

CHAMPIONS LETTER FOR THE RECOGNITION, PROTECTION AND PARTICIPATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Our planet is facing a severe and multiple environmental crisis, which includes climate change, hunger, poverty, inequality, pollution, human rights abuses and biodiversity loss among others. Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) are the driving force in advocating for urgent actions to address this crisis. However, they are paying a heavy price for their leadership. Global Witness reports that at least 2,100 environmental defenders were killed between 2012 and 2023. Additionally, more than a third of defenders murdered in 2022 were Indigenous Peoples. According to the 2022 Alliance for Land, Indigenous, and Environmental Defenders (ALLIED) report, environmental defenders are further increasingly targeted with harassment, smear campaigns, criminalization, and other forms of violence. In parallel, restrictions for civil society and EHRDs' participation in decision-making processes. In that scenario, we believe governments can also be actors of change and, as such, hold a responsibility towards all people fighting this crisis.

The signatories of this letter call on other leaders from governments and international institutions to work together with EHRDs, including women defenders, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and civil society, to address the threats faced by EHRDs and to commit to their protection and meaningful inclusion in decision-making on climate and environmental processes at the global, regional and national levels. Positive examples towards these goals have already been taken– including commitments and efforts under the Aarhus Convention, the Escazú Agreement and its Action Plan on Human Rights defenders on Environmental Matters, and the UN Human Rights Council resolution 40/11 and General Assembly resolution 78/216 –not to mention the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change themselves. However, strengthening the coordination of these efforts would highly benefit the much-needed promotion of a human rights-centered approach that recognizes and enables a safe environment for defenders.

We, therefore, call for urgency in convening a permanent, global multi-stakeholder dialogue as a collaborative space for information exchange, dissemination of good practices, and coordinated efforts to shape global and regional policy solutions with EHRDs at the centre of this work. Such collaborative space can facilitate dialogues around commitments and opportunities to:

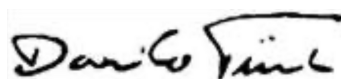
- Ensure a safe and enabling environment for EHRDs so that they can act and exercise fundamental freedoms and promote climate solutions without threats, restrictions, reprisals and insecurity.
- Promote EHRD and civil society meaningful and inclusive participation in decision-making processes.
- Share good practices and examples across countries that inspire collaborative frameworks for protection.
- Develop policies and protection mechanisms for EHRDs based on robust data on the needs of diverse EHRDs, and the threats they face and work with EHRDs to address them.

We firmly believe that only together, with decisive leadership and action, can we promote active involvement by environmental human rights defenders whilst also addressing the critical scenario emanating from deforestation, biodiversity loss, pollution and contamination and climate change. As we prepare to gather in Belém for the 30th UN Climate Change Conference, there is a window of opportunity to advance such action. The biggest risks facing us from climate change cannot be tackled by anyone acting alone and certainly not by harming those mostly affected. We ask you to join us to design such a collaborative space to build a more inclusive, and equitable society where all citizens, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, origin and age, have a voice in shaping their present and future.



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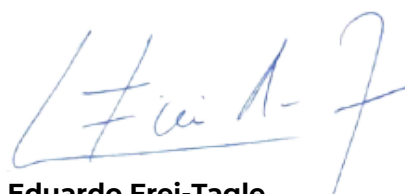
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