



Photo: UN Women / Eva Sibanda, Ryan Brown



WOMEN ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Defending the women who defend the planet

Women and girls are taking action worldwide to realize human rights, particularly the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the rights of nature. They are defending land, water, natural resources, territories and communities from environmental harms and climate impacts, often at great personal risk, facing criminalization, threats, stigmatization, violence, and even death.¹

Women environmental human rights defenders (WEHRDs), many of whom are Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent, face gender-specific challenges and violence. They are targeted not only as defenders of rights, land and natural resources but also as women defying discriminatory societal gender norms. These threats include gender-based violence, assault, threats to their families,

defamation campaigns, and other forms of gender-based intimidation, offline and online, to silence their voices and undermine their work.



As we mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30), which emphasized the importance of women's participation in environmental decision-making and action, it is imperative for Member States to reaffirm their commitments and responsibilities.² They must respect, protect and fulfil their human rights obligations to WEHRDs,³ including the right of Indigenous Peoples to free, prior and informed consent, and ensure WEHRDs' full, meaningful and equal participation in decision-making processes and environmental and climate action.⁴

In line with existing commitments, Member States are called to:



RECOGNITION

- Reaffirm and recognize the importance and legitimacy of WEHRDs, their work and their rights.
- Acknowledge the specific risks faced by Indigenous WEHRDs and WEHRDs of African descent, ensuring an intersectional approach in promoting and protecting their rights.
- Recognize the vital contributions of Indigenous WEHRDs and WEHRDs of African descent, ensure their meaningful participation in environmental decision-making processes and actions, and implement targeted measures to protect them from threats, while supporting their right to defend their territories and natural resources.




PARTICIPATION

-  Promote WEHRDs' voice, agency, leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making related to the environment at the local, national and international levels, including in climate and biodiversity discussions and negotiations.
-  Uphold WEHRDs' rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, in virtual as well as physical spaces.

PROTECTION

-  Protect WEHRDs by providing an enabling environment to exercise their roles without fear, including through strengthening laws that protect and recognize WEHRDs and repealing laws that criminalize their work.
-  Denounce and prosecute violence, attacks, intimidation and reprisals against and killings of WEHRDs and their families and allies.


ACCESS TO JUSTICE

-  Ensure WEHRDs' access to justice and their rights to redress and effective remedy.
-  Hold perpetrators of threats, violence and attacks accountable, eliminate impunity and strengthen enforcement by legal and judicial systems.
-  Prevent the misuse of legal and judicial mechanisms, such as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), intended to intimidate, censure and silence WEHRDs.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

-  Respect and uphold the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to ensure business enterprises respect the rights of WEHRDs, their territories and communities.
-  Require investors and international finance institutions to respect human rights in the context of their investments and business operations and to develop and implement human-rights based environmental risk assessments and policies to prevent and address threats to WEHRDs.

FUNDING

-  Provide sustainable support to WEHRDs and their organizations through predictable, flexible and core funding.

Notes

1. UN Women, UNEP and OHCHR (2022) [Human Rights, the Environment and Gender Equality](#); UN Environment (2018) [Promoting Greater Protection for Environmental Defenders Policy](#).
2. CEPAL (2024) [COP 3 of the Escazú Agreement Reinforces the Commitment to Recognize, Protect and Promote All the Rights of Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters | Third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement](#).
3. Including under the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, UN GA Resolution on Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN HRC Resolution on Recognizing the Contributions of Environmental Human Rights Defenders.
4. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, UN Declaration on the Right to Development, Aarhus Convention and Escazú Agreement.