

The power of collective struggles

COMMUNITIES IN LIBERIA FIGHT BACK AGAINST THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCE CORPORATION



For the Indigenous communities living near the **Salala rubber plantation** in Liberia, life is a daily struggle.

The milky latex extracted from the rubber trees is sold to the largest tyres manufacturers in the world, and it is the 4th most exported product in the country. For local people, though, it has brought no benefit. On the contrary, it has led to loss of livelihood, destruction of sacred sites, pollution, and gender-based violence.

In 2008, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) gave a \$10 million loan to Salala Rubber Corporation (SRC), which is owned by **Socfin**, a French-Belgian agribusiness giant with a long history of human rights violations across its plantations in West Africa.

In the lush hills of Margibi and Bong counties, Salala has a concession of over 4500 hectares. Only a few Indigenous and traditional communities own formal land titles in Liberia. In 2008, when Salala's bulldozers showed up to further expand the plantation, the **Kpelle Indigenous communities** could not legally challenge it. But they were ready to peacefully resist, to speak out, and to defend their rights.

In 2019, 22 communities - represented by local NGOs Green Advocates International, Alliance for Rural Democracy, Natural Resource Women Platform, and the Yeagbamah National Congress for Human Rights - filed a **formal complaint with the IFC**. They raised concerns related to land grabbing and forced evictions, lack of consultation, loss of livelihood, labor rights violations, water pollution, gender-based violence, and threats of reprisals and intimidation.

The investigation has dragged on for years and it is still ongoing, despite evidence of **serious violations**.

Many women working at the plantation have reported cases of **sexual harassment**. SRC contractors have been asking them sexual favors in exchange for hiring them or raising their pay, and they have dismissed them or withheld their salary when they refused to have sex with them. Also security guards have harassed them. In some cases, they even threatened to kill them.

Local activists have faced **reprisals** for speaking out. Some were forced to flee, fearing for their life.

In May 2023, the community submitted a **petition** to the IFC. In the letter, they argue the bank failed to apply its **safeguards on Indigenous Peoples**, refusing to recognize that the project impacts the traditional way of life, the culture, the sacred sites, and the livelihood of the local Kpelle peoples. The community is calling on the bank to respect their rights as Indigenous Peoples, and to provide justice and access to remedy.

Read more:

- ["At a rubber plantation in Liberia, history repeats in a fight over land"](#) - Mongabay
- ["Liberia: 22 Affected Communities Petition IFC over SRC's Environmental Harms"](#) - Liberian Observer
- ["Rubbed out"](#) - Global Witness
- ["Socfin/Bolloré Plantations: Rising Profits, Ongoing Repression"](#) - Oakland Institute

Updates from members and partners

LATIN AMERICA

COP 2 Escazú: civil society organizations and communities call for the protection of defenders

In April, some members and partners of the Coalition participated in the 2nd Conference of the Parties to the **Escazú Agreement** (COP 2 Escazú) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. During the COP, the parties elected the members of the Escazú implementation committee and approved the Buenos Aires Declaration, emphasizing the role of the rights of **access to information, public participation, and justice in environmental matters**.

Our allies also organized and joined some side events. At the session "Zero tolerance for reprisals: the role of development banks and Escazú in the protection of defenders", they called on development banks like the Inter-American Development Bank to guarantee respect for human rights in the projects they fund, and address the gaps in the safeguards implementation.



The Road to the 2023 Summit of Presidents of the Amazon



In early August, Brazilian President Lula will host in Belém do Pará a regional meeting to renew the **Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO)**. The presidents of the countries containing parts of the Amazon will discuss issues including deforestation, protecting Indigenous Peoples' rights, sustainable development, and climate change. The aim is to draw plans and present a united front in the struggle to save and "revitalize" the Amazon rainforest.

In April, members and partners of the Coalition organized the panel "Challenges and opportunities for the peoples in the face of the Amazon initiative (IDB, ACTO, and Leticia Pact)", giving an overview of the Leticia Pact and ACTO, their impacts, and how activists and organizations can use these mechanisms in their advocacy work.

