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(A CALG initiative in support of "SAFE" – a Solidarity Alliance and Fund for the Defenders of the Commons and ICCAs).



Members of the Shuar ethnic group, Ecuador. Copyrights: Nature and Culture International (NCI)



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Dear Friends and supporters,

This illustrated first 2017 edition includes news and updates covering six Southeast Asian Regions: **the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Vietnam**, as well as **India, Bangladesh** and **Australia** in addition to eleven Latin America nations: **Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Guyana, Mexico, Honduras, San Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, Chile** and eleven African countries: **Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, DR Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Guinea, Nigeria, Liberia, Mozambique, South Africa**. North America (**Canada and the USA**) is also featured.

For the first two months of 2017, through an attentive monitoring of web sources and media releases, and thanks to information provided by our local partners, we have recorded at least **17 new victims of extra-judicial killings of activists and human rights and environmental defenders (HREDs) occurring in the Philippines (8), Myanmar (1) Colombia (6), Mexico (1), Guatemala (1), five of which are women**. Virtually all cases are associated to conflicts being related to mining, dams and other forms of large scale land grabbing. Murders of HREDs in Africa are likely to have occurred during the same period, but these occurrences remain unrecorded and undocumented. Cases of severe harassment and extreme violence against HREDs have been reported from Argentina and Kenya.



Friends and supporters carry the coffin of slain environmental rights activist Berta Caceres in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Mar. 3, 2016. | Photo: Reuters

The general section of our Autumn Bulletin has several articles on the ongoing violence perpetrated globally against human rights and environmental defenders (HREDs).

The year that we have left behind has been one of the most terrible, if not the worse, in terms of murder and victimizations of environmental and human rights defenders (EHRDs), world wide. According to information from different sources and organizations, **over 1,000 human rights**



**defenders were killed or subject to other violations in 2016, and the overwhelming majority of those killed were from Latin America.**

The annual report from Front Line Defenders pointed out that the killings commonly occurred following threats and warnings, but were frequently ignored by authorities, once reported to police. The report showed that **282 human rights defenders were killed across 25 countries** (compared to 156 in 2015) a remarkable increase from the previous year.

The non-violent activities of human rights defenders were targeted by state and non-state actors, and **49 percent of people were killed** after working to defend land, indigenous and environmental rights. While physical attacks, intimidation, threats, stigmatization and smear campaigns and even cyber-attacks were commonly used to discourage and discredit human rights defenders, legal action was the most commonly used means to subdue the efforts of activists.

**Latin America was by far the most dangerous region for human rights defenders in 2016 with 217 killings**, equivalent to more than three-quarters of the reported killings worldwide. Despite its progress toward peace, **Colombia was the most dangerous country with 85 reported killings. Brazil was the second-most dangerous with 58 killings**, followed by Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and the Philippines. The report also shows that safety for activists has deteriorated significantly in a number of countries, including Bangladesh, Turkey, and several African and South American states.





Overall, according to **UN Special Rapporteur Victoria Tauli-Corpuz** there have been “serious retreats” in the implementation of indigenous rights, including the threat of tribal land being taken away by extractive industries. On the other hand, Corpuz highlights the efforts that Ecuador and Bolivia have made to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNRIP).



Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Credit: UN Photo/Mark Garten.

The year 2016, will also be remembered for the way in which several important battles to defend nature and indigenous peoples’ rights have been taken to the streets, leading to powerful mobilizations and massive solidarity networks like **the gathering at Standing Rock, in Northern Dakota (USA)**. In countries such as **Ecuador, Bolivia** and **New Zealand**, indigenous activism has helped spur the creation of a novel legal phenomenon (<http://therightsofnature.org/call-for-action/>) — the idea that nature itself can have rights. The 2008 constitution of Ecuador (<http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>) was the first national constitution to establish rights of nature. In this legal paradigm shift, nature changed from being held as property to a rights-bearing entity (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/sep/24/ecuador.conservation>).

**The notion that nature has rights is a huge conceptual advance in protecting the Earth.** Prior to this framework, an environmental lawsuit could only be filed if a personal human injury was proven in connection to the environment (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/sep/24/ecuador.conservation>).

This can be quite difficult. **Under Ecuadorian law, people can now sue on the ecosystem’s behalf, without it being connected to a direct human injury.** Unlike Ecuador and Bolivia, **New Zealand’s rights of nature are not embedded in its constitutional law**, but rather protect specific natural entities. Native communities in New Zealand were instrumental in creating new legal frameworks that give legal personhood, and thus rights, to land and rivers.



Also in 2016, a higher awareness has been growing on the reasons responsible for the depletion of natural resources and the impending extinction of rare species. In addition to the usually mentioned culprits (poachers, loggers, agri-business corporations, greedy business folk), the civil society has acquired a better understanding of how **consumers and citizens**, in their own ways, **are also responsible for species extinction and biodiversity depletion in other regions of our world.**

Many people in the developed and developing world are consuming natural resources so rapaciously, albeit unwittingly, that their consumption habits are causing rapid habitat losses for numerous species of wildlife in places like Sabah and Sarawak. **In Borneo, for instance, oil palm firms continue to fell large tracts of forest to create new plantations simply because there's plenty of need from consumers for the products (everything from sweets to detergents) that use palm oil.**



Opening Pandora's box: Once pristine rain forest in Borneo, the land on the left has been clear-cut for a palm oil plantation. Everytime people cut into forests, they create "edges," where people come into contact with animals — and their viruses.  
*Frans Lanting/Mint Images/Getty Images*

The year 2016 has also seen a growing awareness on how **biodiversity conservation and indigenous peoples' rights are closely intertwined.** Approximately **370 million indigenous people, 5,000 tribes, reside in more than 90 countries worldwide, within this territory lies 80 percent of the world's biodiversity.** The reason these two things go together is testament to indigenous peoples' lasting relationship with nature – something we can all learn from.

The masterful knowledge many indigenous people have of their environment is well documented and unsurprisingly, many of the world's medicines (<http://www.survivalinternational.org/articles/3172-there-are-medicines-out->



[there-that-i-know-about](#)) originate from tribal people too. Yet, despite the wealth of knowledge and wisdom embedded in forests, they are being destroyed globally at a rate of 50 soccer pitches (<http://www.wri.org/publication/climate-benefits-tenure-costs>) a minute.

A report by the World Resources Institute (<http://www.wri.org/resources/data-visualizations/why-invest-indigenous-lands>) has even concluded that **securing the deserved rights for indigenous communities could be the most economically efficient way to fight climate change**. Investing in forests as carbon stores is five to 42 times more cost-efficient than trying to capture carbon emissions from fuel-guzzling power stations. So, **if rights were to be secured in Bolivia, Brazil, and Colombia we would be 49.7 megatons of carbon dioxide lighter over the next 20 years** – that's the equivalent of taking up to 12.6 million cars off the road annually!

Oil and gas concession overlaps 1.3m hectare "protected area" inhabited by indigenous peoples in "isolation"



'El Cono' in the Sierra del Divisor National Park in the Peruvian Amazon. Photograph: Thomas Muller

**In the year 2017, expectations of protecting more forest and Indigenous peoples' and community conserved territories and areas (ICCAs) are not very favorable**, as some articles of this bulletin suggest. In addition to this, globally, there remains considerable uncertainty about what the **Trump Administration** will actually do in the years to come. Surely, **early indications don't look favorable for tropical rainforests and indigenous peoples**. First and foremost, climate change deniers have strong influence in the administration. Antipathy to science is pervasive and the administration also appears to be openly hostile to foreign aid and multilateralism, which are traditionally important sources of support for rainforests.

**In 2017, the expansion of palm oil plantations will continue to represent a major threat for tropical forest and ICCAs, worldwide.** According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), [global demand](#)



[for palm oil](http://www.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/agriculture/palm_oil/) ([http://www.panda.org/what\\_we\\_do/footprint/agriculture/palm\\_oil/](http://www.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/agriculture/palm_oil/)) is expected to double by 2050 to 240 million tons. The high profitability of the crop is spurring large-scale expansion outside its traditional stronghold in Southeast Asia. In Latin America, **Peru and Ecuador are rapidly scaling up their plantation acreage**, while **Suriname is poised to approve two major palm oil projects**. In West and Central Africa, 2017 also appears to be the year that industrial oil palm finally lives up to the hype.



Oil companies profit from the direction the European Commission is proposing whereby no differentiation is made between biofuels. [Scott & Emily / Flickr]

**This 2017 version of our CALG bulletin contains a new section named “Oil Palms and Palm Oil Updates”.** General information on oil palm development and palm oil are all included here, while specific updates on oil palm expansion in Latin America, Africa and Asia will continue to be listed in the “Regional Topics” section.

In this issue, our new section on oil palms includes an interesting interview to **South African-born British filmmaker Michael Dorgan** on his well-know film documenting the consequences of oil palm production. Particular emphasis is placed on the impact of palm oil production outside of Southeast Asia. Specifically, some articles suggest that **present trend of oil palm expanding onto previously cleared lands, guided by roundtable certifications programs, provides an opportunity for more sustainable development of the oil palm sector** in Latin America. However, we in CALG, do not believe that this is the case, given the well-documented **violations of several RSPO (Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil) members** and the **unwillingness of RSPO itself to uphold its own standards**, due to inefficient complaints mechanisms and limited capacity to impose adequate sanctions to those members which are found guilty of destroying forest, peat lands and indigenous people’s livelihoods.

Dario Novellino an anthropologist from the Center for Biocultural Diversity (CBCD) of the University of Kent poses the question of **what certifications (such as RSPO) can actually do to bring justice to**



**traditional inhabitants** (e.g. communities of hunters-gatherers and shifting swidden cultivators) that have been already relocated to government resettlement camps and/or forcibly moved elsewhere after their land was targeted for oil palm plantations. “I have seen this with my own eyes” claims Novellino “in 1992 I lived with the communities of Sakai in the remote forests of Mandau sub-district in Riau Sumatra. These food self-sufficient and culturally vibrant communities were forcefully removed from their primary peat forests, that is now being managed by the Kuala Lumpur Kepong Berhad (KLK) a Malaysian multinational, and RSPO member. It is rather an insult for indigenous peoples to know that the palm oil being produced in their ancestral territories (from which they have been kicked out) is now being defined as ‘RSPO certified sustainable palm oil’. **No matter how, palm oil that comes from areas where abuses and violence have been committed against indigenous peoples is tainted with blood, and should never be defined as sustainable**” adds Novellino.



The Sakai of Mandau sub district (Riau, Sumatra) were forcefully removed from their land. Copyrights: Dario Novellino

A new study published in the journal [Conservation and Society](http://www.conservationandsociety.org/article.asp?issn=0972-4923;year=2016;volume=14;issue=2;spage=73;epage=85;auiast=Ruysschaert) (<http://www.conservationandsociety.org/article.asp?issn=0972-4923;year=2016;volume=14;issue=2;spage=73;epage=85;auiast=Ruysschaert>) looks at how effective NGOs’ participation in the RSPO scheme truly is. This, and other studies, have supported the view that **the emergence of certifications for global commodities, such as RSPO, can be qualified as a new capitalist instrument** (Fouilleux and Goulet 2012), promoted by dominant economic players (Fouilleux 2013; Oosterveer 2014) and major NGOs (Cheyns 2012; Escobar and Cheyns 2012; Pye 2013), operating at the expense of local people (Ponte *et al.* 2011; Fouilleux 2013; Cheyns 2014).

**Overall, certifications (if rigorously applied) may address some social and some environmental problems associated with palm oil (e.g. traceability through the whole supply chain), but they are unable to address the broader issue of land grabbing, community displacement, massive deforestation that occurred when plantations areas were first established, long before RSPO and POIG (the Palm Oil Innovation Group) had actually been put in place. POIG was set up in 2013, and it**



defines itself as a collective of progressive palm oil companies and brands together with environmental and social NGOs that are working to build on the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil standards and commitments by both demonstrating innovation to implement RSPO existing standards as well as additional critical issues. They plan to do this by assisting in the work of the RSPO, as well as introducing their own innovations. **Greenpeace claim that POIG verification indicators will be used by independent third parties to determine if a palm oil company is protecting forests and peat lands that have high biodiversity, carbon and social values**, while simultaneously upholding the rights of local communities and workers, and improving livelihoods for local communities. Such verification indicators should also ensure that plantations have not been developed on land acquired through expropriations in the national interest (eminent domain) after March 2014. **One is left to wonder what will happen instead to those plantations that have been developed before such date, and what kind of actions will be taken to bring justice to all the victims of agri-business-induced resettlement and relocation.**

Not only Ferrero but several other firms (Procter & Gamble, Cargill, Nestle, Kellogg, Unilever, etc.) using the ingredient, say they buy palm oil certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, which works with producers to reduce the negative impacts of cultivation on the environment. But according to the same company, **Ferrero, began using palm fruit oil, which is 100% certified as sustainable, only in 2015.** This has not prevented Greenpeace-Italy to praise Ferrero for its promise to protect forest. In fact Ferrero is the first company to support the Greenpeace's Palm Oil Innovation Group (<http://poig.org/>) a gathering of palm oil producers, consumer companies and non-governmental organizations, that are said to be committed to protecting forests, peatlands and wildlife – as well preventing exploitation of workers and local communities. **Through POIG not only Ferrero has been 'redeemed' by Greenpeace but also oil palm giants such as Musim Mas (RSPO executive member) that, in the past, has purchased palm oil from the Korean company Korindo that cleared cut one of the most biological richest forest in Papua (Indonesia).** In addition to this the same company is well known for its blatant violations of plantation workers' rights and criminalization of union members. **CALG is concerned that the participation of Ferrero, Musim Mas and other firms in POIG, is going to represent a form of green-washing that will erase, with a clean slate, the 'dark history' of some such companies, re-classifying them as 'responsible' and 'environmentally concerned'.**



Deforestation of primary forest in Papua. Musim Mas purchased palm oil produced by Korindo and is now POIG's member.

