logging. Other forms of attacks on EHRDs are increasingly common such as criminalization and detention, harassment and intimidation, militarization, terror-tagging or red-tagging, and physical and psychological harm.

For EHRDs to continue their important legitimate work which supports the achievement of the sustainable development goals, more must be done to address the challenges they face in the region. The forum is a significant milestone as it will be the first dedicated space for EHRDs to come together and safely discuss, learn from each other's experience and formulate their own recommendations for positive change in the region. The recommendations could become a foundation to raise awareness among policymakers, the private sector and other stakeholders in order to encourage policies and practices recognizing the vital role of EHRDs. It is in this context that the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) along with the Asia Pacific Network for Environment Defenders (APNED) are convening the Asia Pacific Environmental Defenders Forum on 17-19 November 2021 at 10:00-13:00 GMT+7 / Bangkok time which will be held virtually online.

**DO YOU ADVOCATE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND
THE ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS OF COMMUNITIES IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC?**

Indicate your interest to join the discussions! Pre-registration link: <https://bit.ly/3iyYlel>

OBJECTIVE

1. To analyze and discuss the situation of EHRDs in the Asia Pacific region,
2. To offer a dedicated space for dialogue and learning exchange among EHRDs,
3. To enhance capacities of EHRDs by providing access to information on best practices and types of support available from organizations and institutions, international treaties and policies, and potential policies at the national and regional level,
4. To enable EHRDs to formulate their recommendations to address the challenges they face in the region.

CONDUCT OF THE FORUM

The forum will be held from 17-19 November 2021 at 10:00-13:00 GMT+7 / Bangkok time. All the sessions will be accessible online.

DAY 1

Wednesday, November 17, 10am–1pm

SESSION 1 : EHRDS' VITAL ROLE IN UPHOLDING ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Objective: To present the situation of EHRDs in the Asia Pacific region as well as their contribution in the success of environmental struggles to have greater appreciation on their vital role in upholding environmental human rights.

10:00–10:05	Welcoming Remarks
10:05–10:10	Opening remarks
10:10–10:20	Keynote Speech
10:20–10:40	Situation of EHRDs
10:40–10:50	Victories on the ground
10:50–11:00	Open Forum
11:00–11:10	Break

SESSION 2 : ENTRY POINTS FOR EHRDS

Objective: To present opportunities that can be maximized and best practices that can be replicated by EHRDs.

11:10–11:15	Introduction to the session
11:15–11:20	UNEP–OHCHR Memorandum of Understanding
11:20–11:30	Entry Points in the ASEAN / South Asia / Pacific
11:30–11:40	European legislation on mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence and the role of diplomats
11:40–11:45	Experience from Mongolia in the establishment of the Law on the Legal Status of Human Rights Defenders
11:45–11:55	Experience from Latin America on the establishment of the Escazu Agreement
11:55–12:10	Open forum
12:10–12:20	Break

SESSION 3 : SUPPORTING EHRDS

Objective: To present practical types of support from institutions and organizations and to access these supports.

12:20–12:25	Introduction to the breakout session
12:25–12:55	Breakout session: Types of support for EHRDs and recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urgent response• Capacity development• International human rights mechanisms and treaties• Defending lawyers who represent EHRDs
12:55–13:00	Closing

DAY 2

Thursday, November 18, 10am–1pm

SESSION 4 - FOCUS ON GROUPS EXPERIENCING DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS

Objectives: To present the particular situation of groups experiencing disproportionate impacts to highlight the need to have specific ways to address challenges, to provide a venue for the participants to have a learning exchange of experiences and best practices, and to share recommendations to improve the situation of EHRDs in these groups.

10:00–10:10	Recap of Day and introduction of Day 2
10:10–10:40	Discussion on groups experiencing disproportionate impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indigenous peoples/ local communities/ ethnic minorities• Women• Youth
10:40–11:05	Open forum
11:05–11:15	Break
11:15–11:20	Introduction to the breakout session
11:20–12:20	Breakout session: Learning exchange and formulation of recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indigenous peoples/ local communities/ ethnic minorities• Women• Youth
12:20–12:50	Sharing of discussions from the breakout rooms
12:50–13:00	Synthesis and closing of Day 2



DAY 3

Friday, November 19, 10am–1pm

SESSION 5 : EHRDS AND THEMATIC AREAS

Objectives: To present the particular issues of EHRDs experiencing or working on issues relating to different thematic areas, to have a learning exchange of experiences and best practices, and to share recommendations to address the challenges of EHRDs related to different thematic areas.

10:00–10:10	Recap of Day 2 and introduction of Day 3
10:10–11:00	Discussion on thematic areas <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mining and extractives• Agribusiness and logging• Water and dams• Industrial and infrastructure development and air pollution• Climate change
11:00–11:10	Open forum
11:10–11:20	Break
11:20–11:25	Introduction to the breakout sessions
11:25–12:25	Breakout session: Learning exchange and formation of recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mining and extractives• Agribusiness and logging• Water and dams• Industrial and infrastructure development and air pollution• Climate change
12:20–12:45	Sharing of discussions in breakout rooms

CLOSING SESSION

Objectives: To synthesize the recommendations and to present the main points raised in the forum.

12:45–12:55	Presentation of conclusions
12:55–13:00	Closing remarks

CONVENING ORGANIZATIONS

- United Nations Environment Programme – Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – Regional Office for Southeast Asia
- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – Regional Office for the Pacific
- Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact
- Asia Research Institute for Environmental Law
- Diplomacy Training Program
- EarthRights International
- Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development Forum Asia (FORUM-ASIA)