

ALLIANCE ^{FOR} LAND,
INDIGENOUS ^{AND}
ENVIRONMENTAL
DEFENDERS

UNCOVERING THE

HIDDEN ICEBERG

NEW DATA SHOWS ALARMING PATTERNS OF ATTACKS AGAINST INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES, LAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

33

KILLINGS*

COLOMBIA

1297

NON-LETHAL
ATTACKS**

19

KILLINGS*

PHILLIPPINES

240

NON-LETHAL
ATTACKS**

* Data reported by Global Witness for 2021

** Preliminary data reported by ALLIED for 2021

WHAT IS ALLIED SHOWING

In preliminary data from **2021**, **ALLIED documented a total of 1,537 non-lethal attacks** against defenders **across two countries**.

This preliminary analysis of 2021 ALLIED data focuses on **Colombia** and the **Philippines**, two of the most dangerous countries in the world for land and environmental defenders. Across both countries, **attacks on Indigenous Peoples represented more than 40% of total attacks** where information was available, with community leaders and members accounting for another 34%. **Land remained the most dangerous resource to protect, accounting for more than half of all registered attacks**. Territory and customary rights, closely tied to land, accounted for another 42% of attacks.

A second round of this evolving analysis will include attacks from Guatemala, Kenya and Mexico, together with deeper discussion from a gender perspective.

Worldwide, the climate crisis has lent an urgency to the defender of land, territories and natural resources, while the green transition has also posed new threats to defenders. Violence against Indigenous Peoples, land and environmental defenders has continued unabated, with Indigenous communities, which protect some of the most important global biodiversity hotspots and carbon sinks, being disproportionately targeted. Impunity prevails at alarming rates while defenders are criminalized and subjected to legal harassment by private actors through laws used to curb opposition.

New **ALLIED data** – a combined dataset produced by a group of local, regional and global data collectors – uncovers the hidden iceberg of non-lethal attacks against **Indigenous, land and environmental defenders¹ (ILED)**, as well as their organizations and communities. The data reveals extensive patterns of violence that can precede the killing of these defenders. Likewise, they also represent a crucial opportunity for intervention.

In 2021, **Global Witness' global dataset** documented the killing of 200 land and environmental defenders, a figure that is considered an underestimate given that many killings are not reported or documented. Likewise, in 2021, BHRRC reported 615 attacks on human rights defenders globally related to business, including threats, judicial harassment, physical violence and killings. Nearly 70% of these were committed against climate, land and environmental defenders.

But the global tracking of such violence relies on media monitoring and publicly available information, while the ALLIED dataset integrates global datasets with sources of data much closer to where the violence happens, collecting information that may never make it into news and public reports. Globally reported attacks and killings that rely on published material are the tip of another, much deeper iceberg.

¹ ALLIED defines ILEDs as individuals and groups (communities, organisations, networks and movements) who help to secure a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, including the climate, and to safeguard the planet for current and future generations. This includes those that live from and on the land and those advocating for the rights of indigenous and traditional communities who serve as stewards of their customary lands. ILEDs may or may not identify themselves as defenders or activists, and many of them defend the environment as part of their struggles to protect their or their communities' lands, territories or resources. ILEDs are an especially vulnerable category of human rights defenders because the attacks that they face are often linked to intersecting patterns of marginalisation, racism and discrimination; they also rarely see a response due to highest levels of impunity.

COLOMBIA

In 2021, Colombia witnessed widespread social protests that came to encompass demands related to human rights, social justice and land rights. Indigenous communities protested encroachment on their land for illegal mining, while progress towards land redistribution outlined in the peace process was challenged by ongoing conflict between armed groups and paramilitary forces.

The ALLIED dataset from 2021 reflects an alarming trend of violence against human rights defenders in the country.

In 2021, when Global Witness registered 33 killings of land and environmental defenders in Colombia, ALLIED documented a staggering 1,297 non-lethal attacks against these defenders. In a country that has long been among the most hostile to land and environmental defenders, ***in 2021, for every LED killed, nearly 40 non-lethal attacks*** were documented.

60% of attacks in Colombia were perpetrated against individuals, while nearly 40% of attacks were committed against communities. An additional, small percentage of attacks were carried out against organizations.

Reflecting **overall trends in 2020** and 2021, **threats represented the majority of the non-lethal violence** documented in Colombia in 2021, accounting for nearly half of all attacks. **Beatings or physical injuries were the second most common, accounting for 12% of attacks, followed by displacement (10%) and arbitrary detention (5%).**

To a greater extent than in 2020, **defenders working to protect their land and territories represented 96% of all attacks registered in Colombia**, the overwhelming majority. Again, **Indigenous Peoples were disproportionately victims of attacks, representing 38% of attacks** where information was available. Community leads or members accounted for another 27%.

In Colombia, data indicates that **agriculture and livestock is the most dangerous sector for land and environmental defenders, indicated in 84% of cases** where information was available. Oil and gas, as well as mining, together accounted for an additional 12% of attacks where the sector was known. In terms of the probable perpetrators of such violence, the armed forces were most commonly indicated, accounting for 28% of the cases where information was available. Paramilitary forces were indicated in another 19% of cases, and police and national-level officials accounted for an additional 18% and 17%, respectively.

ALL ATTACKS AGAINST ILEDs REPORTED IN COLOMBIA IN 2021



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

COMMUNITY LEADERS / MEMBERS

GREEN TRANSITION

Among the attacks highlighted in the 2021 ALLIED database are those related to the green transition. While a shift to cleaner sources of energy promises less environmental degradation than traditional fossil fuels, the decarbonization of the economy has also presented new challenges and risks for ILEDs.