In May, Foro Social Panamazónico, Red Eclesial Panamazonica, Asamblea Mundial, indigenous organizations, the Coalition and several other civil society organizations addressed an **open letter** to the presidents attending the Summit, asking them to take **urgent action to protect the Amazon and its peoples**. We also urged them to include civil society in the Summit and presented a set of proposals, in six key areas:

- 1) avoiding the Amazon's point of no return;
- 2) the fate of the peoples of the Amazon;
- 3) protecting the Amazon from mining and mercury;
- 4) ensuring access to water for life;
- 5) providing direct, transparent, and participatory financing; and
- 6) defending the bodies and territories of Andean-Amazonian women.

Read here the open letter

"Proposals for the Summit of Presidents of the Amazon" (in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Portuguese](#))

A LEARNING EXCHANGE ON HOW TO HOLD CANADIAN MINING COMPANIES ACCOUNTABLE

On May 31, human rights and environmental defenders from seven countries in Latin America took part in a conversation about how they can advocate for their rights when these are being threatened by **Canadian companies** operating abroad. The meeting was co-organized by Mining Watch Latin America, the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability, and the Community Resource Exchange.

Canada is one of the world's major players in mining, leaving a **large environmental and human rights footprint** in its wake. The participants exchanged experiences, and shared key tools that communities can use to defend their rights.



Learn more: ["The 'Canada Brand': Violence and Canadian Mining Companies in Latin America,"](#) Justice and Corporate Accountability Project.

The AfDB approves its new Safeguards System

In April, after a two-year review, the African Development Bank (AfDB) approved its updated **Integrated Safeguards System** (ISS), a set of policies that aim to prevent environmental and social harms in the context of the projects supported by the bank. The updated safeguards introduce important elements, including the commitment not to tolerate **reprisals** and specific guidance to prevent threats and attacks against those speaking out or raising concerns.

However, the safeguards place the responsibility to prevent and address reprisals on the bank's clients, failing to recognize that clients have a clear conflict of interest and that the AfDB itself should be taking actions to address reprisals.

Do you want to learn more about the new safeguards? [Download the AfDB toolkit >>>](#)

AfDB hold Annual Meetings in Egypt

On May 25, over 45 African and international organizations called on the AfDB to open spaces for civil society and communities' participation during the **Annual Meetings** and beyond.

While the recently updated [AfDB's Integrated Safeguards System \(ISS\)](#) includes a commitment not to tolerate reprisals, the fact that the Bank decided to hold its Annual Meetings in Egypt sends a contradicting and worrisome message.

Egypt is currently infamous for its **closed civic space**. Thousands of people – including human rights defenders and journalists – are still arbitrarily detained, simply for speaking truth to power. Unfortunately, the lack of opportunities for participation during the Annual Meetings is only the tip of the iceberg. Civil society organizations have long been advocating with the AfDB to create spaces for participation, to be more **transparent and inclusive**, and to take concrete steps to tackle reprisals.

[Download the joint letter](#)

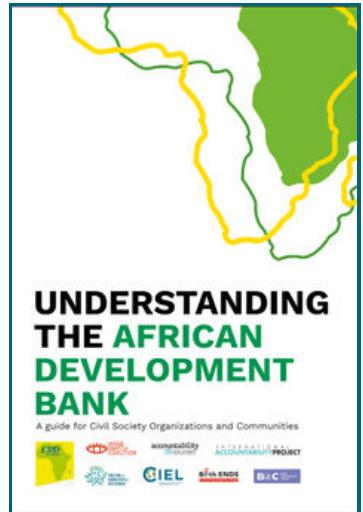
LEARNING TOGETHER: COMMUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE JOIN FORCES TO DEMAND THEIR RIGHTS

In the mineral-rich district of Mutoko (northern Zimbabwe), local communities are facing serious rights violations connected to mining projects, and in particular **black granite mining**. In the past three years, four children drowned and died after falling in the open pits that were left uncovered, because companies are failing to restore the land after extraction. Other violations include forced evictions, environmental degradation, and loss of arable land. Mining companies are also failing to meaningfully consult communities, to ensure their right to access to information, and to adequately compensate them.



