

Side Event #:
#65
Side Event Title:
<p>Defend the defenders. How to effectively protect those who fight for the right to food?</p> <p>Supporting indigenous peoples and social movements in their struggle against hunger by protecting them against threats and criminalization</p>
Key speakers/presenters:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juan Carlos Morales González, FIAN Colombia (Moderator) • Nadia Ait Zai, African Human and People’s Rights Commission (ACHPR) <p>Testimonies from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cameroon • South East Asia • Palestine • Kenya
Main themes/issues discussed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major problems faced by right to food defenders; • Testimonies from civil society activists from different countries and continents; • How to support indigenous peoples and social movements in their struggle against hunger by protecting them against threats and criminalisation?
Summary of key points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increasing number of reports from UN Human Rights bodies, including the UN Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights Defenders, Right to Food and Indigenous Peoples, have shown that those who defend economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, especially the right to food, are among the most threatened human rights defenders in many countries; • The attacks directed to defenders are complex and diverse: often the aim is destroying a specific social fabric or articulation by targeting a community or civil society leader. The objective is usually not to only intimidate or criminalize an individual targeted person, rather to destroy the framework around these defenders, by using a combination of the following tools: stigmatization, (especially challenging women’s reputation), threats, criminalization, torture, disappearance, sexual violence, attacks on family members, restriction of movement, limitation of economic resources, use of instigating or discriminatory language by politicians which encourages physical aggression of their followers against the targeted defenders; • Indigenous peoples are often particularly affected: violations of their rights are widespread and include attacks on their representatives. Many of these cases involve land grabbing through large-scale agrobusinesses, severe environmental damages through extractive industries or threats to livelihoods through mega-projects, often introduced without the free, prior and informed consent of the affected indigenous communities; • Women in areas of conflict and war are particularly affected and vulnerable. Testimonies from different countries and reports of UN and regional human rights bodies show the alarming

additional risks women face, especially when they take leading roles in defending the rights of their communities or social constituencies;

- Regional human rights mechanisms can play a crucial role in effectively defend the defenders, in collaboration with UN human rights bodies and special procedures, national human rights institutions and organizations and civil society groups: together, they can generate conditions of better protection for right to food defenders, including through fostering a more constructive and proactive attitude of governments towards the defenders, and concrete actions to overcome impunity;
- The role of mainstream media in these cases is critical: sometimes they are part of the problem in stigmatizing right to food defenders and community struggles, and sometimes they are important allies in defending the defenders;
- A number of new Instruments and mechanism for an enhanced protection of human rights defenders has been developed and adopted in many countries, regions and on the UN level. The main challenge is now to promote their use and implementation in support of the threatened community leaders and defenders of the right to food, indigenous peoples and women's rights activists.
- The international community, including the United Nations agencies working on agriculture, rural development, food security and nutrition, environment should seek a closer collaboration with the national, regional and global human rights institutions to foster not only the right to food, but also promote a better protection of those who defend it.

Key take away messages

- Those who defend the right to food of their communities are often themselves at risk. Those who defend their rights related to lands, fisheries and forests, are often stigmatized, repressed, and criminalized, particularly if they come from a women's or indigenous peoples' organizations.
- There are instruments and mechanisms to promote an enhanced protection of defenders at risk, but a much stronger commitment and engagement of the involved actors is needed to make them more effective: some governments need to change their attitudes and policies towards the communities and civil society organizations.
- The international community should pay more attention to strengthening the regional and UN human rights bodies, and seek communication and collaboration with those organizations of right to food defenders, indigenous peoples, and women who are the most at risk.