According to CALG, **whether Ferrero, the maker of Nutella, is actually one of the most progressive consumer-facing companies when it comes to palm oil sourcing (as Greenpeace claims), will only**



**be proven** after the company makes publically available the satellite maps of the plantations from which they purchase the so-called certified sustainable palm oil oil. Then, with the work of anthropologists, historians and other specialists and by consulting bibliography, archive data and demographic information, it would be possible to determine what kind of vegetation was there (where plantations presently stand) and what indigenous communities inhabit(ed) such areas, how they lived, how is their life today and whether they have been the victims of forced relocation due to land conversion for oil palm business.

As another article in this section suggests: palm oil as currently produced is fundamentally unsustainable. The Globiom report (<https://www.transportenvironment.org/publications/globiom-basis-biofuel-policy-post-2020>) highlights the very high ILUC (Indirect Land Use Change) impact of palm oil production. **Any activity that stimulates additional palm oil production causes a highly adverse climate change impact.** This is not because palm oil cannot be produced sustainably (says the article) but rather because **the level of global demand for additional palm oil is such that it so often leads to the draining of peatland in Malaysia, Indonesia and other tropical countries around the world.** Therefore **the palm oil market cannot be divided into two parts, whereby the certified supply is assumed to be sustainable, and the rest is assumed to shoulder all the negative impacts.** The multiyear longevity of GHG emissions from peatland drainage does not allow this. Traceability is also another concern. **Only one of 14 multinationals surveyed by Greenpeace could trace its palm oil back to the plantation where it was grown.** None could say with certainty that they did not use palm oil from recently deforested land <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21710844-weather-helping-little-despite-tough-talk-indonesias-government-struggling-stem>



Forest and peat fires in Riau, Indonesia. Image: World Resources Institute, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Biofuel originating from palm oil is also an issue of major concern. **At 3 million tonnes per year European palm oil biodiesel accounts for 5% of world palm oil output and 15% of world palm oil growth.** Before 2010 palm oil represented a negligible share in biodiesel use in Europe, whereas, in 2015, 46% of all palm oil imported into Europe was used as fuel for transport, which is a six-fold



**increase since 2010.** Oil companies profit from the direction the European Commission is proposing whereby no differentiation is made between biofuels. 'Good' and 'Bad' biofuels are treated equally. This is why, **EU parliamentarians of the anti-establishment 5-Star Movement** (which is running neck-and-neck with the ruling Democratic Party in Italian opinion polls) - **during a recent consultation at the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), has proposed that palm oil used in biodiesel production (HVO) should not be recognized as contributing to climate and renewable energy targets in the EU and its import should be banned outright** (<http://mirkobusto.net/biodiesel-stop-olio-palma-entro-2020-vittoria-5-stelle-europa/>).



On the other hand, **big exporters countries such as Indonesia are stepping up their efforts to gain recognition from the European Union for a palm oil product certification** amid the ongoing anti-palm oil campaign in Europe on the back of sustainability concerns.

As of now, within Europe as a whole, Italy is at the forefront in the attempt of banning palm oil imports into the country. **The 5-Star Movement has recently presented a draft law that aims to definitively ban the import and use of palm oil use in all Italian industries, from food to cosmetics to biofuel.** Moreover, it has asked the Italian advertising authority to block Ferrero's campaign and fine it for misleading consumers on both health and environmental risks.

Continuous pressure by 5-Star Movement, Italy's main farming association Coldiretti, online food magazine Il Fatto Alimentare ([www.ilfattoalimentare.it/](http://www.ilfattoalimentare.it/)), etc. have all contributed to the decision of many Italian food companies to stop using palm oil. The decision was further corroborated by the outcomes on an important study by the **European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)**. In fact, in May, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) (<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/160503a>) warned that **contaminants in palm oil raise potential health concerns** across the board. The EFSA panel found that the major cancer concern is over glycidyl fatty acid esters or GE, which form during food processing, or when palm oil is refined at temperatures over 393 Fahrenheit. Although the World Health Organization and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization flagged the same potential risk that EFSA had warned of regarding GE, they did not recommend consumers stop eating palm oil. The US Food and Drug Administration also has not banned the use of palm oil in food.



While many food manufacturers (Barilla, Colussi, Galbusera, Balocco, the COOP supermarket chain, etc.) have banned palm oil from their products, Italian food giant Ferrero is fighting back against claims that palm oil, which is used in its Nutella spread, may cause cancer. The hazelnut and chocolate spread, one of Italy's best-known food brands and a popular treat for children <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/food-and-drink/news/these-amazing-nutella-hacks-will-make-your-life-so-much-better/> relies on palm oil for its smooth texture and shelf life. Other substitutes, such as sunflower oil, would change its character, according to Ferrero. **High temperatures are used to remove palm oil's natural red color and neutralize its smell, but Ferrero says it uses an industrial process that combines a temperature of just below 200C and extremely low pressure to minimize contaminants.** The process takes longer and costs 20 percent more than high-temperature refining, Ferrero told Reuters. But it said this had allowed it to bring GE levels so low that scientific instruments find it hard to trace the chemical.



NUTELLA HAS BEEN IMPLICATED IN THIS SCANDAL, BUT MANY PRODUCTS CONTAIN PALM OIL. HEINZTEH/SHUTTERSTOCK

On the other hand, it should also be pointed out that **any move away from palm oil would surely have economic implications not only on Ferrero** but on many other buyers, as it is the cheapest vegetable oil, costing around \$800 (£655) a tonne, compared with \$845 for sunflower oil and \$920 for rapeseed oil, another possible substitute. **Ferrero uses about 185,000 tonnes of palm oil a year, so replacing it with those substitutes could cost the firm an extra \$8-22 million annually, at those prices.** As of now, the company has declined to comment on these calculations.

One article in this section draws an interesting **correlation between massive environmental destruction (as that caused by oil palm expansion) and the cropping up of new fatal infectious diseases.** According to evolutionary biologist Kevin Olival <http://www.ecohealthalliance.org/personnel/dr-kevin-i-olival>, it is really the human impact on the environment that's causing these viruses to jump into people. "Wild animals are now refugees. They have no home. So they come live in our backyards. They pee on our crops. Share our parks and playgrounds. Giving their viruses a chance to jump into us and make us sick" says Olival.





Virologist Kevin Olival of EcoHealth Alliance travels around the world hunting down undiscovered viruses.

*Sanjit Das/Panos Pictures for NPR*

Another article deals with the challenging journey of a consumer trying to get rid of palm oil in his diet and in other products of daily use. The article reveals how - all of us (consumers) - must be aware of the impact our consumption has on nature and the extent to which we must adjust accordingly. **And if we want less monoculture and less virgin forest to be cleared for palm oil plantations, consumers should just make sure that they don't buy products that contain palm oil.**



More articles in this section concern **Greenpeace challenging HSBC** on financing for palm oil companies and what the financial institution has to say about the accusations received.

**Our regional highlight in this bulletin is Ecuador**, where ongoing actions by the **Shuar Arutam** communities aim at preventing the plundering of their land by mining companies. The province of



Morona Santiago, where the Chinese company EXSA Ecuacobres has been given 41k hectares of land for large-scale mining, has been under [a state of exception](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/12/shuar-tribe-face-military-amazon-mining-protests-161228112853484.html) <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/12/shuar-tribe-face-military-amazon-mining-protests-161228112853484.html>

since December 2016. **Military and specialized police forces have been deployed there to protect the company after a group of Indigenous Shuar tried to take over its mining camp.** The take-over erupted in clashes between Indigenous Shuar and security forces, resulting in the death of one police officer. The conflict came after **the military evicted 32 Indigenous Shuar from their homes in August that year, in the community of Nankints,** where the company now operates.



A warrior of Ecuador's Indigenous Shuar community protests against a Chinese copper mine set to be built in the country's Amazon region. (Rodrigo Buendia/AFP/Getty Images)

**The contested area is that of Cordillera del Cóndor and along the banks of the Zamora and Santiago Rivers.** Since 2008, through their own organization, the Shuar Arutam have been asking the National Government (with no success) to begin an institutional dialogue (especially with reference to threat posed by mining to their ancestral territory). **The people complain that a large mining company has been allowed to buy from the state and a few settlers, the land that belongs to them by ancestry.** As a result, more than **38 percent of the Shuar Arutam territory is under concession to large-scale mining:** all the riverbanks of the Zamora and Santiago basins have been granted as concessions for small-scale mining, and a gigantic hydroelectric dam is scheduled to be built. If all these projects will push through, the Shuar Arutam claim that there will be no place left for them to live. This is why, in 2007, the resident Shuar Arutam communities told the company to leave. Now, nine years later, one member of their representing Shuar organization claims that “someone has manipulated the President and convinced him that, before he leaves office, we should be forcibly evicted. When we disagreed with the order, there was a tragic violent incident. We have been blamed for the tragedy of the murder of a policeman, but we did not give orders to kill anyone. Instead of talking with us, the Government ordered thousands of police and soldiers”.





"The Condor probably contains the largest number of endemic species in the country," says Ecuadorean biologist Dr. Juan Guayasamin, who says that the large swathes of still pristine forest in the Condor should be revered and protected as part of Ecuador's natural and cultural heritage.

As of now, entire communities are being victimized and often labeled as 'anti-developers' and, even worse, as 'terrorists'. Presently, representatives of the Governing Council of the Shuar Arutam people are calling upon all the inhabitants of Ecuador and Morona to join them in their demand for peace, to cease the violence and to demand that the Government enters into a serious dialogue with the impacted communities. Meanwhile, members of one of Latin America's most well-known environmental organizations, [Acción Ecológica](http://www.accionecologica.org/editoriales/sosaccionecologica), <http://www.accionecologica.org/editoriales/sosaccionecologica> have been fighting hard for their survival against a controversial attempt by Ecuador's government to shut them down. The move by the government came six days after violence between soldiers, police and indigenous Shuar people opposed to a Chinese-run copper development, Panantza-San Carlos, in the Cordillera del Condor region, and just two days after Acción Ecológica had called for a Truth Commission to be set up to investigate events there. The attempt to close the organization has sparked severe criticism from [UN human rights experts](http://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21065&LangID=S) <http://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21065&LangID=S> and outrage from numerous civil society organizations in Latin America and elsewhere.

The situation of other local communities elsewhere in the country is not any better, such as in the coastal province of Esmeraldas, near Ecuador's northwest Colombian border. Here the plaintiffs—the Afro-descendant community of La Chiquita and the Awá community of Guadualito— have not received any justice after they filed the landmark intercultural constitutional court case against Los Andes and Palesema Oil Palm Companies, on July 23, 2010. They requested repairs in relation to the Rights of Nature, Living Well (*Sumak Kawsay* in Kichwa, *El Buen Vivir* in Spanish), and pluricultural self-determination over territory. They contended that both Los Andes and Palesema Oil Palm Companies were responsible for massive deforestation, widespread biodiversity loss, excessive river pollution, and the subsequent deterioration of health and food sovereignty.





A sweet moment with children of the Awá community of Guadualito in their diverse *chacra* (rotational farm plot). Shade grown cacao is a good alternative to oil palms in the Chocó rainforest ecoregion (Photographed by Hazlewood on Oct 30, 2016)

It is not yet clear why the court case resolved that there would be a transfer of responsibilities from the Los Andes and Palesema Oil Palm Companies to the state, although communities' claims were made against the latter. The two oil palm companies, in fact, have been effectively freed from their economic, moral, social and cultural responsibilities towards the two communities. A month after the judge has made his sentence public—as of Feb. 12, 2017—**Los Andes Oil palm company continues to dump chemicals and boiling waste water into the river and extract palm oil from plantation fruit.**

Meanwhile, **oil drilling continues in Ecuador's southeast Amazon**, where local indigenous communities have been evacuated and destroyed; their leaders persecuted and incarcerated.

There was a time, however, when people really believed that Correa's government would have given a better future to Indigenous people, particularly when a 2008 referendum overwhelmingly approved a new constitution that saw many of their historic demands being represented. The honeymoon quickly ended however, when just a year later a Correa-controlled National Assembly sought to pass new mining and water laws that threatened those very rights they had struggled for.

By 2011, the Center for Economic and Social Rights [found there were 189 Indigenous people in the country accused of terrorism](http://www.abc.com.py/internacionales/en-ecuador-189-indigenas-estan-acusados-de-terrorismo-y-sabotaje-dice-ong-285128.html), <http://www.abc.com.py/internacionales/en-ecuador-189-indigenas-estan-acusados-de-terrorismo-y-sabotaje-dice-ong-285128.html> sabotage or crimes against the security of the state. This included key Indigenous figures for their leading roles in the water law protests. Cases of blatant violation of indigenous peoples' rights by the Ecuadorian state are well known such as [the controversial Mirador](#)



[and San Carlos Panantza projects](http://remezcla.com/culture/indigenous-shuar-fight-military-to-take-back-land-in-ecuador-amazon/) (<http://remezcla.com/culture/indigenous-shuar-fight-military-to-take-back-land-in-ecuador-amazon/>) in the country's southern Amazon, where Indigenous Shuar have been answered with forced evictions, incarceration, and murder for their resistance against mega-mining on ancestral land.

**Since its founding in 1986, the Conaie organization has been a militant defender of Indigenous and campesino rights** – predominantly across Ecuador's rural areas, where neoliberal policies have sought to privatize and exploit natural resources, but – according to Conaie (Territories and Natural Resources of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) leaders, **the Correa government has made it harder for Indigenous people to fight back as a united front.** Severino Sharupi, head of Conaie claims that Correa “made close relations with key and historical leaders who pull a large following in the Indigenous movement, like Ricardo Ulcuango who was appointed ambassador to Bolivia. They betrayed Conaie's position, but you know these important posts pay well,” Sharupi added.