In 2023, with the support of the Community Resource Exchange, the Mutoko-based organization **Disaster and Environmental Management Trust (DEMT)** organized a series of capacity-building sessions. DEMT 60 community environmental impact assessment (EIA) experts cascaded the [EIA training](#) to a total of 600 people in mining communities. There is now a well-empowered **network of environmental defenders**, who are actively documenting violations and bringing these cases before government officials and agencies such as the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) for redress.

Thanks to the evidence-based advocacy led by affected communities, the government's EMA officers issued an order requiring mining companies to close the pits, and the mines complied within 5 weeks. Furthermore, EMA officers are now conducting **random inspections** to ensure that mining companies are complying with environmental laws and EIAs, including adequately discharging hazardous waste. Communities in Mutoko were also able to voice their concerns about mining companies' lack of response to community corporate social responsibility needs, and the companies are now starting to build some health facilities.





Credit: NGO Forum on ADB

ADB Annual Meeting

On 2-5 May, many of our members and partners attended the **Annual Meeting** of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Incheon, South Korea. They joined meetings with Executive Directors and other bank's management staff, organized events, and led powerful campaigns to demand the ADB to protect people and the planet.

NGO Forum on the ADB, together with their allies, shared with the bank a joint statement rising concerns around safeguards, energy, civic space and reprisals among other issues. In the statement, the signatories write that the ADB must refrain from "supporting a development pathway that leads to import dependence and mega infrastructure-related social and environmental damage", and from promoting projects that "further deepen the financial crisis and widen inequality."

The network **Reality of Aid - Asia Pacific** organized a CSOs caucuses and engaged with ADB staff on several issues, including reprisals. At the end of the caucuses, over 130 CSOs from the Asia-Pacific region and beyond signed a joint statement that includes recommendations on a wide range of issues (e.g., transparency, participation, energy, conflict-affected contexts, and reprisals).

Read more:

- Video: ["Challenging Ways Forward Asserting Communities' Considerations on Just Transition"](#)
- Video: [Approaching the Last Mile for a Strong Safeguard Policy](#)
- [NGO Forum - joint statement](#)
- [Reality of Aid - Asia Pacific joint statement](#), and list of [recommended reading on the ADB](#)

For locals, India's coal rush means a black future (by Vidya Dinker)

In India, the contradiction between green commitments and reality on the ground couldn't be starker. For the communities most directly affected by **coal mines**, the high-level discussions on renewable energy are nothing more than empty promises. Their day-to-day reality is far from being green. The forests in their territories are being destroyed. **Pollution** is eating up their lungs. And for the future generations living here, the future looks black.

One of the areas most affected by the coal rush is Singrauli, in the northeastern state of Madhya Pradesh, also known as the "Power Capital of India".

The **biodiversity** found in Singrauli and its surroundings is exceptional. But the beautiful, precious forests of Singrauli risk disappearing, because of the black gold hidden in their womb.

Sacrificing these forests in the name of national interests will not bring real development. It will lead to more profits for private companies, but it will harm everyone else: the Indigenous Peoples in Singrauli first, but also all those around the world who are already facing the consequences of **climate change**.

[Read the full article in "The Diplomat"](#)

EBRD Annual Meeting and reprisals against defenders in Uzbekistan



On 16-18 May, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Annual Meeting took place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Together with international and local partners, we joined the event to talk about civic space, human rights and reprisals.

Some groups and defenders from Central Asia and the Caucasus also participated in a **capacity-building session** facilitated by CEE Bankwatch Network, to learn how to engage with the bank. The event was also an opportunity to engage with the bank's management staff, and to present some recommendations on what the EBRD could do to **address human rights violations** and shrinking civic space in the countries where it invests.

