



ASOCIACIÓN  
AMBIENTE Y SOCIEDAD

## Defending the environment in Colombia is a death sentence: *Ambiente y Sociedad*

Bogotá July 31, 2020

- *Ambiente y Sociedad deeply regrets the fact that Colombia has ranked first as the most dangerous country for the defense of the environment. In 2019, 64 defenders were killed. We condemn and alert about the increase in killings of indigenous leaders for the mere fact of claiming their land.*
- *We demand the transformation of the economic model and effective protection for human rights defenders, who are absolutely irreplaceable.*
- *We demand respect for the life of those who care for protected areas and are murdered for doing their job.*
- *Ratification of the Escazú Agreement is necessary to find effective solutions to this scourge.*

Colombia, “a wave of growing violence”, is the title of the section of the report “Defend Tomorrow” from Global Witness, pointing out that it is one of the most violent countries for defenders of land and the environment. In fact, the number of defenders killed in the country in 2019 rose to 64, which is twice as many as in 2018, and it is the highest figure recorded by Global Witness about the country.

Vanessa Torres, deputy director of *Ambiente y Sociedad* warns that “this number represents truncated lives, and the struggles of communities that have been threatened and worn out. Leaders don’t exist without their land; it is not enough to banish them from

**Asociación Ambiente y Sociedad**  
Calle 19#3-50 Of 1603 Bogotá-Colombia. Tel: 57: (1) 2865285  
Email: [comunicaciones@ambienteysociedad.org.co](mailto:comunicaciones@ambienteysociedad.org.co)  
[www.ambienteysociedad.org.co](http://www.ambienteysociedad.org.co)

their territory, which is their life (...) The ratification of the Escazú Agreement opens up a historic opportunity for us to achieve effective protection for defenders, which is why we call upon the Congress of the Republic so that the ratification process can be completed promptly”.

The global analysis by Global Witness records, in 2019, a record number of 212 murders globally, making it the most difficult and violent year for those who defend forests, rivers and territories from the destructive industry. Of the 21 countries that top the list of assassinations of environmental defenders in 2019, 10 are countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, positioning itself as the most dangerous region for environmental activism for the third consecutive year. Around the world, ordinary people are being threatened, criminalized and killed for speaking out against the abuses they are subjected to, for protecting their livelihoods, customs and territories. Among the causes behind these socio-environmental conflicts are the expansion of the extractive and agribusiness industries.

María Alejandra Aguilar, Climate Justice Coordinator at *Asociación Ambiente y Sociedad* - AAS comments that “Compared to the 2018 data from the Enemies of the State (*Enemigos del Estado*) report, killings of environmental defenders in Colombia increased by 62.5% with the record figure of 64 leaders killed in 2019, which means that, on average, one defender of the territory is killed every week in the country. In Colombia the situation is dramatic, as a human rights defender is killed every 72 hours, 90% of the murders remain in impunity, there is no one to be held accountable for the attacks, there is no justice for the victims and there are no guarantees of non-repetition. Among the populations most affected by violence against environmental defenders in Colombia, indigenous peoples stand out, and approximately 64 indigenous peoples are at risk of cultural extinction for causes related to the systematic displacement and the defense of their territories and ways of living. The National Indigenous Association of Colombia - ONIC, reported that there is an ongoing indigenous genocide: in 2019, 115 indigenous leaders were killed, one every three days. In Colombia, we have not yet understood that the materialization of the rights of indigenous peoples and rural communities is the same materialization of the rights to a healthy environment, a stable climate and a future, since

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it is them, in their lines of action, who lay the foundations of environmental democracy and sustainable development”.

The report highlights the shared responsibility of institutional and private actors in fulfilling their responsibilities, since their defense represents the root of threats and deaths, and also calls on the private sector to “implement zero tolerance policies with respect to threats against defenders and ensure full cooperation with any investigation into the attacks. Finally, in the case of investors, it recognizes that they must ensure that their money is going in the right direction, and urges them to set up early warning systems to prevent possible conflicts and avoid deaths.

Environment and Society, once again, deeply regrets the murders of the people behind these figures, and reiterates what was expressed by the environmentalist Wilches Chau: *"They are not only crimes against defenders of the Earth and the land, but hundreds of young people condemned to the armed conflict"*

Report “*Defending tomorrow: Climate crisis and threats against defenders of the earth and the environment*”. Available at <https://bit.ly/2CT8N4t>

For more information:

Alicia Gómez- communications

coordinator. [aliciagomez@ambienteysociedad.org.co](mailto:aliciagomez@ambienteysociedad.org.co) +(57)3204821467

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