In the present electoral campaign, as one article shows, **Conaie and other indigenous federations such as Ecuarunari and the Confederation of Nationalities and Indigenous Peoples of the Ecuadorian Coast (Conaice) do not share the same views about the political candidates who are running for the next country's presidency.** Surely, these divisions and divergent opinions do not help in building up a unified and cohesive indigenous political front.

Also in neighboring **Colombia**, violence against activists and indigenous peoples' advocates continues. **On January 7, Aldemar Parra Garcia was assassinated by two unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle in broad daylight.** Aldemar was an active member of the rural community of El Hatillo that since 2010 has been involved in a lengthy process of involuntary resettlement with three mining companies. He was a family member of several community leaders who were critical towards a resettlement plan recently proposed by the mining companies. He leaves his wife and three children behind.



Aldemar Parra Garcia, Source: AK Rohstoffe

The murder of Aldemar is not an isolated incident. Unfortunately, **this murder fits a pattern of violence against civil society and their leaders that we see across Colombia and in the mining region of Cesar.** According to the report 'Civil society under Threat' [http://www.facing-finance.org/en/2017/01/another-mining-activists-in-colombia-killed/#\\_ftn1](http://www.facing-finance.org/en/2017/01/another-mining-activists-in-colombia-killed/#_ftn1) **in Cesar at least 200 leaders became victims of threats, assaults and killings during the period 2012-2016.** It is important to point out that all of these victims are social leaders whose efforts are considered by certain sectors of the Cesar population

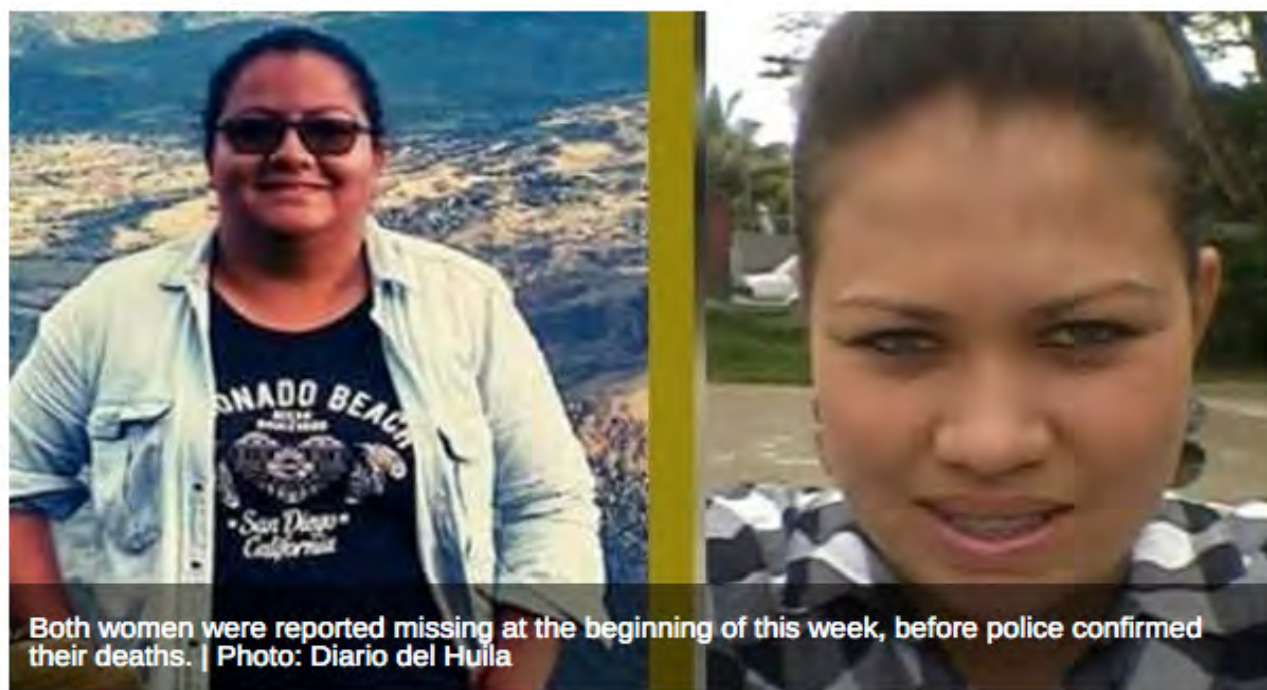
to be critical of the impact of mining activities in the region. Most of these acts are claimed by or carry the signature of neo-paramilitary groups, who claim to defend the interests of the mining companies and other economic actors in the region.

In addition to Aldemar's murder, **another human rights defender has been murdered in Colombia,** According to eyewitnesses, **activist Olmedo Pito Garcia was stabbed by two men who attacked him as he was walking home in the southwestern department of Cauca, one of the regions hardest hit**



**by decades of armed conflict between government forces and guerrilla rebels.** This is the first case of homicide of a social leader in Cauca in the early days of 2017. Last year, **a total of 16 social leaders were killed in the department**, according to information provided by human rights organizations.

In the same department of Cauca, **the bodies of two indigenous women from the community of Purace have been found.** The two women, who were residents of the municipality of La Plata, had been reported missing by their relatives since Tuesday, Nov. 29. **Marly Yuliet Gomez Suarez and Shirley Daniela Lozada, both 23 years old, were found with gun wounds in the head and signs of physical abuse.** The women went missing at a sacred site called Andulbio lagoon, also known as San Rafael lagoon, between 2-3 p.m. The Cauca Regional Indigenous Council released a statement expressing sadness that the deaths could happen "in the middle of the peace process."



Also in the same month of January, **police in the Pacific coast city of Buenaventura announced they had discovered the body of Afro-Colombian human rights activist Emilsen Manyoma, 32, and her partner Joe Javier Rodallega,** who had been missing for several days. A prominent leader in the Bajo Calima region since 2005, Manyoma was an active member of the community network CONPAZ where she was an outspoken critic of right-wing paramilitary groups and the displacement of local by international mining and agribusiness interests. **For the past year, Manyoma played a key role in documenting attacks on human rights leaders in the region as part of the recently created Truth Commission.**





Colombian human rights defender Emilsen Manyoma | Photo: CONPAZ

According to the human rights organization Front Line Defenders, **at least 85 human rights defenders were murdered in Colombia in 2016 alone.** Overall, community leaders keep on reporting a resurgence of paramilitary activity in recent months — including a proliferation of paramilitary graffiti tags, sighting of unidentified armed agents and the circulation of threatening paramilitary pamphlets — which they blame for the systematic attacks on activists. In particular, members of the left-wing **Marcha Patriótica**, a political movement bringing together some 2,000 social organizations, have suffered dozens of targeted attacks. **More than 120 activists affiliated with the movement have been murdered since it was founded in 2012,** prompting leaders to sound alarm over a new political

genocide against its members.



Hundreds of Indigenous people accompany the coffin of Daniel Coicue, a member of the Indigenous Nasa tribe. | Photo: AFP

**Extrajudicial executions of civilians committed by soldiers often take place as "false positives," when the victims are presented as guerrilla fighters fallen in combat in order for the perpetrators to be rewarded promotions or bonuses.** The military strategy

involves murdering civilians and dressing them up in guerrilla clothes to boost the government's body count in the war on the rebels. **More than 3,000 people were killed this way during former President Alvaro Uribe's two terms in office, which were marked by high levels of human rights abuses.** He has been accused of having links to violent right-wing paramilitary groups.



In spite of massive and continuous violence against indigenous peoples, rural communities and their defenders, recently there has been a groundbreaking win for some indigenous communities. **The Colombian Constitutional Court has found in favor of an indigenous peoples' centuries-old fight for their territory, granting the petition for the protection of constitutional rights requested by the Embera Chamí people of the Indigenous Resguardo Cañamomo Lomaprieta, in western Colombia.**

The Resguardo's claim was accepted by the Colombian Constitutional Court, the final court of appeal for constitutional matters in Colombia. **The court ordered that the Resguardo's lands must be delimited and titled within one year, during which time all further permits or formalization of mining activities must be suspended.** Any subsequent mining activities proposed on the delimited territories may only proceed on the basis of the effective participation of the Resguardo.

**"This is a landmark decision for indigenous peoples in Colombia and globally," said Viviane Weitzner of Forest Peoples Programme.** "It recognizes the legitimacy of indigenous self-regulation of subsoil resources within their territories, lifting the label of criminalization of a spiritually, culturally and economically important activity that has been conducted without the use of harmful substances for centuries. The court is calling on the State to do more to protect indigenous territorial rights, by applying international standards around demarcation and titling and ensuring future decision-making includes the Cabildo's free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). We remain concerned however that this decision may increase the risks to Resguardo leaders, some of whom have already suffered a number of recent credible death threats. It is important that the Colombian government ensure that members of the Resguardo are protected in light of this decision, and we urge the State to do everything in its power to ensure the safety of land and human rights defenders involved in this case."



Peru, the cradle of the ancient Incan empire, is battling to protect its wealth of indigenous languages from being overpowered by Spanish, the dominant language since colonial times

, DIGEIBIRA/AFP

approximately 40% is included in an oil and gas concession <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/andes-to-the-amazon/2016/aug/21/national-parks-people-plants-pumas-big-oil> ultimately controlled by a Canadian-headquartered company, Pacific Exploration and Production. Even more alarming is how the park has been divided into different zones by the Management Plan approved in November 2016. Instead of being a "strictly protected zone" because of the almost 15 years-old proposal to establish the Yavari-Tapiche Reserve for indigenous people living in "isolation", the entire north-east part of the park has been categorized as a "special use zone" where the ecosystem, according to Peruvian law, can be "transformed."

In Peru other challenging legal processes are also taking place such as that being pursued by an indigenous federation suing the government over a new national park. **Peru, according to the IUCN, is the country that has established more "protected areas" than any other in 2016.** Undoubtedly its most important conservation achievement in recent years has been the creation of the 1.3m hectare Sierra del Divisor National Park, (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/andes-to-the-amazon/2015/jul/29/peru-stalling-new-national-park-unique-amazon-mountain-range>) although

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/andes-to-the-amazon/2016/aug/21/national-parks-people-plants-pumas-big-oil>



Indigenous people living in “isolation”, as Peruvian law calls them, are extremely vulnerable to contact with third-parties because of their lack of immunological defenses, which can lead to the spread of diseases and fatal epidemics. **The most recently-contacted groups in Peru have been devastated: between 30%-50% of the “Matsigenka-Nantis” are reported to have died since the 1970s, almost 50% of the Nahuas in the 1980s, and approximately 25% of the “Chitonahuas” since the 1990s.**

As indigenous isolated groups are being decimated, Peru is also battling to protect its wealth of indigenous languages from being overpowered by Spanish, the dominant language since colonial times. **"There are four endangered indigenous languages and another 17 that are critically endangered, which is about half the country's indigenous languages,"** said Elena Burga, head of the government's Intercultural, Bilingual and Rural Education Department. **No fewer than 37 indigenous languages have already disappeared, according to official statistics.**

As of now, in Peru, Environmental contamination caused by extractive industries continues to be the main cause of social conflict in the country, and **Peruvian Indigenous and campesinos are currently engaged in fighting 156 mining giants, which they claim are threatening their natural resources and land.** Peru's Minera Antamina has caused the most problems, with conflict in seven of its mining projects across the country, followed by Hudbay Peru with five, Barrick Misquichilca — a subsidiary of Canada-based Barrick Gold Corporation — with four, and Southern Peru also with four.

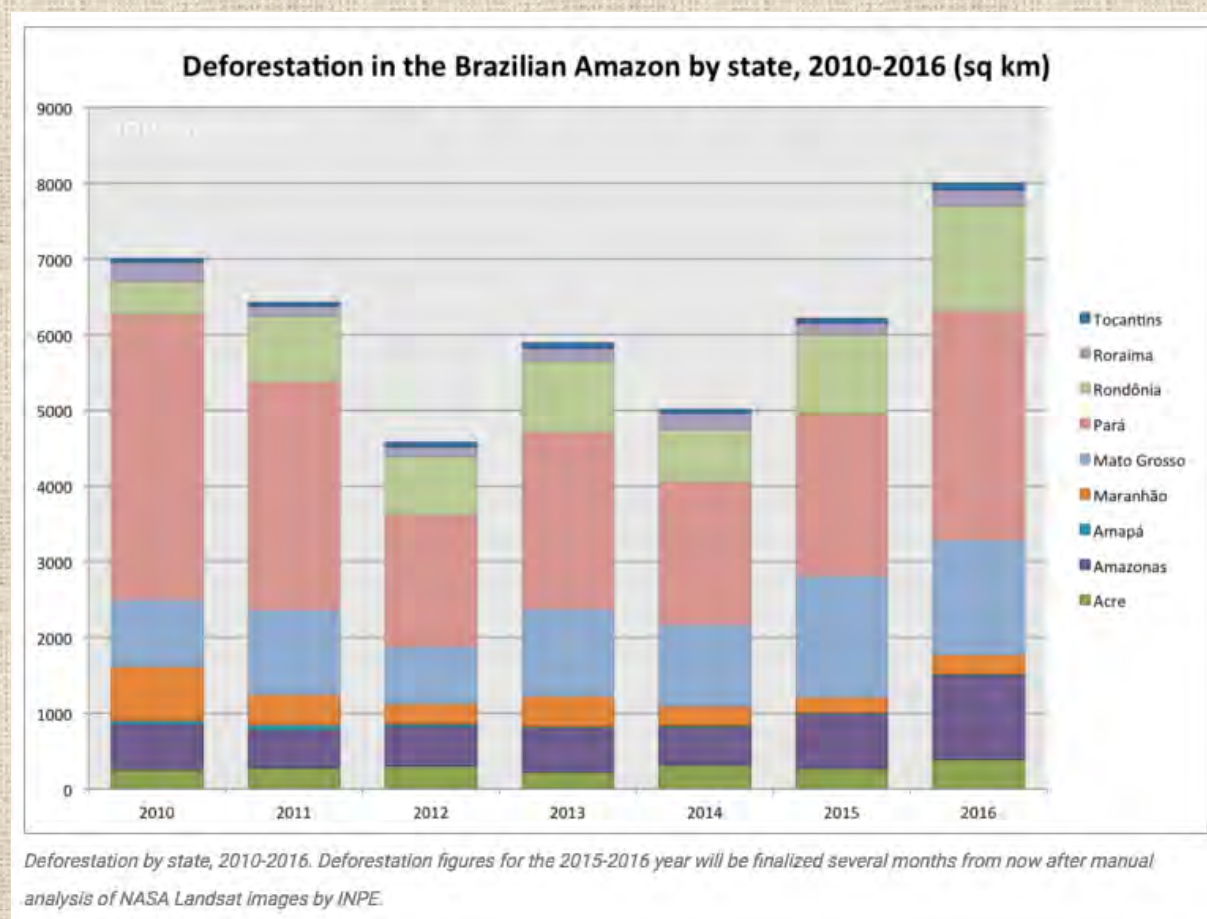


At least three people (<http://www.telesur.tv/english/news/2-Civilians-Die-in-New-Mining-Conflict-in-Peru-20161107-0007.html>) have died and dozens were injured in early November 2016 during a confrontation with police, as a result of a failed dialogue with Consorcio Minero Horizonte over the Bernabe project in the province of Pataz. **During the government of departing President Ollanta Humala, which started in 2011, 50 people died and 750 were injured in clashes between environmental demonstrators and government authorities.**



The mining industry remains one of the primary sources of foreign trade in Peru, although investment in the sector has fallen with the drop in international commodity prices. Peru is the second-largest exporter of copper in the world, with 70 percent of exports in raw form and 30 percent as purified metal.

