

SAVE THE DATE
25 – 27 October 2022

Hybrid event: Bangkok | Online

ASIA PACIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FORUM

Protecting Those Who Protect the Environment



“Do you advocate for the protection and promotion of the environment and of the environmental rights of the communities in Asia and the Pacific? Indicate your interest to join the discussions!”



<https://bit.ly/3Q07ZKk>

WITH SUPPORT FROM:



CONVENED BY:



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



2nd Asia Pacific Environmental Human Rights Defenders Forum

Supporting the vital role of EHRDs as champions for a just and sustainable future

Concept Note

25-27 October 2022

Event Title:

2nd Asia Pacific Environmental Human Rights Defenders Forum (2nd Asia Pacific EHRD Forum)

Proposed Tagline

- *Protecting those who protect the environment*
- *Supporting the vital role of EHRDs as champions of a just and sustainable future*

Forum Background

Environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) are at the forefront of the triple planetary crises of pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change. All EHRDs, as individuals and groups who, in their personal or professional capacity and in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights relating to the environment, including water, air, land, flora and fauna¹, play an essential role in protecting the environment, supporting the rights of communities to participate in environmental decision making and calling out unsustainable development practices and illegal actions causing environmental harm. Their role is central to realizing the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment: a right that has recently been given universal recognition.

Following a landmark resolution adopted at the Human Rights Council in 2021², on 28 July 2022 the United Nations General Assembly recognized, for the first time, that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a universal human right³. The General Assembly resolution affirms the importance of a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for the enjoyment of all human rights, and calls upon States, international organizations, business enterprises and other relevant stakeholders to scale up efforts to ensure a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for all. There is no time more critical to support and champion the role of EHRDs than now, to ensure that the right to a healthy environment is implemented for everyone everywhere.

Environmental defenders continue to be at the forefront of environmental protection, holding governments and businesses to account for environmental harms and upholding the rights of those most affected by environmental degradation. Environmental defenders fill a vital gap of spotlighting inaction of primary duty-bearers. Despite the crucial contribution from environmental human rights defenders, they are rarely recognised and often neglected as significant drivers of sustainable and just social and environmental progress. Instead of lauding the actions of EHRDs, they are instead frequently subject to violent attacks and reprisals, stigmatization, arbitrary detention and lawsuits. Environmental defenders who may be activists, journalists, Indigenous peoples, and members of local communities, who are at the forefront of sustainable development and good environmental governance, are often targeted and harassed.

Among the 615 human rights defender attacks linked to Business and Human Rights tracked in 2021, nearly 70% were against climate, land and environmental rights defenders⁴. Data demonstrated that while attacks against EHRDs happen in every region of the world, Asia Pacific was the most affected region in 2021 with 247 cases. Most attacks occurred in India (49) and the Philippines (44).

Recognising the significant risks facing EHRDs, the Inaugural Asia Pacific Environmental Human Rights Defender Forum was held from 17-19 November 2021, convened by UN Environment Programme, UN Human Rights and the Asia Pacific Network of Environmental Defenders together with Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, EarthRights International, FORUM-ASIA, Asia Research Institute for Environmental Law, and Diplomacy Training Programme. Based on interactive dialogue and thematic sessions held during the first Asia Pacific EHRD Forum, a set of recommendations were collated. Recommendations included;

¹ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/environmental-rights-and-governance/what-we-do/advancing-environmental-rights/who>

² HRC resolution 48/13

³ resolution 76/300

⁴ Data released in April 2022, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/from-us/briefings/hrds-2021/human-rights-defenders-business-in-2021-protecting-the-rights-of-people-driving-a-just-transition/>

- increase support, solidarity and alliances to effect change;
- work at the grassroots level but provide regional and global backstopping;
- ensure that environmental defenders have protection and access to information and justice, and can participate in decision making and other processes;
- there is a need to develop counter-narratives about environmental defenders;
- ensure a human rights-based approach in environmental issues;
- increase knowledge and awareness on the situation of environmental defenders;
- develop capacities of environmental defenders;
- increase awareness on human rights standards, treaties and mechanisms including in relation to business and human rights (BHR);
- improve, legislate and strengthen national laws and policies for protection, access to rights and ensure public participation;
- advance a regional legally binding framework;
- ensure that foreign countries and international financial institutions follow human rights due diligence; and
- strengthen relationships among national to international institutions.

These recommendations have guided UN programming and advocacy at the country and regional levels to continue to support the contribution of EHRDs.

To build on the outcomes of the first Forum, the 2nd Asia Pacific EHRD Forum will be held from 25-27 October 2022 as a dedicated space for EHRDs to come together and safely discuss, learn from each other's experiences and successes, and build awareness and capacity. The 2nd Asia Pacific EHRD Forum will also focus on capacity building sessions that will equip EHRDs with additional knowledge and skills.

Objectives of the Forum

The objectives of the Asia Pacific EHRD Forum are;

- To serve as a safe space for EHRDs to discuss ongoing challenges and regional trends in the promotion, protection and realization of environmental rights.
- To provide a platform for peer learning amongst EHRDs across Asia Pacific.
- To provide access to information on good practices, success stories and information on addressing violations of environmental rights.
- To provide networking spaces for EHRDs to strengthen their network across sub-regions.

Platform of the Forum

The 2nd Asia Pacific EHRD Forum will be a hybrid event with both in-person sessions held at Thammasat University, Bangkok and virtually through an online platform. A website will become available for the Forum in September 2022.

Language of the Forum

The 2nd Asia Pacific EHRD Forum will be held in English. There will not be interpretation available in other languages.

Expected Participants

The target audience is EHRDs and those who support the work of EHRDs from Asia and the Pacific, with 100 to 200 participants (approximately 60-80 participants in person and approximately 150 participants online). Limited sponsorship may be available for in-person participation.

The event aims to be gender balanced and inclusive, seeking involvement of defenders who represent marginalized groups including Indigenous peoples, women and youth.

Criteria for participation include:

- EHRDs: individuals who, in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights relating to the environment, including water, air, land, forest, flora and fauna.
- Individuals who directly support the work of EHRDs through technical, legal or other assistance.
- Able to communicate in English.
- Representative participation for those from marginalized groups, Indigenous Peoples, women and youths will be taken into consideration.
- Gender and geographical diversity will be taken into consideration.
- Priority will be given to creating a space of dialogue for the direct participation of environmental defenders in Asia and the Pacific

Registration and Participation

A pre-registration/expression of interest form will be created using a secure link. A "save the date" email, including the link, will indicate the eligibility for participation with the inclusion of this statement:

"Do you advocate for the protection and promotion of the environment and of environmental rights of the communities in Asia and the Pacific? Indicate your interest to join the discussions! <https://bit.ly/3Q07ZKk>

Participation will be subject to an approval process:

"Following pre-registration, participation in the event will be subject to an approval and registration process. Please note that we will try to accommodate individuals and organizations that support environmental defenders, but priority will be given to creating a space of dialogue for the direct participation of environmental defenders in Asia and the Pacific."



#ChampionsofChange
#ProtectEnvironmentalDefenders