Just after the EBRD held its Annual Meetings in Uzbekistan, local activist **Miraziz Bazarov was abducted**, threatened and physically attacked.

This is the last in a long series of attacks, as a result of his activism and his reporting on corruption, misuse of funds and other issues.

According to Telegram channel Sarpa, Miraziz was arbitrarily detained by the police and accused of violating the order not to post anything online, under his house arrest conditions.

Miraziz was arrested in 2020, after raising concerns about misuse of ADB's funding and alleged corruption during the Covid-19 pandemic. You can read his story in our report "Unhealthy Silence".



[**Briefings on the EBRD from Bankwatch and their partners**](#)

[**Uzbek Forum's briefing on EBRD Meeting**](#)

[**Bankwatch briefing: Forgotten Annex**](#)

[**Bankwatch's podcast**](#)

VIETNAM: THE GLOBAL CAMPAIGN "STAND WITH BACH"



On 24 June 2021, just five days after his son was born, Vietnamese environmental lawyer Dang Dinh Bach was **detained on false charges**. He was later sentenced to five years in prison. Bach has dedicated his entire life to helping improve the health and well-being of marginalized communities in Vietnam. His arrest appears to be a retaliation for leading a campaign to reduce his country's reliance on coal.

Due to international pressure, Nguyen Thi Khanh, another prominent Vietnamese climate leader, was released in June. A **global campaign** is now calling for the release of Bach too. The **UN working group on arbitrary detention** has also recently urged the Vietnamese government to immediately release him.

To join the campaign:

- 1) [Sign-on to Open Letter \(organizations\)](#)
- 2) [Sign-on to Avaaz petition \(individuals\)](#)
- 3) [Check out & share the campaign's website: standwithbach.org](#)
- 4) [Join a solidarity hunger strike](#)

JOINT LETTER TO THE NEW UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

On May 22, a group of 70 organisations and networks from around the world addressed a letter to Professor Surya Deva, to congratulate him on his new role as the **UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development**. The signatories expressed their interest to work with him to leverage public development banks, to advance the right to development and to adopt a human rights-based approach.

[**Download the letter here**](#)



Kenya: conservation project leads to human rights violations and reprisals



Credit: Oakland Institute

In Korbesa, a village in the region of Isiolo in Eastern Kenya, a **conservation project** is leading to violent attacks against the local community.

On May 8, Kenyan police violently cracked down on a protest against the conservation agency Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), firing live ammunition and tear gas into the unarmed crowd. The community was protesting against the opening of an NRT office in their village and the imposition of a conservation project without their free, prior and informed consent.

The day after, a woman was arrested while traveling with her child on a bus, on unfair charges of inciting the protest. She was given an exorbitant bail and she is now facing serious charges, in what it looks like an intentional strategy to **silence dissent**.

NRT presents itself as a community-driven initiative that focuses on participatory methods and local empowerment, but voices from the ground depicts a completely different story.

For years, the community has been speaking out against the serious **human rights violations** committed by NRT armed rangers, the loss of access to their land and natural resources, and the lack of dialogue and meaningful consultations. Among the most serious violations, there have been **extra judicial killings** and enforced disappearances in various grazing areas and watering points.

In September 2021, around 165 villagers from Khorbesa presented a petition in court, denouncing the human rights violations committed by NRT and affiliated authorities. So far, however, their request for justice has remained unaddressed.

Despite NRT's terribly poor human rights track record, since its founding in 2004 the agency has received millions of dollars from well-known organizations and institutions, including the European Union, USAID, the World Wildlife Fund, the World Bank, and the French Development Agency.

Today NRT operates conservancies on over 10 % of Kenya's land. According to a 2021 report by the Oakland Institute, "Stealth Game: "Community" Conservancies Devastate Land & Lives in Northern Kenya", the NRT - together with the Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) and in coordination with the local authorities - have allegedly "dispossessed pastoralist communities of their ancestral lands, through corruption, cooptation, and sometimes through intimidation and violence, to create wildlife conservancies for conservation dollars".