In Brazil, after a much heralded decade-plus of declining deforestation in the Amazon, the region has now experienced **back-to-back years of sharply increasing forest destruction** (<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/11/brazil-deforestation-in-the-amazon-increased-29-over-last-year/>). For the twelve months ended July 31, 2016, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon rose 75 percent off its 2012 level, which was the lowest since annual record keeping began in 1988. Yet the situation is poised to get worse — potentially much worse. At the tail end of 2016, **Brazil's congress moved to eviscerate environmental regulations** (<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/12/temer-government-set-to-overthrow-brazils-environmental-agenda/>). And acting president Michel Temer has made no secret of his desire to push for **massive infrastructure construction in the Amazon** (<https://news.mongabay.com/series/amazon-infrastructure/>) including dams and highways that threaten to undermine Brazil's historic progress in curbing forest loss.



Grappling with Brazil's longest recession since the 1930s (<http://money.cnn.com/2016/10/04/news/economy/brazil-economy-jobs-crisis/>) government officials are under enormous pressure to combat rising unemployment, address widespread corruption and control inflation. Yet two recent bills designed to solve the problem are misguided attempts that could degrade the environment, diminish human rights and hurt the economy. The bills were not subject to public debates, hearings or deliberative sessions, either by Congress or civil society. The first proposes an overhaul of Brazil's environmental licensing laws, regulations that require companies to undergo an environmental evaluation before they begin operations in order to minimize detrimental impacts. The overhaul would make licensing more



flexible for states, allow select corporations to provide their own licenses, exempt some agricultural activities from the licensing process altogether, and exempt financial institutions from the liability of their investments, among other modifications.



Through the second government decree, issued in mid-January, **Brazil's government announced major changes to the procedure by which it formally demarcates indigenous lands** — a move applauded by the *ruralistas* industrial agriculture lobby and large landowners, but greeted with alarm by indigenous land rights activists. **The federal decree, known as Ordinance 80, shifts decisions made regarding the recognition of indigenous territory boundaries to the Ministry of Justice, taking those decisions out of the hands of the National Indian Foundation (Funai), which had previously demarcated indigenous lands based on technical research and anthropological analysis.**

**Brazil's population includes 900,000 indigenous people, of whom 517,000 live on officially recognized indigenous lands. About 13 percent of the country's territory is set aside as indigenous lands — 98.5 percent of it within the legally designated Amazon region.** The demarcation process has been fraught with controversy, and demarcation of indigenous territory has been delayed for years by Funai, and in some places, for decades. Ordinance 80 is only the most recent effort by the Temer government (sometimes conducted in secret) to do an end run around the current Funai demarcation process, possibly in order to exert more control over it.

It is expected that indigenous land rights activists will continue in their opposition to Ordinance 80. MPF deputy attorney general Maia said that the MPF will ask that the government revoke the new ordinance, but is waiting for an audience with the Ministry of Justice before proceeding with any action.

A recent World Resources Institute report (<http://www.wri.org/publication/climate-benefits-tenure-costs>) quantifies the economic value of securing land rights for the indigenous communities who live in the Amazon basin. Indigenous Peoples tend to be good protectors of forests— **WRI's research found that from 2000 to 2012, the average annual deforestation rates inside Brazil's tenure-secure indigenous lands in the Amazon were 2.5 times lower than in similar untitled forests.** It also found that tenure-secure



indigenous lands in the Brazilian Amazon are worth \$523 billion to \$1.165 trillion over the next 20 years, when factoring in global climate change mitigation benefits and other ecosystem services like clean water, soil retention, biodiversity and tourism revenue.

Supporters of the proposed legislation might ask, “What about foregone income from alternative, high-value land use, such as agriculture or cattle pastures?” **WRI research finds that even when considering these missed opportunities, the total economic benefits to securing indigenous land rights in Brazil outweigh the costs of doing so.**



*Dancing Mundurucu warriors. The Mundurucu have battled for years with the Brazilian government to get their lands formally demarcated.*

*Photo by Mauricio Torres*

As rural violence in Latin America's largest country hits its worst levels in a decade, large farm owners in Brazil are forming private militias to attack land rights campaigners, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW) campaigner, citing the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). **At least 54 people were killed in rural land conflicts in Brazil in 2016, this is highest level of rural bloodshed in Brazil since 2003 when 71 people were murdered, the CPT said.**

In neighboring **Guyana**, indigenous people complain that a continuing prohibition on joint requests for land titles has led to the fragmentation of their collective lands and has weakened joint decision-making on land use. This situation is discussed in recent study conducted by the Amerindian People's Association (APA) in 42 Indigenous settlements across regions 1 and 2. As a result, the study recommends that the government should amend the 2006 Amerindian Act to allow for joint title requests and also establish an independent national tribunal to hear the indigenous peoples' claims and grievances about land, territorial and resource rights. The study was conducted between 2012 and 2015 by the APA and its partner, the Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), through direct engagements with communities. Many of the people who participated in the study consider that individual land titles are undermining indigenous culture and way of life.



Other recent cases of extra-judicial killing come from **Mexico**. **Isidro Baldenegro López was shot dead on January 15 in the Coloradas de la Virgen community** in the Guadalupe and Calvo municipality of Chihuahua state. The murder quickly drew attention to collusion between drug trafficking cartels and the illegal timber industry, which López was known for speaking out against. "Tribal figures [cacicazgos] involved with the illegal timber trade and organized crime are the material and intellectual authors" of the crime, a human rights activist told [BBC Mundo](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-38687131) (<http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-38687131>) under condition of anonymity as a safety measure. **For years, criminal groups have used illegal logging in the region as a means of laundering the dirty money obtained from marijuana and opium poppy cultivation.** According to the Proceso correspondent Patricia Mayorga, the illegal trade is not only used to generate profit from the wood sales but also to build houses for those who control the plantations and the drug trafficking, reported [La Sierra](http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/green-life/murder-mexican-environmental-activist-isidro-baldenegro-occurred-amid-atmosphere) (<http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/green-life/murder-mexican-environmental-activist-isidro-baldenegro-occurred-amid-atmosphere>)



*Indigenous environmental activist Isidro Baldenegro López. 2005 Goldman Prize ceremony. All rights reserved.*

**López attempted to defend the Sierra Tarahumara for years.** But the area where the states of Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua converge is one of the main marijuana and poppy producing regions in [Mexico](http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news) (<http://www.insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news>). This has created fertile ground for the [illegal timber trade](http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2016/10/14/1122301) (<http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2016/10/14/1122301>) as well as growing violence and corruption in the area. **The murder of Baldenegro López is the latest illustration of the uphill struggle for the protection of the Mexican environment, which has been challenged by the illegal extraction of resources and criminal groups operating in the region.** López' path followed that of his father, who was murdered in 1986 by criminals involved in illegal logging. Despite the recognition from



international organizations that his environmental activism brought him (López [received the Goldman Prize](http://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/isidro-baldenegro/) in 2005) the activist's life ended brutally.

The death comes on the heels of the UN calling for more human rights protections. UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders [Michel Forst](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/SRHRDefendersIndex.aspx) has [condemned](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21102&LangID=E) López's execution. "We condemn the outrageous and senseless killing of environmental defender Isidro" says Forst. "It is a tragic reminder of the dangers and risks facing environmental and indigenous defenders in Chihuahua".

Also in **Honduras**, the lives of Environmental and Human Rights Defenders are constantly under threat. **Although Honduras is one of the smallest countries in the world, it boasts one of the highest murder rates per capita** ([http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5?year\\_high\\_desc=true](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5?year_high_desc=true)). Human rights defenders, many of them women, pushing for better conditions in these industries and beyond, often find themselves in the crosshairs of the violence. Miriam Miranda, a human rights defender from the African-indigenous Garifuna community says "We can't say that we are superwomen. The fear exists, but what is important is to not let the fear paralyse us and to keep moving forward. For me, my identity and spirituality have been very important. From a cultural and spiritual perspective, our fight is a basic, fundamental one."



Photographed by Daniella Zalcman.

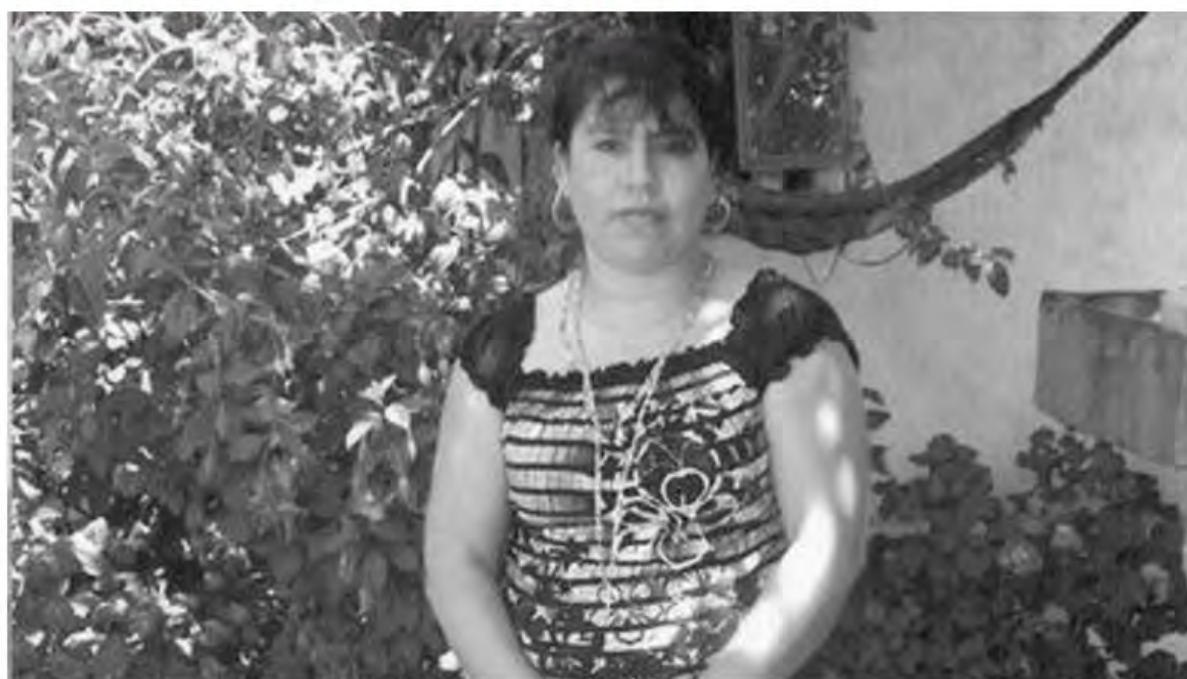
As the coordinator of the [Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras](http://www.ofraneh.org/ofraneh/index.html) (OFRANEH), Miranda is constantly challenging the business interests that threaten to make her community disappear. **Drug traffickers have made Garifuna communities**



**along the coast violent battlegrounds for routes and territory.** Major corporations want to build beach resorts in the villages the Garifuna have called home for centuries. Low-wage factories making clothes for export to Europe and the U.S. exploit workers, and plantations growing palm oil for cosmetics and food violently take over entire towns (<http://projects.huffingtonpost.com/projects/worldbank-evicted-abandoned/honduras-international-finance-corp-backed-palm-oil-producer>) to plant more of the cash crop.