The production of renewable energy, such as wind farms, solar fields and hydropower has led to new land conflict, while deepening existing disputes. Solar panels and batteries that require the extraction of large quantities of rare minerals and metals, likewise, can lead to a replication of patterns of degradation and violence associated with the traditional mining sector.

For example, in Colombia – one of our two focus countries – local communities, particularly Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants and peasant communities, continue to be affected by the extraction of minerals essential for the energy transition.

*As recent research published by BHRRC has shown, concerns about human rights risks are on the rise in areas where proposed mining projects and new mining concessions are being granted on Indigenous Peoples' and Afro-Colombian communities' lands, as well as natural reserves owned by peasant farmers. Proposed amendments aim to loosen regulations and lift limits on the extraction of minerals in wetland areas (páramos), national natural parks and their buffer areas. **Opposition has led to a spike in attacks on HRDs**, while similarly negative effects of transition minerals, both on communities and the delicate ecosystems they defend, has been observed throughout the Andes.*

50%

**OF TRANSITION MINERALS
ARE IN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES'
TERRITORIES**

PHILIPPINES

In 2021, land disputes continued across the Philippines as Indigenous Peoples and local communities opposed mining, logging and agribusiness operations that encroached upon their land, territories and natural resources. In August, 2021, the killing of several Lumad leaders underscored concerns with government policies and the protection of Indigenous groups. The enjoyment of human rights, including freedom of expression, and the rule of law, remain common challenges facing those that defend the land and the environment.

The 2021 ALLIED dataset reflected these concerns. In the Philippines, in a year **when Global Witness registered 19 killings of land and environmental defenders, ALLIED documented 240 non-lethal attacks on these defenders. For every ILED that was killed in the Philippines in 2021, more than 12 non-lethal attacks were documented.**

Of all attacks in the Philippines, 94% of attacks were registered against individuals. Women accounted for 27% of attacks where information on gender was available.

In 2021, judicial harassment – including elements of criminalisation, lawsuits and unfair trials – represented the largest known type of non-lethal violence documented in the Philippines, accounting for 15% of the attacks where information was available. An additional 19% of cases labeled as ‘other’ included a number of violations of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), while defamations and smear campaigns represented an additional 13% percent of the attacks. Threats, which represented the global majority of non-lethal attacks in 2020, represented just more than 12% of the attacks, followed by arbitrary detention (11%).

In the Philippines, 88% of all attacks against ILEDs were tied to those defending their customary rights, land and territory.

It is not a surprise, then, that **Indigenous Peoples and community leaders and members represented 90% of all attacks where information was available**, 43% and 47%, respectively.

Data in the Philippines indicates that **agriculture and livestock continues to be the most dangerous sector for ILEDs, accounting for 65% of all cases** where the sector was identified. This was followed by fishing, mining and energy, which represented another 25% of attacks with a specified sector.

The **armed forces and police** were most commonly identified as the probable perpetrator in non-lethal attacks in the Philippines, echoing prevailing concerns about the rule of law in the country. Together, they **accounted for 55% of cases** where information was available. Intelligence or secret service agents, as well as local government officials, accounted for an additional 26% of cases, collectively.

ALL ATTACKS AGAINST ILEDs REPORTED IN THE PHILIPPINES IN 2021

88%

DEFENDERS WORKING TO PROTECT CUSTOMARY RIGHTS, LAND AND TERRITORY

43%

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

47%

COMMUNITY LEADERS / MEMBERS

PROCESS

The assembly of the 2021 ALLIED dataset presented a number of challenges, both procedural and with the data itself. In contrast to the pilot period – 2020 data from 10 data collectors covering five countries – the 2021 data included only four datasets. ***Some public sources used in the pilot period are no longer making data available, while a number of other data collectors had challenges*** collecting, processing and sharing data due to limited resources and capacity.

In some cases, the ***data collectors themselves received threats***. These threats are incredibly concerning and, at the same time, they serve to underline the importance of the role played by data collectors and the threat this work poses to those perpetrating violence. Although limitations faced by data collectors – especially local data collectors – are not new, 2021 data migration further highlighted how important ***data gaps*** shape the narrative that emerges from the data, throwing the role of the data collector into sharp relief.

The data itself also presented a number of challenges. A number of datasets did not include ***information about gender***, making an overall reading of attacks from a gender perspective very limited. Additionally, ***information about Indigenous Peoples*** was not always captured explicitly, in an independent field, but may have been included in a field describing the community or a narrative of the incident.

ALLIED works with a range of data collectors that use their own ***formats*** and built-for-purpose structures to report on attacks against defenders. While it has been important to be able to work with data in their original format, this represents an additional challenge, as the migration process often includes a manual transfer of data and their transposition into the ALLIED template and fields.



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CONCLUSION

The widespread presence of non-lethal attacks in the two focus countries are concerning. Defenders are being threatened, attacked and criminalized at higher rates than previously documented in an integrated way.

The data underscores how integrating diverse data sources can serve to provide a fuller picture of the violence, with priority given to local data collectors who are working – often under threat – to document and verify attacks that are seldom published.

*Furthermore, the findings underline recommendations given in the ALLIED 2023 **Crucial Gap report**, calling for states to monitor, collect data and report on the situation of ILEDs, while working to address the root causes of attacks against them.*

Civil society data collectors are filling the data collection gap, but it does not come without risk. More importantly, such efforts cannot substitute for state action to protect these defenders.

Until these individuals, their communities and their organizations are safe to work, live and freely oppose the exploitation of land, territories and natural resources, governments cannot claim that the societies they are building are peaceful, inclusive or capable of addressing the impending climate crisis.

ALLIANCE FOR LAND, INDIGENOUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

ILC is also on:



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