Short Session Report

Defenders at the Front Line
Corruption and the Crisis of Attacks on Environmental Defenders

14:00, 24th October, IACC 2018, Copenhagen, Denmark

Panelists
San Mala, Campaigner, N1M Cambodia,
Debra LaPrevotte, Senior Investigator, The Sentry
Julie Koch, Executive Director, IWGIA
Magaly Avila, Programme Manager, Proetica (TI Peru)

Moderated by: Virginia Cromie, Not1More
Rapporteur: Fran Lambrick, Not1More
Session coordinated by: Not1More

Session topic and aims
How does corruption often contribute to attacks on environmental defenders and indigenous land rights abuses? We set out to examine how environmental rights are subverted for the benefit of business and big landowners.
The session focused on high-level resource grabbing and corruption driving conflict in South Sudan, criminalisation and sand smuggling in Cambodia, and the struggle of an indigenous community in Ucayali, Peru to secure their land rights in the face of death threats and murder. We aimed to gain a better understanding of the interrelations of corruption and environmental rights, and to forge new connections, and spark strategies among participants from a variety of backgrounds.

**Agenda**

12:00 - Moderator Welcome & Introductions, Honouring and Supporting Defenders, **Virginia Cromie**, Not1More

12:05 - Short film : "I can't Sit Still and Watch While Nature is Being Destroyed" [https://vimeo.com/170345235](https://vimeo.com/170345235)

12:10 - **San Mala**, frontline environmental defender, Cambodia – smuggling of sand and our experiences as a young, criminalized, environmental movement (7 minutes presentation followed by one or two questions)

12:20 - **Debra LaPrevotte**, Senior Investigator, The Sentry - resource exploitation and kleptocracy in South Sudan (7 minute presentation followed by one or two questions)

12:30 - **Julie Koch** - Director, IWGIA, global attacks on Indigenous environmental defenders, why are Indigenous Peoples being killed in higher numbers than any other group? (7 minute presentation followed by one or two questions)


12:45 - **Magaly Avila**, Proetica, TI Peru - deadly attacks on indigenous land rights in Ucayali, Peru, (7 minute presentation followed by one or two questions)

13:55 - Open for questions and discussion

13:55 - Rapporteur, **Fran Lambrick**, Not1More, Closing Summary & Opportunities for Action

**Strategies and ideas showcased**

The anti-sand mining campaign in Cambodia highlighted by San Mala involved the criminalisation of five young
environmental defenders, however, the campaign eventually succeeded in stopping the sand mining partly due to the exposure of corruption. This led us to discuss how environmental defenders can also be critical anti-corruption activists, and also key to addressing the underlying drivers of the exploitation and power inequality that they face. In answer to a question from the audience, San Mala spoke about how knowing the law is critical to acting with strength and assurance in addressing environmental destruction. He explained how activists have the number of their lawyer saved and with them on their person at all times. They also inform colleagues and allies where they are going, when, and what they are planning to do.

Investigation into the kleptocratic ruling elite in Sudan highlighted the strategies used to expose grand corruption relating to natural resource exploitation particularly extractives, logging of teak, deforestation to make charcoal. The Sentry used online social media investigations to identify financial flows. Debra LaPrevotte explained some techniques such as identifying the serial number on US dollar bills from a person of interest’s post on Facebook. Debra also explained security precautions that she takes, including having a check-in time with other members of her organisation, an emergency plan, and other precautions.

Indigenous peoples all over the world are disproportionately facing killings, evictions and attacks due to stigmatisation, skewed power relations and the increasing exploitation of land and natural resources. Julie Koch gave a global overview – 40-50% of human rights defenders murdered have been indigenous, while indigenous peoples represent only 5% of the world’s population. We spoke about how land grabbing and unequal access to official process to secure land rights, enabled by lack of accountability of local government, is driving attacks on indigenous peoples in Ucayali, Peru. Magaly Avila shared her insights into how natural resource exploitation and unequal access to land creates financial flows that directly fund the perpetrators of human rights abuses.

**Highlights, questions, quotes and ideas generated from the discussion**

“Environmental defenders are also often powerful anti-corruption activists”
Supporting those at the frontline is important not only to address their needs as victims of rights abuses, but also as powerful agents in the struggle against corruption.

Corruption leads to inequality and skewed power relations, which is exactly what drives attacks on environmental defenders.

**Key recommendations and follow-up actions**

We need to forge better connections between groups working on anti-corruption, human rights and the environment - which are intrinsically linked. Trying to find a solution in a particular case will reach into all these areas in many instances, and it is critical that we share our expertise as members of civil society, rather than being stuck in silos.

All attendees were invited to sign on to the Environmental Defenders Declaration for South East Asia.

Supporting frontline environmental defenders is a key part of the struggle against corruption - as land, extractive industries and natural resource exploitation are fuelling corruption as well as enabled by corrupt systems.

Available emergency and long-term funding, safe-houses, accompaniment, legal counsel and other forms of support are unknown and/or inaccessible to most frontline defenders; we must reach out to groups across the world, and compile information on how to access support, or seek redress in multi-lingual, multi-format media.

Frontline defenders and activists need to be at the heart of our campaigns, cooperative efforts and initiatives to support them.

**Key Insights put forward for inclusion in the IACC Declaration**

Defending our natural environmental from illegal exploitation is part of the struggle against corruption. Land and environmental defenders are also often anti-corruption activists.
We understand that defending the environment and human rights goes hand-in-hand with the struggle for transparency.