Also **Guatemala** is still one of the deadliest countries in the world for environmental activists. **On 16 January, Guatemalan, environmentalist Laura Leonor Vasquez Pineda was shot dead in the southeastern department of Jalapa.** She was a fierce opponent of mining near the El Escobal silver mine owned by the Canadian company Tahoe Resources. Police said she was shot in the head by a group of unknown men who raided her home during the night. She was also a member of the Committee for the Defense of Life and Peace in San Rafael Las Flores. **The area near the El Escobal silver mine has been a scene of conflict since the mine was established in 2007. Opponents of the mine, mainly Xinka people, have held numerous peaceful protests that have been met with violence from mine guards and police.** Residents near El Escobal depend on agriculture and their lands have been affected by the mining activity. In 2013, Tahoe Resources was granted a 25-year mining license, and villagers conducted a referendum in which they expressed their opposition.

defender, Laura Leonor Vásquez



However, very recently, **seven Guatemalan men has won an appeal against Tahoe Resources Inc in a Canadian court, which ruled that their lawsuit accused the miner's private security guards to have shot them, can proceed in British Columbia.** "There is some measurable risk that the appellants will encounter difficulty in receiving a fair trial against a powerful international company whose mining interests in Guatemala align with the political interests of the Guatemalan state," ruled the court. On the other hand, according to Matt Eisenbrandt, Legal Director of the Canadian Centre for International Justice "today's landmark ruling shows that Canadian courts are open to victims of abuses linked to Canadian companies operating abroad. Despite a lack of regulation by the Canadian



government, we hope these recent developments in the courts signal an end to corporate impunity for human rights violations,” Eisenbrandt said.

While opposition to extractive industries in Latin America is responsible for a considerable number of violent death amongst opposing activists, the Catholic church in **El Salvador** has recently called for mining ban Archbishop Jose Luis Escobar Alas said that **the country's mining law is so obsolete that it makes El Salvador especially vulnerable to exploitation. In October 2016, El Salvador celebrated a victory in international arbitration against a multinational mining company.** Pac Rim Cayman had demanded \$250 million for potential profits lost when the government did not grant it a license to mine gold. Australia-based OceanaGold, which purchased Pac Rim Cayman in 2013, was ordered to pay the government's \$8 million in legal fees. **Other proposals to ban mining have been introduced to the legislature, but conservative parties have kept them from advancing.**

Also in **Argentina** the struggle for land is being carried out by indigenous communities facing increasing poverty and much violence being perpetrated against them. **On January 10, 2017 Argentine armed forces opened fire on a community of Mapuche indigenous people in the Chubut region fighting to reclaim ancestral lands currently in the hands of the multinational corporation Benetton.** According to local news, close to 200 gendarme guards blocked Highway 40 and proceeded to attack the community of Lof en Resistencia del Departamento de Cushmanen, which comprises fewer than two dozen adults and five children.

**The attack left most of the community residents injured, two in a critical state. The armed forces ransacked the main house where the women and children were hiding, and detained them. At least ten members of the community were arrested and nothing has been heard from them since.** Among the little news available about the events were reports of harassment and physical abuse of the women and children.



Banners at the Lof en Resistencia community with slogans that read “Productive recovery of the Lof en Resistencia” and “Anti-terrorism law is terrorism”. Photo: Marta Music, used with permission.



**This brutal intervention constitutes a violation of Argentine law 26894 on the possession and property of land, which prohibits any eviction of indigenous people until November 2017.** It has been severely [condemned](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr13/5477/2017/en/) (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr13/5477/2017/en/>) by Amnesty International, which called for “comprehensive and impartial investigations into the acts of violence” and published a list of actions which can be taken to pressure the Argentine government. A petition entitled “basta de repression al pueblo Mapuche” (enough repression of the Mapuche people) is currently in circulation.

**Lof en Resistencia is one of many indigenous communities in the Chubut region trying to reclaim ancestral lands currently in the hands of multinational corporations such as Benetton, Lewis, CNN and The North Face.** The story has received little local media coverage since the start of the occupation in March 2015. More alarming is the lack of international coverage, as these events occur in the context of a complex global struggle that pits indigenous people against multinational corporations and extractive industries throughout the world.

This particular David-and-Goliath battle features a handful of indigenous people on one side and the Benetton Group on the other. **The Italian textile giant, better known for its marketing campaigns promoting human rights, peace and ethnic equality than its controversial possession of 900,000 hectares of Patagonian land,** has been the subject of a few scandals in the past. In 2002, the company was responsible for the [violent eviction of the Mapuche community of Santa Rosa Leleque](http://www.ipsnews.net/2007/02/argentina-patagonia-to-the-highest-foreign-bidder/), (<http://www.ipsnews.net/2007/02/argentina-patagonia-to-the-highest-foreign-bidder/>) which sparked a wave of international indignation.

In [a position statement](http://www.benettongroup.com/media-press/press-releases-and-statements/position-statement-claims-by-the-native-argentinean-population-mapuche/) (<http://www.benettongroup.com/media-press/press-releases-and-statements/position-statement-claims-by-the-native-argentinean-population-mapuche/>) issued by the Benetton Group in December 2010 regarding the occupation of the Santa Rosa Leleque community, the company said it “found itself unwittingly involved” in a “historic problem relating to the creation of the Argentinean state in the 19th century and its relationship with the native populations who lived there before the birth of the state.”

Legally, the issue is a real jigsaw puzzle. While the company was probably aware of the historical circumstances under which the Argentinean Southern Land Company Ltd came to possess the land, **can the Benetton Group really be held accountable? What about the property rights Benetton is brandishing in the courts? On the other hand, article 75 (subsection 17) of the Argentine National Constitution clearly recognizes the pre-existence of indigenous people in Argentina and guarantees their possession of lands they traditionally occupied.** Argentina has also ratified the ILO Convention 169, as well as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, guaranteeing indigenous people essential constitutional rights. According to Human Rights Watch and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs however, Argentina hasn’t respected either piece of international legislation.

The issue also goes beyond mere legality. Benetton [bought the 900,000-hectare parcel in 1991 for 80 million dollars. The value of that land has since increased tremendously](http://www.lepoint.fr/economie/les-indiens-mapuche-contre-l-empire-benetton-10-02-2011-1296773_28.php) ([http://www.lepoint.fr/economie/les-indiens-mapuche-contre-l-empire-benetton-10-02-2011-1296773\\_28.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/economie/les-indiens-mapuche-contre-l-empire-benetton-10-02-2011-1296773_28.php))

**It is inconceivable to think the Italian company would easily give it back to the Mapuche, which means the land would have to be bought back by the Argentinean government with taxpayers’ money, something to the people in the region are firmly opposed.**

In **Chile**, six hundred kilometers (360 miles) north of Santiago, the National Humboldt Penguin Reserve reverberates with the braying of 26,000 Humboldt penguins — around 80 percent of the



species' entire population. Sea otters and migrating blue whales glide through the waves close to colonies of nesting seabirds. **This global biodiversity hotspot, part of a cluster of protected islands near the fishing community of Punta de Choros, now faces an unwelcome newcomer: The Dominga megaproject, which includes two massive open-pit mines, a commercial port and a desalination plant.** With construction slated to begin as early as March, environmental groups and local fishermen are racing to stop Chile's latest "sacrifice" to industry.



Led by Andes Iron, the Dominga copper and iron mines directly threaten the region's unique land species, including the fox-like *culpeo* and the *guanaco*, a caramel-colored llama relative. The project also comes packaged with a desalinization plant on the coast and a large-scale port that will strengthen the region's trade connections with Santiago and other major cities, and will likely mobilize additional industrial development. **Fishers submitted 400 public comments opposing Dominga being supported by local NGOs which gave them support for writing these comments, and assisted them with travel to the civil consultation venue.**

Moving the **North America** our first article is dedicated to the ongoing first nations struggle against DAPL, at standing rock in North Dakota. **In the wake of President Donald Trump's announcement that he would resume construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, indigenous organizers, tribal leaders and Providence community members protested the controversial pipeline in front of Citizens Bank on February 8.** Demonstrators argued that the DAPL would threaten area access to clean water, violate Native American tribes' — specifically the Sioux tribe's — treaty rights by unfairly impinging on tribal land and cultivating corporate greed at the expense of civilian welfare. The protest was organized the day of an announcement that the Army Corps of Engineers would grant the final permission necessary to begin legal construction of the pipeline. **Trump's revival of the pipeline does not come as a surprise. As early as December, he said that he supported completing the pipeline, which spans four states and may carry as many as 550,000 barrels of oil per day to Illinois from its starting point in North Dakota.**

Today, many first nation representatives feel that **the struggle in North Dakota by the Standing Rock Sioux has awakened the consciousness of indigenous peoples across the country.**



On US east coast, the Ramapough are working with other indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois) Confederacy, to protect against depredations threatened by the Pilgrim Pipeline, which is proposed to carry oil from those same Bakken fields in North Dakota through Mahwah on a route taking it from Albany to a New Jersey refinery at Linden. The Ramapough Lenape Nation is part of the great Lenape nation that populated broad swaths of what are now the Middle Atlantic States, from Connecticut to Maryland, when the first Europeans sailed across the ocean to seize land they had lived on since time immemorial.



Photo credit: Marire Longo

Despite centuries of genocidal exploitation of the land and peoples, across the United States, the Ramapough – recognized by the state of New Jersey as an indigenous nation – have survived and have no intention of going anywhere anytime soon. The people have expressed their cultural and collective rights on a 13.5 acre piece of riverfront land they have owned since 1986 in Mahwah Township. But under the guise of enforcing zoning codes, non-indigenous Mahwah leaders are trying to force Ramapough off their land by claiming that tents and other temporary structures they use on our riverfront for ceremonial purposes somehow rise to the level of permanent structures requiring permits. The selective enforcement imposed on legally protected Ramapough activities ranges from sending police officers to demand removal of tents and other pop-up structures to disregarding serious hate-crime allegations emerging from the theft of ceremonial logs on Ramapough land and the carving of swastikas on others. **The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection rejected Mahwah's arguments that the temporary structures threatened to exacerbate flooding concerns and that the Ramapough's bringing in mulch to stabilize the land was impermissible.** That is why the American Indian Law Alliance and the New Jersey Chapter and Environmental Justice Committee of the National Lawyers Guild – along with local and national organizations championing



religious freedom, indigenous rights and environmental protection – have joined with the Ramapough to resist compliance with summonses issued by Mahwah.

**As Trump's campaign promises to revive coal industry,** recently the House Republicans voted to overturn a regulation meant to protect U.S. waterways from coal mining operations on. The measure will now move to the Senate, where GOP leaders are expected to quickly follow suit. Lawmakers in both houses, have also announced bills to block the [stream protection rule](https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-stream-protection-rule-safeguard-communities-coal-mining), (<https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-finalizes-stream-protection-rule-safeguard-communities-coal-mining>) an update to regulations that the Department of Interior finalized toward the end of President **Barack Obama's** tenure (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/topic/barack-obama>). The update overhauled requirements for coal mining operations in order "to avoid mining practices that permanently pollute streams, destroy drinking water sources, increase flood risk and threaten forests." The stream protection rule mandates testing and monitoring of waterways before, during and after mining operations, and requires companies that have used controversial practices like mountain top removal mining to restore land to its "previous condition" after operations are finished. It updates regulations that were more than three decades old. **This and other similar legislative moves counter against the interests not only of First Nations people but of civil society as a whole.**

**Where capital and State fail, the first people of North America may lead the way forward to what is right for the planet and its inhabitants.** Although peaceful resistance and peaceful counter-action by First Nation people is continuously being weakened. This is also the case of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, at Oak Flat, a desert landscape and 90-minute drive outside Phoenix (Arizona). **Members of the San Carlos Apache Tribe revere the federally owned land as sacred.** Environmentalists consider it a sanctuary for wildlife and vegetation. Climbers, hikers and campers gravitate to Oak Flat for outdoor recreation. However, **in December 2014, Congress passed and President Obama signed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, which authorized Resolution, a Phoenix-based affiliate of foreign mining companies Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton, to perform mining operations in Oak Flat in exchange for other land in Arizona.** Environmentalists and the tribe remain opposed to a mine, which Resolution said it is needed because it would create jobs, boost Arizona's economy, and copper is "a key ingredient in wind and solar energy." Company leaders propose exchanging eight land parcels across Arizona for mining Oak Flat.



Photo by Bri Cossavella/Cronkite News

Members of the San Carlos Apache Tribe set up a camp near the entrance of Oak Flat campground showing they oppose a proposed copper mine.

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Wendsler Nosie Sr., councilman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe, said that "in ancient times as well as today, references to Oak Flat can be heard in our songs, rituals, teachings and language," he said. "Understand that any land base is important because there's purpose to each of them, but Oak Flat is everything that makes us who we are." He called the mine the "genocide of our religion."



The opening article on **Canada** is a **review of PM Trudeau's relationship with Indigenous Peoples in Canada over the past years**. When he wrote his **mandate letter** (<http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-indigenous-and-northern-affairs-mandate-letter>) to the newly-minted Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Carolyn Bennett, he said **“no relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples.”** This came just before he was to take on his first year in office. At the time, he earned a lot of public praise with this inclusive language, his plans for policy reforms and his assurances that things were going to change in Canada.

However, the article concludes that **First Nation people have only seen minor shifts in the political landscape that are overshadowed by the column of projects that were approved despite nationwide demonstrations calling for these projects to be stopped**. Of course, Trudeau did pull through on some of his promises to indigenous communities, like an increase in funding and the launch of the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women. But it is what lies beyond these promises that concerns indigenous people.