Read more:

- [Latest Community Protest Against NRT Upended by Violent Crackdown](#) - Oakland Institute
- [Land Grab & Human Rights Abuses in the Name of Conservation](#) - Oakland Institute's report

Indigenous defender Alessandra Korap awarded the Goldman Prize



- Alessandra Korap -

Credit: Goldman Prize

In April Alessandra Korap, an Indigenous woman from Brazil, was awarded the [Goldman Environmental Prize](#) for her tireless work defending her community against extractive industries. A teacher, a lawyer and an activist, Alessandra is a member of the Munduruku Peoples of Sawré Muybu Indigenous Territory, in the north of Brazil. The area covers over 170 thousand hectares of rainforest along the Tapajós River.

For years the community has been under constant threat from the companies looking to exploit their territory's natural resources. Anglo American, a global mining company with a portfolio that spans diamonds, platinum and more, announced in 2020 its intention to mine copper in the Sawré Muybu Indigenous Territory.

Alessandra Korap and other indigenous leaders mobilized to [oppose the project](#). They organized protests, lobbied the government, signed joint declarations against mining and deforestation, joined efforts with organizations like Amazon Watch and Greenpeace, and reached out to local and international media. They also conducted patrols of the territory and measured levels of deforestation.

As a result of these coordinated efforts, [Anglo American backed off](#). The mining company announced in 2021 that it would withdraw its prospecting applications. Explaining its decision, Anglo American directly referenced the preoccupations expressed by organizations and in particular the strong opposition of indigenous communities to the project.

This was a major victory for the indigenous communities and their allies. It sent a clear message to the world that the territories where they live are not for grabs and that [their voices will be heard](#). This success has paved the way for other companies to reconsider their prospecting plans in indigenous lands.

Korap and the indigenous communities are now continuing to protect their territories. They are currently petitioning the Brazilian government to declare their lands as protected Indigenous Territories and to put a stop to the destruction of the Amazon rainforest.

In 2020, Alessandra Korap participated in the civil society campaign ahead of the Finance in Common summit, sending a video message to public development banks funding projects in Brazil that harmed local communities and the environment.

You can watch the full video [here](#).

Read more:

- [Meet Alessandra Korap Munduruku - Goldman Prize](#)
- ['I'll keep fighting': Indigenous activist and Goldman winner Alessandra Munduruku - Mongabay](#)
- Visit the [Pariri Indigenous Association website](#) to learn more about Alessandra's and her community's work.

Take action:

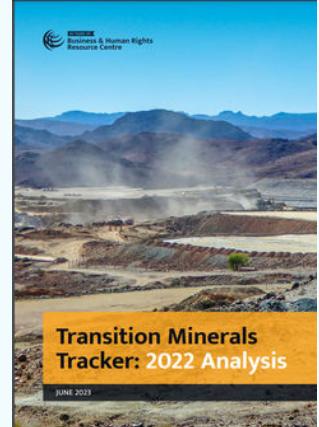
- [Sign the letter urging President Lula da Silva to support the Munduruku and commit to declare their lands as Indigenous Territories!](#)

New reports and publications

Transition Minerals Tracker (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre)

This analysis details the human rights implications of mining for six key minerals for renewable energy technologies and batteries: cobalt, copper, lithium, manganese, nickel and zinc. BHRRC has recorded a total of 510 allegations of human rights abuse from 2010 to 2022, including 65 new allegations in the past year. Over one-quarter of allegations represent attacks against human rights defenders. Corruption cases related to transition minerals are growing, with 10 new allegations recorded in 2022.

