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Many of the violations against indigenous human rights defenders take place in the context of the extractive industry, land rights and large-scale projects, such as hydro-electric dams or oil and gas pipelines. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders in 2016 noted an increase in reprisals against environmental human rights defenders protesting the harms caused by projects funded by international financial institutions. Despite their role as protectors of biodiversity and nature, indigenous human rights defenders are often presented as obstacles to progress, anti-development or even as enemies of the State or terrorists.

Responding to violations against human rights defenders

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has been closely following the situation of indigenous human rights defenders. During its fifteenth session in 2016, a key message emerging from the Permanent Forum's report was the need to combat pervasive violations against indigenous human rights defenders, including criminalization, persecution, violence, imprisonment and killing. To follow up on this, the Permanent Forum will consider the situation of indigenous human rights defenders at its sixteenth session in particular during the dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and the Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on Monday, 1 May.

In 2000, the United Nations established a specific mandate on human rights defenders (the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders) to examine and respond to information on the situation of human rights defenders, to engage with Governments and others on the implementation of the Declaration and to recommend strategies to protect human rights defenders.

The Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples also regularly draws attention to the threats against indigenous human rights defenders in country visits, reports and statements.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that indigenous individuals have the rights to life, physical and mental integrity, liberty and security of person – and that they shall not be subjected to any act of violence (article 7). In addition, the UN Declaration on the rights of human rights defenders articulates existing human rights in the specific situation of human rights defenders. These rights include the right to protection, the right to criticize Government bodies and agencies, the right to provide legal assistance and the right to access resources for the purpose of protecting human rights, including the receipt of funds from abroad.

Further background information:

[A/71/281 Situation of human rights defenders. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#)

[Declaration on the rights of human rights defenders](#)

[Front Line Defenders: Annual Report on Human Rights Defenders at Risk in 2016](#)

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