**The body that represents Canada's 50,000 or so Inuit is telling the Justin Trudeau government to quit paying lip service and get to work entrenching Aboriginal rights into Canadian law.** In a position paper called “Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada,” released Jan. 24, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami says **Trudeau and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett have not lived up to their promise to entrench those international rights in Canada.**



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau discusses a new Inuit-to-Crown relationship with Natan Obed, the president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and other Inuit leaders at ITK's offices in January 2016, almost exactly one year ago today. The national Inuit body is now calling on the Trudeau government to fulfill its promise to entrench the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canadian law. (PHOTO BY ADAM SCOTTI/PMO)



Interestingly enough, very recently, Justin Trudeau's government tried to stop Ontario Superior Court Justice Edward Belobaba from issuing a ruling promised for February 15, 2017 on the liability of Canada for Ontario Indigenous children's loss of cultural identity during the Sixties Scoop. **The Sixties Scoop era from 1965 to 1984 placed 16,000 indigenous children from Indian-reserves in Settler foster homes. Plaintiffs in the \$1.3 billion lawsuit claims that the Settler government's foster care policy harmed children's identity.**

More importantly, in December 2016 Trudeau's government claimed that determinants of aboriginal culture or identity were too vague to render any protection obligation on the part of Canada legally enforceable. **Canada admitted in government arguments that at-risk children likely suffered harm from loss of their indigenous identities.** However, the government argued against their complicity in harming children's identity because it had no "duty of care" toward indigenous children. Provincial confidentiality provisions prevented disclosure of the identities of a child's biological parents who were usually Status Indians under federal authority.

Clearly, **the Sixties Scoop is a legacy of Canada's IRS policy that former Prime Minister Stephen Harper admitted in the 2008 *Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools, on behalf of the Government of Canada* was used "to kill the Indian in the child".** So, there are two prime ministers in a row that admitted Canadian complicity in cultural genocide that began with the IRS policy, leads to the Sixties Scoop policy, and even continues today in current problems in Ontario's foster care system.



Quinton Sault, 19, dances during the opening of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation annual powwow on their reserve near Hagersville, Ont., Aug. 27, 2016. "The fact the indigenous population is the youngest demographic group in Canada offers opportunity to support change in a large generation of young people that could cascade forward into the generations to come," write Len Flett with Nicole Letourneau. (JESSE WINTER/ TORONTO STAR)



This CALG bulletin also wishes to honor the memory of **Arthur Manuel, a long-time outspoken indigenous leader in British Columbia, who dies on 11 January died at age 65.** The former chief of Neskonlith First Nation near Merritt, and former elected head of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, founded the Indigenous Network on Economies and Trade and was one of the leading critics of Canada's policies towards First Nations. Manuel was from a family of indigenous activists. His father, George Manuel, was president of the National Indian Brotherhood and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. Manuel's sister is renowned indigenous filmmaker Doreen Manuel, who teaches and coordinates the Indigenous Independent Digital Filmmaking program at Capilano University. And his daughter Kanahus Manuel is herself a leading figure in Secwepemc activism — particularly after the Imperial Metals tailings pond collapse at Mount Polley Mine. Most recently, **Arthur Manuel also joined the Standing Rock Sioux encampment in the U.S.,** and last year, he co-authored the book *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake Up Call*.



CONTRIBUTED/FACEBOOK

Arthur Manuel, left, joined the Standing Rock Sioux encampment against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 with his daughter Kanahus Manuel, right.

Other interesting articles on Canada, in addition to the reflection of Arthurs Manul on the relationship between the Canadian State and indigenous people, are found in the section of our bulletin named “Online Articles and Web Links”.

Human Rights situation in **Asia** has seen **a negative record in 2016**, a year characterized by the promotion of extrajudicial killings and the failure of some Asian countries to protect its vulnerable groups. This fact has been revealed by the annual report of Human Rights Watch. In some countries, like the Philippines and China, ‘the strong leaders have imposed their authority to the detriment of



the government, that was unable to respond to their actions, as rulers of the law, guaranteeing the prosperity and security of the state', showed the 687 pages report of HRW. **The report details cases of arrest or even physical elimination of governments' critics, executions, religious and racial discrimination, censorship of the press and other such abuses that contravene the Human Rights.** The document noted the unprecedented level of extrajudicial executions in the campaign against drug traffickers in the Philippines and eliminating the state's critics in Malaysia. Moreover, other concerns include cases of murder and imprisonment against dissidents in Cambodia, in the light of local elections this year and the parliamentary elections in 2018, the failure of the Indonesia's authorities to ensure the protection of minority's rights and the harassment of Human Rights activists in Vietnam.



Kristine Joy Sailog, a 12-year old girl shot dead by unidentified gunmen, is laid to rest on Dec. 29 in the province of Laguna. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said he was sorry about 'collateral damage' brought about by the government's war on illegal drugs. (Photo by Vincent Go)

Our chapter on **Southeast Asia** starts as usual with **the Philippines**. As an introductory article points out, Southeast Asia is in the grip of a biodiversity crisis. Even as new species are found, the region is under serious threat with some places projected **to lose up to 98% of their rainforests in nine years**.

It's also thought to be the

world's most [threatened region for mammals](http://science.sciencemag.org/content/322/5899/225) (<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/322/5899/225>). The region contains 20% of the [planet's vertebrate and plant species](https://unu.edu/publications/articles/unraveling-the-drivers-of-southeast-asia-biodiversity-loss.html#info) (<https://unu.edu/publications/articles/unraveling-the-drivers-of-southeast-asia-biodiversity-loss.html#info>) and the world's third-largest tropical forest. Sadly, the region's fragile biodiversity is frequently forgotten by the global media. It also suffers lower publishing rates than other tropical regions for ecology and biodiversity research. It's perhaps no surprise, then, that Southeast Asia has some of the highest rates of deforestation on the planet, having lost [14.5% of forests in the last 15 years](http://www.pnas.org/content/108/12/5127.short) (<http://www.pnas.org/content/108/12/5127.short>). Some areas, such as the Philippines, have lost up to [89% of their original forest cover](http://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/archive/Philippines.htm) (<http://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/archive/Philippines.htm>). This loss is rendered especially stark using recent advances in satellite imagery, such as Google Earth time-lapse, which shows that **many regions have been transformed from pristine forest to agriculture within the last decade or two**. Forest loss is one of the major drivers of species decline in the region, and pulp-paper, rubber and oil palm production are the main drivers of forest clearance. **Southeast Asia exports 86% of the world's palm oil and 87% of the world's natural rubber**. The areas where these grow are [projected to expand](#) by over 4.3 million to 8.5 million hectares to meet demand by 2024.

**New maps prepared by CIFOR reveals how much terrain has changed on the island of Borneo.** CIFOR scientist David Gaveau, who developed the atlas, said, "The tool is an open platform for researchers, advocacy groups, journalists and anyone interested in deforestation, wildlife habitats and corporate actions." Incorporating 40 years of maps of Borneo (the world's third largest island), the tool reveals both the forest remaining and what is being reshaped due to degradation and extraction industries. With the ability to search by oil palm or pulpwood concessions, and view the locations of intact peatland, as well as determine the speed with which forest is converted to



plantation, the atlas offers the first significant opportunity to distinguish companies that are avoiding deforestation to a large degree. The data provided by the atlas is free to download, and informs whether a particular oil palm concession is certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)- the organization that implements a global standard for sustainability in the palm oil industry.



In the Philippine President, Rodrigo Duterte has identified oil palm development as one of the key industries that, according to him, could boost the country's economy. He has indicated both Palawan and Mindanao as the new frontiers for oil palm expansion. The former is also known as the 'last frontier' for its dense forest and rich biodiversity. Because of its unique features, Palawan was declared a Man & Biosphere Reserve in the 90s. At least 9,000 hectares have already been cleared and several companies are seeking to develop thousands of hectares each. The renewed rush for land in the Philippines follows a [statement by President Duterte](http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/11/13/1643291/philippines-opens-doors-malaysia-palm-oil-production) (<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/11/13/1643291/philippines-opens-doors-malaysia-palm-oil-production>) that he welcomes foreign investment in palm oil, made during a state visit to Malaysia in November 2016. Subsequent announcements have pointed towards vast investments in palm oil plantations. Philippine Trade Secretary [Ramon Lopez](http://news.abs-cbn.com/business/11/10/16/malaysia-eyes-palm-oil-imports-from-philippines-trade-dept) (<http://news.abs-cbn.com/business/11/10/16/malaysia-eyes-palm-oil-imports-from-philippines-trade-dept>) said Malaysian businessmen are planning to develop at least 80,000 hectares, with the possibility of expanding to 300,000. Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) director general Charito Plaza said the **Malysian company Alif** is looking to invest \$1 billion for the project that would require **at least 128,000 hectares of land in Agusan Del Sur**. She further claims that oil palm plantations in Agusan will be using ancestral domain areas, and that indigenous people already signed a contract or MOU to allow their territories to be converted to special ecozones for the palm oil industry. **It is, however, very doubtful whether Alif has undergone a proper Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) procedures**



and have complied, therefore, with the certification of pre-condition as defined in section 59 of the IPRA Law (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act o RA 8371).

Pressure from agribusiness firms is increasing at an alarming rate and this is why CALG, in partnership with Rainforest Rescue, has launched an international campaign calling to stop oil palm expansion in Palawan. The petition has already reached almost 140,000 signatures online. **The petition is still open for signing on this link:** <https://www.rainforest-rescue.org/petitions/1089/we-need-our-land-not-oil-palms>



The indigenous Pala'wan families cultivate fruit and vegetables in small forest gardens (© CALG)

Recently **CALG** has also sent an open letter to newly elected **DENR (Department of Environment and natural Resources) secretary, Regina Lopez**, requesting her to ensure a strict environmental scrutiny of all existing oil palm plantations rather than 'no-red tapes' as the Philippine Palm Oil Development Council Inc. (PPDCI) and oil palm investors are requesting.

See letter: <https://intercontinentalcry.org/will-help-us-save-palawan-oil-palm-rush/>

In our opinion, **what DENR should do, is to place all environmental compliance certificates (ECCs) of existing oil palm companies to strict auditing and reviewing.** All those oil palm companies that have illegally cleared land and forest should be stopped immediately. **In short, DENR should not hesitate to shut down all oil palm operations and other forms of agribusiness that are involved in land grabbing and that have been found to have violated environmental, health and safety laws and regulations, as well as indigenous peoples' right, as stated in the IPRA law. '**

**CALG** believes that if Pres. Duterte administration has been able to crackdown mining oligarchies, in the same way, he should not allow oil palm oligarchies to go ahead with their plans. After all, palm oil is mainly produced as a commodity for foreign export and not for local consumption, moreover it is an agricultural model that is in antithesis with food sovereignty and self-sufficiency and



that contributes to climate change and the privatization of natural resources by large corporations whereby the former are being taken away from traditional users and put under the control of big companies. **We in CALG believe that if rural poverty is to be seriously addressed, land should be used for food security, not for the massive export of cash crops.**

The province of Mindanao has been the site of prolonged clashes between palm oil companies and indigenous Higanonon peoples. In October 2012, the leader of a group opposing the expansion of palm oil plantations was shot dead by an assassin riding a motorcycle. [Global Witness](https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/dangerous-ground/) (<https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/dangerous-ground/>) later described Mindanao as “one of the most dangerous regions in the world to be a land and environment defender.” **CALG campaigners worry similar violence could come to Palawan.** In fact, communist guerrillas have already set themselves against palm oil expansion, [burning and destroying companies’ equipment](http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/602640/news/regions/suspected-npas-burn-heavy-equipment-in-palawan), (<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/602640/news/regions/suspected-npas-burn-heavy-equipment-in-palawan>) and indigenous communities fear they may be caught in the crossfire if the military is sent to intervene.

Elsewhere in the Philippine, extra-judicial killing of journalists and EHRDs continues.

**On January 5, 2017, around 4pm, Venie Diamante, 43, a T’boli and municipal tribal chieftain, was brutally killed by** an unnamed assailant on board a motorcycle while on his way home from Koronadal City. Diamante was already near his residence in Sitio Lambusong, Brgy. Puti, Norala, South Cotabato, when the gunman continuously fired at him; he sustained eight (8) gunshot wounds. He was left on the side of the road, when a couple found him while on their way to the market. Diamante’s remains were brought to funeral parlor in Sentro Nola.

**On Jan. 6, 2017, environmental journalist Mario Contaoi was shot dead in the Northern Philippines.** According to the [Manila Times](http://www.manilatimes.net/murder-environmental-protection-advocates-must-outrage-us/306283/), (<http://www.manilatimes.net/murder-environmental-protection-advocates-must-outrage-us/306283/>) Contaoi was riding his motorcycle when he was shot by tandem riders on the national highway. He later died in the hospital. While no official motive has been giving for the murder, many Philippine media outlets, and those familiar with Contaoi, are linking the death to his journalistic work.



Mario Contaoi — Photo — via Facebook

**Contaoi’s death makes a total of eight killed over the last six months and 105 in the past six years.** Unfortunately, most of these killings remain unpunished. **It is not a surprise that 6 years later, the murder of Doc. Gerry Ortega in Palawan is still waiting for justice.** In 2015, the alleged masterminds, former Palawan governor Joel Reyes and Coron mayor Mario Reyes, were arrested in Thailand. The former governor is currently detained in Puerto Princesa City Jail while Mario Reyes was allowed to post bail on May 2016.





For the family and friends of Ortega, 6 years may seem fast compared to other cases but they are still hoping that the wheels of justice would turn faster.

**A few days after Contaoi's murder**, on January 23 a Surigao IP leader, **anti-mining activist, has been gunned down**". 27-year-old Veronico "Nico" Lapsay Delamente, a leader of the Mamanwa tribe in Claver was an outspoken critic of nickel mining corporations wreaking havoc on ancestral lands. He was shot the same day that the Indigenous Lumad and Mamanwas groups were set to hold a meeting with National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) representatives to discuss community conflicts linked to large-scale nickel mining. Kasalo, a Lumad

organization, reported that two men aboard a motorcycle with their faces covered drove by and shot Delamente several times. One of the bullets hit a bystander, a child who is still being treated in hospital. "The assailants were not apprehended despite the presence of a military detachment of the Task Force Diamond of the Philippine Army at the entrance of the road exiting Punta Naga," **the group said, as reported by Davao Today**. Delamente was a provincial coordinator of Katribu Partylist since 2010 and was also an active member of the Kahugpungan sa Lumadnong mga Organisasyon, a regional Lumad organization.

