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Press Statement

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Defending Territories, Defending Our Lives

Today, on International Human Rights Day, Friends of the Earth Asia Pacific (FoE Asia Pacific) launches its latest publication, **Defending Territories, Defending Our Lives** - a grim reminder that everyday, somewhere on this planet, environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) are being threatened, defamed, assaulted or murdered for defending their territories. This publication highlights seven (7) case studies from Friends of the Earth member groups in this region which show, in some cases, the extreme conditions that environmental human rights defenders are living in to defend themselves, their families and the territories in which they live.

In **Bangladesh**, villagers living in Khulna, part of the Sundarbans have been repressed for raising their concerns on the construction of the Rampal Coal Power Plant which sits within the largest mangrove forest in the world. The proposal to build a high speed rail track from Bandung to Jakarta in **Indonesia** has resulted in many villagers losing their homes. The initial land acquisition process has been marred by intimidation and manipulation by local officials, ignoring the genuine participation of local landowners.

Meanwhile in **Malaysia**, fisher communities are losing their fishing territory to a large sea reclamation project in Penang. They are on the brink of losing their livelihood forever and marine life would be destroyed. In **Palestine**, communities living in Hebron city are suffering from nuclear radiation contamination as a result of the dumping of nuclear waste by Israel.

While in **Russia**, state owned transnational company Rosatom is actively exporting deadly technologies like nuclear to many countries around the world, despite the countless nuclear related disasters and errors that remain unresolved. Those who criticise Rosatom are threatened with charges of espionage and labelled as foreign agents.

In **Sri Lanka** it is now completely illegal to protest against the highly polluting garbage dumps that many local communities across the country are so concerned about. Finally, in the **Philippines**, which had the highest number of extra judicial killings in the Asia Pacific region - 39 assassinated in 2018 alone-, coffee growing companies are wresting away fertile land from indigenous peoples, threatening, harassing and murdering community leaders in the process.

These cases are a reflection of the dominant neoliberal economic paradigm that is generating increasing inequality, hunger, loss of democracy, devastation of territories and livelihoods, destructive climate change, biodiversity loss, land-grabbing, and increasing corporate human rights abuse.

The current neoliberal system exploits people for profit and facilitates corporate impunity, resulting in violence towards those who are standing up to economic and political power. To stop this violence over the long term we must change this system. We need to create sustainable societies and new relations between human beings, and between human beings and nature, based on equality and reciprocity. But to create these societies and

assert people's rights we need to increase people's power.

For us, this means transforming our economic, food and energy systems based on genuine, radical and just democracies centred around people's sovereignty and participation.

Governments and international institutions can no longer ignore the growing voices of discontent amongst communities and activists who are in one way or another defenders of territories, struggling to defend their lives, livelihoods and the right to live in a clean and healthy environment on a planet where those with the power are constantly putting profits before people and the environment.

Friends of the Earth Asia Pacific repeats its clarion call that the protection of the environment and environmental human rights defenders is a responsibility of states and the international community. We call for an end to the corporate plunder of community resources, and end to attacks on environmental human rights defenders, and an end to the impunity of government and corporations in environmental destruction and human rights violations.

Our new report can be downloaded at: <https://foeasiapacific.org/portfolio/defending-territories-defending-our-lives-protecting-human-rights-and-the-environment-in-asia-pacific-through-system-change/>

Watch the interviews with Rizwana Hasan (FoE Bangladesh), Vitaly Servetnik (FoE Russia) Abeer Butmeh (FoE Palestine) on the repressions against

EHRDs: <https://foeasiapacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/apac4.mp4>