[Download the report](#)



The labyrinth of transition: thinking a socio-ecological way out in times of crisis. (FARN) *in Spanish only

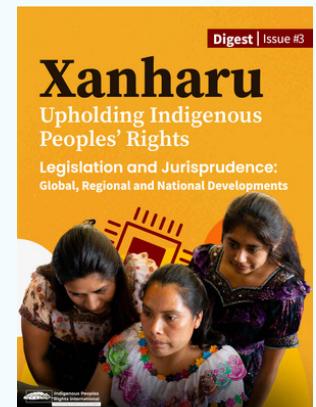
This is the 15th edition of the FARN Environmental Report. It acknowledges that Argentina has made great strides in some areas in the past 40 years but that the environmental issue has been neglected. The report concludes that the environment is inseparable from the social and economic crisis that Argentina faces and that any solution must address both issues. The report provides examples of possible paths to an integral socio-ecological transformation.

[Download the report](#)

Xanharu || Upholding Indigenous Peoples' Rights Legislation and Jurisprudence: Global, Regional, and National Developments (Issue 3) (IPRI)

Indigenous Peoples' rights continue to be violated in law and practice in many parts of the world, but at the same time more and more legislation is affirming their rights. In this Digest, which is being regularly updated, IPRI provides a compilation of legislation and jurisprudence in relation to Indigenous Peoples' rights at the international, regional and national levels.

[Download the Digest](#)



Briefing Paper on Updated Guidelines (OECD Watch)



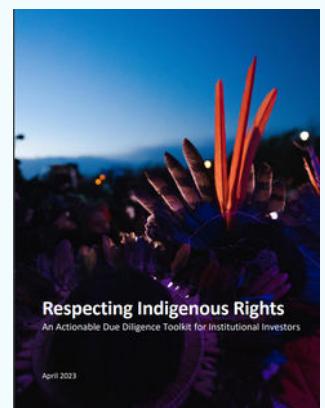
In June, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released a "targeted update" of its Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. There are some compromises, but the majority of updates strengthen the standards.

[Read OECD Watch short statement](#)

[Read OECD Watch briefing](#)

Respecting Indigenous Rights: An Actionable Toolkit for Institutional Investors (Amazon Watch)

This toolkit is an Indigenous-led guide for pension funds, asset managers, and other institutional investors on their responsibility to respect the rights of Indigenous peoples. It reviews the investor responsibility to respect Indigenous People's rights, offers guidance on how to incorporate their rights into management systems, and provides practical tools for identifying and addressing impacts to which investors are connected.



[Download the toolkit](#)

Misplaced Trust: new report out in July

Equator Complaints

Banktrack has launched a website to raise complaints about projects financed under the Equator Principles, that are causing harm to communities and the planet. The **Equator Principles**, approved 20 years ago, are the banking sector's own standards for managing risks to human rights and nature. Over 130 financial institutions are signed up. But the Equator Principles are not good at stopping disaster projects from getting financed. Through this site, Banktrack will send complaints to the **Equator Principles Association** and the banks involved in financing the project.

What's next

AUGUST

8-9: Summit of Presidents of the Amazon
10-14: World Bank Spring Meetings
22: World Earth Day



SEPTEMBER

4 -6: Finance in Common summit
Cartagena (Colombia)
15: International Day of Democracy
19-20: SDG Summit - New York (US)
25-26: AIIB Annual Meetings

Useful resources

- **Understanding the AfDB**

By: Accountability Counsel, AWC, BIC, Both Ends, CIEL, IAP, LSD, Coalition for Human Rights in Development)

This toolkit provides an overview of the African Development Bank (AfDB) and how it works; information on key safeguard policies and how to submit complaints to the Independent Recourse Mechanism; and advocacy tips on how CSOs and defenders can engage with the bank and demand respect for human rights, when they're violated in the context of the AfDB projects.

[Download the toolkit](#)

- **Video as evidence environmental defense guide**

By: WITNESS

This guide provides information and good practices to help community-based documenters collect visual documentation of environmental human rights crimes and violations, so that it can be effectively used in advocacy and accountability processes.

[Download the toolkit](#)

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