**On the evening of January 20, around 8pm, Alexander Ceballos, 54, regional council member and district area coordinator of the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) was gunned down** by two unnamed assailants near his house in Purok Tangke, Brgy. Pandanon Silos, Murcia, Negros Occidental. Ceballos was rushed to the Sanitarium Hospital in Bacolod City but was declared dead-on-arrival. Ceballos and his family has long been the target of threats and intimidation by the Dela Cruz clan, a political clan who controls the town of Salvador Benedicto for more than 20 years. Ceballos' involvement in organizing and mobilizing farmers to uphold and defend their rights have earned him the ire of the Dela Cruz family. On January 28, 2017, Quilina Ceballos, wife of Alexander Ceballos, received a death threat via text message. The message stated: 'You, your companions, and your two children's place in the cemetery is ready.' Quilina Ceballos received the threats while still in mourning for her husband's death.

**On January 25, 2017, another farmer from Negros Occidental, Wencislao Pacquiao, 48, member of the San Benito Farmers Association- Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), was shot** while doing work in the designated land cultivation area (LCA). He was with Rebeco Pabuaya, another farmer from the same organization. Around 9 in the morning, Pacquiao was approached by a gunman and was shot in the back. He was hit in the thigh and still managed to run but was pursued by the shooter and sustained more shots. **Pacquiao sustained five (5) gunshot wounds**. Pabuaya was also targeted but because he was working in the lower part of the LCA, he managed to escape. Pacquiao was shot at close range and was clearly targeted by the shooter.

**On February 7, Mia Manuelita Mascarinas-Green, a Philippine lawyer who specialized in investigating crimes against the environment has been ambushed and shot dead**. Four motorcycle-riding gunmen opened fire after surrounding a van being driven by Mascarinas-Green - with her



children and nanny in the vehicle - near her home on the central island of Bohol. Her children are twins, aged two, and a 10-year-old daughter, according to local media reports. **Her death brings to 112 the number of environmental campaigners murdered in the Philippines over the past 15 years**, according to Filipino environment monitor Kalikasan. This includes 12 since President Rodrigo Duterte took office 7 months ago, Kalikasan said.



Friends of Earth International strongly condemns the brutal murder of environmental lawyer Mia Manuelita Cumba Masacariñas-Green on February 15, 2017. Mia as she was fondly known, was only 49 years old. She was assassinated in front of her 3 young children while driving them home in Tagbilaran, Bohol. Mia was also a board member of **The Environmental Legal Assistance Centre (ELAC)**.

**A human rights group says a dozen environmental advocates have been killed in the Philippines since President Rodrigo Duterte took office at the end of June.** The vice president of the Philippines wants an investigation into all the deaths calling for authorities to “eliminate the culture of impunity in the country.” Vice President Leni Robredo is herself a former human rights lawyer. She left an additional post in the Duterte cabinet late last year because of what she called “major differences in principles and values” with the president.



Photo downloaded from Internet. Copyrights: Unknown



According to Kalikasan human rights activists' group, as the Duterte administration and its Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) announced their new counter-insurgency plan Oplan Kapayapaan, replacing Oplan Bayanihan, attacks targeting land and environmental activists, perpetrated by private armies of landed families and mining firms complicit or in connivance with State security forces, have continued. While names of operational plans changed, the military's objectives to quell dissent and defense of people's rights remain. **"Such killings are also reflective of the prevalent dominance of big landlords and businesses in the Philippines and their use of violence against peasants struggling for genuine agrarian reform"** says Kalikasan. The killings occurred before and during the third round of formal peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), when both Parties started to tackle the crafting of an agreement on socio-economic reforms including genuine agrarian reform and rural development.

Karapatan, another group of human rights advocates has also slammed both the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police after they have gone on an arrest spree against political activists, peace consultants, development workers and civilians on trumped-up charges. According to Karapatan "President Duterte's 'cancellation' of the formal peace talks of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) has further emboldened State security forces to arrest and detain activists....in line with the counter-insurgency program Oplan Kapayapaan."



Photo: Sandugo - Movement of Moro and Indigenous Peoples for Self-Determination (facebook)



Karapatan is also strongly denouncing the re-instatement of death penalty, saying “it will mostly affect the poor who have far less or no access to resources to defend themselves before courts”. Apart from HR defenders, activists, and political dissenters, also that the lives of political prisoners will be endangered under the proposed measure. Even the Catholic bishops of the Philippines also register their strong objections to restoration of death penalty.

**Surely military abuses against civilians, activists and indigenous people have not been reduced since Duterte’s presidency.** On January 10, there are reports about the officers of the 50th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army harassing, intimidating and belittling representatives of the indigenous Kalinga village of Western Uma, Lubuagan, and members of the Justice and Peace Advocates of Kalinga (JPAK) at their headquarters in Kapanikian, Camalog, Pinukpuk. The impacted communities and people claim to be unjustly accused of being supporters of the New Peoples Army.



A soldier on post skims the peoples' declaration. He hesitantly called for the officers to decide if the paper will be received or not. Photo by Alma B. Sinumlag

Elsewhere in the country other indigenous group and specifically **the Bugkalot tribe are celebrating the issuance of Certificates of Land Ownership (CLOA) as Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) from Agrarian Reform Secretary Rafael Mariano.** Covering some 4,600 hectares of resettlement area at Keat and Matmad in this town to be used productively, the CLOA was recently given to around 1,150 ARBs led by Bugkalot chief Rosario Camma, also former mayor of this town. Camma said the beneficiaries are the actual occupants and tillers from the Bugkalot tribe, and who also forged a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), stating the obligations of each party. The Bugkalots are Indonesian in origin and are recorded as being among the first people to come to the Philippines, also known as the Italon Tribe, Kadayakans, Egongots or



Ipagis and Abacas or Tamsis. As stated under the 1988 Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (RA 6657) amended by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension Reforms (RA 9700), collective CLOAs should be issued to individual ARBs.

Not all Philippine politicians are insensitive towards the value of having such as a high number of indigenous ethnic groups all over the country. Senator Loren Legarda, for instance, is convinced that indigenous communities have an important role in conserving the country's protected areas and should be utilized by the government. In line with this, **the Senator filed Senate Bill No. 1185, the proposed Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Conserved Areas Act.** Under the bill, concerned government agencies should recognize and promote IP rights to their ancestral domains and the ICCAs including their right to maintain, protect and regulate access and prohibit unauthorized intrusion in such areas

With reference on the ongoing crackdown on mining in the Philippines, DENR Secretary Gina Lopez has already shut down several companies, with strong resistance from the mining sector. President Rodrigo Duterte is backing the decision of Secr. Gina Lopez to ban mining in watershed areas. **Duterte who warned last year that the Southeast Asian nation could survive without a mining sector had supported Lopez's decision to shut over half the country's mines.** But he later did not rule out reviewing her order amid the potential revenue losses from mining. **Lopez on Feb. 2 ordered the closure of 23 of 41 mines in the world's top nickel ore supplier for environmental violations, saying many of them were in watershed zones that threaten water supply and quality.** Another five mines were suspended. **She also ordered the cancellation of 75 mining contracts,** or nearly a third of mineral production sharing agreements for mines that have yet to go into production, for being located in watershed areas. She reiterated her stance, saying she would not allow mining at the expense of the environment and people who depend on seas and farms for their livelihood.



The mining industry has filed an opposition to the confirmation of Environment Secretary Gina Lopez due to her alleged bias against large-scale players. KRIZJOHN ROSALES, file

DENR Secretary Gina Lopez has been criticized also for the huge amounts of jobs that will be lost as a result of mining companies' closure. Even some indigenous communities have expressed their concern. For instance, **Manobo Datu Ben Tindogan is worried about what will happen to his people after they lose the royalty share from mining companies operating in their ancestral lands.** The families get livelihood assistance and 160 of their children get full scholarships from the mining companies. But with the closures, they will lose all of those benefits and, worse, the royalty share—equivalent to 1 percent of the gross sales of the

mining companies—for operating in their ancestral lands. In January alone, royalty payments in Caraga amounted to over P270 million, paid by 10 mining companies whose operations are within the indigenous peoples' lands.



In a special order she signed on February 20, DENR Secretary Gina Lopez also authorized the conduct of simultaneous community consultation and engagement in the provinces of Dinagat Islands, Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur on February 20-24. Lopez said the exercise was meant to assist the communities and households affected by the mining audit, “particularly ensuring that they will be able to transition well from being mining workers or mining communities to an empowered social entrepreneur or a vibrant community enterprise, impelled by the principles of ecosystems integrity and social justice.” Gina Lopez plans to develop mined-out areas into eco-tourism zones that would help rehabilitate the mining sites and provide livelihood to affected communities. In this way, 95 percent of the income will go to the affected communities as opposed to the mining business where the bulk of profits goes to investors. It is also hoped that **‘rehabilitation’ or ‘re-vegetation’ of mined areas will stimulates a green economy.** It has been foreseen that every 100 hectares, it will create 1,000 livelihoods.

**The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines last week sought to block Lopez's appointment, saying her recent moves showed an "undeniable bias" against the sector. Lopez is among a few cabinet members who have yet to be confirmed by Congress.**

Still largely underexplored, the Philippines' **mining sector contributes less than 1 percent to the overall economy,** with only 3 percent of 9 million hectares identified by the state as having high mineral reserves being mined, according to government data.

Small-scale miners, particularly in Mindanao, are appealing to Lopez to help boost the sector and to legalize small-scale mining, starting with the establishment of Minahang Bayan, where they can extract and process gold. **However, the government is not keen on approving any application for ‘Minahang Bayan’,** the centralized program for processing of minerals within a specific area—where the government can better monitor gold production—this year, as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) steps up the campaign against irresponsible mining operations.

Various government and non-government agencies have also launched **three major projects aimed to combat the problem of child labor in the Philippines.**

These initiatives include programs against child laborers in the gold mining industry, as well as setting up help desks, a local registry on child labor, and a new child labor module aimed to raise awareness in conditional cash transfer beneficiaries. These are in support of the Philippine program against child labor, which aims to take at least 1 million kids out of child labor by 2025. According to the 2011 Survey on Children conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, **about 2.1 million Filipino children between 5 and 17 years old are currently engaged in child labor, with a number of them performing physically demanding and hazardous work.**



ENDING CHILD LABOR. The International Labor Organization, together with several national government agencies, vows to end child labor by 2025. Photo by Patty Pasion/Rappler

In neighboring **Taiwan,** draft regulations for the establishment of boundaries for Aboriginal land and villages by the Council of Indigenous Peoples have met with strong criticism from Aborigines and



lawmakers. The Indigenous Youth Front and legislators across party lines criticized the draft for not including privately owned land, adding that the draft regulations are a slight against Aborigines. **The Indigenous Youth Front said that, by excluding privately owned land from traditional territories, the end result would be fragmented traditional territory.** New Power Party (NPP) Legislator Kawlo Iyun Pacidal, an Amis, said that the regulations would make Aborigines “drifters on their own land” and deprive them of autonomy to determine their own village affairs. The regulations would also make it easier for corporate entities to establish resorts on Aboriginal land, Kawlo said. Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Legislator Chen Ying (陳瑩), a Puyuma, said that it was “absurd” and “unacceptable” that the council is unable to perfectly draw the borders of traditional territories. The draft regulations were based on the Indigenous Peoples Basic Act (原住民基本法), which only regulates public land. The government would have to seek alternative legal channels to purchase private land improperly taken from Aborigines and then return it, Kolas said. The discussion on the draft resolution is ongoing.

As far as concerning indigenous peoples’ right, in **Malaysia, because of a recent court's decision (December 20 2016) indigenous rights and the preservation of Malaysian rainforests are suffering a major setback.** In a majority ruling the Federal Court of Malaysia has rejected the approach previously taken by lower courts in Malaysia and by the Australian High Court in its Mabo case, ruling that indigenous people have no title claim over foraging lands. The recent death of the Chief Minister of the Malaysian State of Sarawak, Adenan Satem, is another blow to Indigenous rights. Adenan Satem succeeded long-serving chief minister Abdul Taib Mahmud in 2014 and went on to take his Barisan Nasional party to a resounding state election victory in 2016. In his short time in office Adenan showed some willingness to listen to Indigenous voices, reversing his predecessor's commitment to build a series of major dams on the Baram River.



Four of the eight paper presenters at the NCR land forum (from left) Sec-Gen of the Society for Rights of Indigenous People of Sarawak Michael Mering Jok, Dayak National Congress board member Patrick Sibat Sujang, NCR land rights lawyer and Ba'Kelalan assemblyman Baru Bian and NCR land rights expert Datuk Sri Edmund Langgu,. — Picture by Sulok Tawie

Overall, Malaysian courts had appeared to be moving to recognize native title, as have Australian, Canadian courts and other jurisdictions around the world. But in a three to one majority decision the Malaysia Federal Appeals Court ruled that native land rights only covered settled land where natives had felled forest and cultivated land. Native rights did not extend to land in the primary forest where natives foraged for food. It remains to be seen how this court's decision will develop and to what extent it will be implemented.



According to People's Justice Party (PKR) Chairman Baru Bian, Sarawak's newly-formed committee on territorial domain (pemakai menoa) and communal forest reserves (pulau galau) should quickly resolve issues pertaining to land claims based on native customary rights (NCR). He said, many from the indigenous community are deeply concerned over the matter and want the Committee Head, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah, and the new Chief Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg to swiftly act on this issue. "There are no two ways about it but to amend the Sarawak Land Code, if the state government is serious about protecting the NCR land of the native community in Sarawak," Baru said. "I am aware that some people are concerned that the recognition of such adat (custom) may cause huge areas of land to be subjected to claims by the natives. This is not true as NCR claims require proof." More importantly, this arrangement must first be recognized by the authorities.

**On January 7, a Dayak native customary rights (NCR) land forum today called on the state government to constitute a native court system which runs parallel with the civil court.** In a draft memorandum to be submitted to Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem, the forum said the native court system must have jurisdiction over cases involving native customs, including NCR lands. The forum, organized by the Dayak Intellectual Group, also urged that a Royal Commission of Inquiry be established with its panel members to comprise the Dayak elders and experts in the Dayak customs.

**While legal debates on customary rights are ongoing, indigenous ancestral lands continue to be encroached.** This is the case of the IPs residents of Kampung Sungai Limo. Provisional leases have been issued over their native land including the very lot where their houses were built on at the village. According to acting village chief Balang Dusing, three companies have encroached on their land, clearing trees, oil palm plantations and other farming plots. **The native land areas that have been cleared, including communal forest reserves and territorial domains, was estimated close to 1,600ha. The land grab is affecting more than 40 households involving some 200 villagers,** he said, while adding that native customary rights (NCR) land belonging to neighboring villages is also affected. Villagers are now having dialogues with representatives from the Barisan Nasional in the hope to solve their plight. Balang added that the village applied for a NCR perimeter survey in 2012 but the request was denied when the Land and Survey Department issued a letter saying that their native land has been earmarked for other purposes.



Several residents of the longhouses manning a road block in the plantation.

It is worth pointing out the **plight of a group of Iban in Mukah, accused of "illegally collecting fruits" from land that is currently under dispute between them and a private company.** This has raised a sharp response from the pro-autonomy advocacy coalition

Sarawak4Sarawakians (S4S). Asked to comment on a police report made by the manager of Kenyana Estate in Mukah,



S4S chairman Peter John Jaban replied that it was like claiming one was stealing from one's own land. **"No one can be accused of stealing fruits from his or her own land, but with that police report, the estate had in effect accused them (Iban) of stealing fruits growing on their own land,"** Jaban said.

Elsewhere, in Peninsula Malaysia **five Orang Asli, indigenous peoples' activists from Gua Musang in Malaysia who were blockading forests from illegal logging operations were arrested on January 23.** Forestry officials from the state of Kelantan — which is governed by the opposition Islamic Party (PAS) — destroyed several Orang Asli blockades. This was despite the fact that on January 17 a magistrate court had cancelled the application by the logging company concerned and declared that Orang Asli have rights over their customary native land. **In the state of Kelantan, which is located in the north east of Peninsular Malaysia, deforestation and logging activities have been rampant since 2000.** Kelantan is ruled by one of the federal opposition parties, PAS. Being an opposition state, the federal central government of Malaysia deprives the state of its due royalty payments from its offshore oil explorations. **Denied oil royalties, the Kelantan government has turned to raising funds from giving out concession licenses for logging, commercial farming, mining and property development on forest reserves and Orang Asli native customary lands.**

Having full knowledge of several indigenous villages in the Gua Musang district, the Kelantan government has deliberately ignored its duty to gazette the indigenous native customary land. While the area remained ungazetted, the Orang Asli rights in the land were in serious jeopardy and this enabled the Kelantan government to alienate their land for commercial projects. The study **An "Insight to Kelantan Timber Industry"** (<https://www.c4center.org/insight-kelantan-timber-industry>) describes the logging industry as rife with corruption. The process of awarding concessions is completely opaque and logging companies operate with impunity.



Indigenous people blocking a logging road in western Malaysia (© Freunde der Naturvölker)

Realizing their native customary lands were being encroached at an alarming rate, the Orang Asli communities established the Jaringan Kampung Orang Asli Kelantan (Network of Orang Asli Villages) to fight for their rights. The communities mapped out clearly their native customary borders based



upon their cultural heritage, graves of their forefathers, rivers, fruit farms, etc. They were able to quantify the extent of the encroachment that has taken place.

**An international petition to support the Temiar and other indigenous groups to defend their forest in Kelantan has recently being launched by Rainforest Rescue.** The petition is still open for signing:

<https://www.rainforest-rescue.org/petitions/1083/stop-logging-the-temiar-people-s-ancestral-forest>

Meanwhile, **in Sabah the first case of elephant killing for ivory has been recorded.** Killing elephants for their ivory is unheard of in Sabah who have previously been poisoned to death for being a "nuisance" in plantations or ended up dead after being stuck in a quarry pit at the most. However,



the grim discovery of a decapitated bull pygmy elephant in the vicinity of the Ulu Segama Forest reserve may be an indication that **the world crackdown on the ivory trade lately is making poachers try their luck in Sabah.** It was learnt that a single shotgun was fired at a male jumbo at an oil palm plantation boundary next to the Ulu Segama Forest Reserve. Its trunk was chopped off, its head hacked and tusks had disappeared without a trace.

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In **Indonesia**, at the end of 2016, **President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo signed a decree that acknowledged nine indigenous communities' rights to customary forests covering a total of 13,100 hectares.** The historic event followed the Constitutional Court's ruling back in 2012, which states that customary forests are not part of state forests. It took the government four years to comply with the court's decision. Anyhow, **the presidential decree signals the government's political support for efforts to fulfill the constitutional rights of indigenous peoples, many of which have been ignored.** However, indigenous peoples rights' advocates claim that government's recognition should not rest with these nine communities. Not just because indigenous peoples have for decades fallen victim to the state's unilateral claim upon forest areas, but also because their rights to their land should be restored as a basic foundation and invaluable wealth of our diversity. To achieve this objective, there are several major steps that the government should consider. **In addition to customary forests, based on Village Law No. 6 /2014, the government is required to recognize and define indigenous villages.** Meanwhile, according to the 1960 Agrarian Law, in this kind of region, the government can provide communal rights to land. The government should lead this move and take a synergistic approach to realizing the law's mandate. **For indigenous people living in coastal areas, the law on the management of coastal areas and small islands requires the state to recognize those people's territories and rights.** The question is whether the government already has a blueprint on national development for indigenous peoples. The fact that most of the indigenous community forests are located within forest areas is indisputable. **According to the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), 90 percent of at least 84 million ha of indigenous communities' territories are**



**forest.** But more than a half of the customary forests have been converted into forestry and mining concession areas, as well as plantations. Problems will arise when dealing with fresh land. What if it turns out that the land is customary forest that has not been recorded and recognized? In anticipation of this, the government should carefully discharge forest areas with thorough verification that involves indigenous people.

**Most Indonesian indigenous peoples advocates believe that reform policy should serve as momentum for a new paradigm that puts people and sustainability as its main principles, leaving behind exploitative, myopic forestry management in the past.** It should streamline the complexity of the land tenure system, acknowledging and protecting people's rights and ending past conflicts while mitigating future ones. The police and the military that have been guarding the interests of



Joko Widodo Photo: supplied

state and company concessions now should in turn use the law to protect the people. The private sector, which has been playing a pivotal role in plantations, is also subject to reform. Companies should respect residents' right to their land and treat them as partners in achieving common welfare.

Also in Indonesia, the recent and unprecedented moratorium on new concessions in peatlands and forest areas has increased conservationists' and indigenous peoples advocates' hopes that more forest will be placed under protection. However, there are plenty of things to worry about in 2017 when it comes to Indonesia's forests. **Jokowi's moratorium isn't permanent** — it only lasts **until the government finishes mapping and zoning the nation's peatlands** (<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/12/green-groups-raise-red-flags-over-jokowis-widely-acclaimed-haze-law/>). And there are no guarantees that prosecution of companies will hold up in court — while **important legal precedents have been set in sanctioning companies for illegal peatlands destruction**, (<https://news.mongabay.com/2015/09/rogue-oil-palm-company-must-pay-26m-rules-indonesias-supreme-court/>) **the judiciary has set a relatively high bar for liability in some cases** (<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/01/indonesias-environment-czar-to-personally-oversee-rematch-with-bmh/>) given the difficulty in attributing responsibility to fire-setting. Nor is it always clear exactly **what instruction the administration is providing to companies** (<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/12/as-accusations-fly-paper-giant-appears-to-stand-by-its-replanting-of-burned-peat-in-sumatra/>).

**Another step that the Indonesian government is making is that of restoring 400,000 hectares of critical peatland in 2017** which is, however, a lower target compared to 600,000 ha in 2016. Environment and Forestry Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar has said the government will speed up canal and pond construction to maintain water levels in peatland areas. **In 2016, 16,615 canals and 2,581 water ponds were built in Sumatra and Kalimantan.** Presidential chief of staff Teten Masduki said



Indonesia had 2 million ha of critical peatland that had to be rewet, of which 1.4 ha was located on concession land. The government therefore has to work with plantation companies.

**Another major challenge that the Indonesia government is facing is how to rejuvenate its palm oil trees to maintain its position as the worlds' largest crude palm oil (CPO) producer.** With some 11.6 million hectares of plantations, the Industry Ministry has accorded priority to increasing investment in the palm oil processing industry that needs raw material. Hence, anticipatory efforts must be undertaken to meet the need for raw material for the production of about 40 million tons of CPO by 2020.



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Harvest worker on an Indonesian oil palm plantation.

**An additional news concerns with the decision of oil palm-Korean company Korindo to stop clearing forest for palm oil concessions until sustainability assessments can be made.** The company has promised to conduct an assessment of the 75,000 hectares of remaining forests on their palm oil concessions in Indonesian Papua. U.S.-based environmental group Mighty Earth said [in a statement](http://www.mightyearth.org/korindo-announces-moratorium-but-questions-remain/) (<http://www.mightyearth.org/korindo-announces-moratorium-but-questions-remain/>) on January 10 that they and their partners will be meeting with Korindo at the end of the month in the hopes that the company will agree to use the High Carbon Stock Approach methodology ([HCSA](http://highcarbonstock.org/)) (<http://highcarbonstock.org/>) in its assessments. Korindo's moratorium and assessment comes just a few months after Mighty Earth and its partners released the report "Burning Paradise" on [September 1, 2016](https://news.mongabay.com/2016/09/korean-palm-oil-firm-burned-large-tracts-of-forestland-in-indonesia-ngos-allege/). (<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/09/korean-palm-oil-firm-burned-large-tracts-of-forestland-in-indonesia-ngos-allege/>). It alleged that Korindo had caused 30,000 hectares of deforestation and an estimated 894 fire hotspots since 2013, and led to [swift investigations](https://news.mongabay.com/2016/09/indonesian-government-to-investigate-korean-palm-oil-giant-over-burning-in-papua/) (<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/09/indonesian-government-to-investigate-korean-palm-oil-giant-over-burning-in-papua/>) by the Indonesian government.

It also needs to be pointed out that, Jakarta has thrown high level support behind the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, or MIFEE, a project in the far south east of Papua province **Eventually expected to cover 1.6 million hectares, MIFEE has attracted dozens of investors, looking**



**to grow food crops and palm oil.** Billed as a project to address food security concerns for parts of the country, local Papuan communities have complained that MIFEE is alienating them from their land.

Also with relevance to Indonesia, **recently the Complaints Panel of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) has just found in favor of a complaint against the oil palm giant, Wilmar International, finding that it has indeed unlawfully taken over the lands of the Kapa community in Sumatra without their consent.** In October 2014, the Minangkabau Kapa community, an indigenous people from West Sumatra, Indonesia, had filed a formal complaint with the RSPO stating that Wilmar International's subsidiary, PT PHP1, had taken over part of their customary lands and established an oil palm plantation without community consent.

After waiting more than two years for a ruling, on 1 February 2017, the Kapa received the RSPO's decision that Wilmar had acted in violation of the RSPO sustainability standard, and had not fulfilled the requirements of Indonesian law. **The ruling requires Wilmar to now take steps to respect the land rights of the Kapa.** However, a basic question remains: will the land being destroyed by Wilmar be given back to Kapa community, and will Wilmar pay for the full rehabilitation of such land?

**Overall in Indonesia, oil palm companies are still the single largest threat to the existence of orangutans' fast depleting forests, according to Orangutan Foundation International.** The foundation, which supports the conservation and protection of orangutans, estimates that **up to 5,000 of the animals are killed every year in palm oil concessions - a worrying situation for their survival as a species.** Indonesia, the world's biggest producer of palm oil, **plans to expand its plantations from 8 million hectares to 13 million hectares in four years.**

**Take a moment to look into the eyes of this baby orangutan. What do you see? Fear, confusion, anxiety – probably a mixture of all three.**



It would appear that the responsibility of this ecological catastrophe lies in the hands of well-known politicians. Recently, the son of a local parliament chief has been named a suspect over illegal land clearing in the Singkil Swamp Wildlife Reserve, a heavily protected area home to the densest population of Sumatran orangutans (*Pongo abelii*). Teuku Popon Rizal is the son of Teuku Zulhelmi, the head

of the legislature in South Aceh district. Rizal is alleged to have had a hand in the destruction of a corner of the reserve where last October authorities [discovered](https://news.mongabay.com/2016/11/palm-oil-culprits-apprehended-in-the-leuser-ecosystem-who-sent-them/) three workers operating an excavator (<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/11/palm-oil-culprits-apprehended-in-the-leuser-ecosystem-who-sent-them/>). The men were apparently preparing to establish an oil palm estate. Hauled in for questioning, they said Rizal had sent them. The Singkil reserve faces the Indian Ocean on Indonesia's main western island of Sumatra. It lies at the heart of one the region's largest, deepest and most intact [peat swamp](https://news.mongabay.com/2014/07/what-is-peat-swamp-and-why-should-i-care/) landscapes (<https://news.mongabay.com/2014/07/what-is-peat-swamp-and-why-should-i-care/>), a crucial carbon sink that has



formed over thousands of years. It is also part of the Leuser Ecosystem, the only place where rhinos, tigers, elephants and orangutans still coexist in the wild.



*Rudi Putra pictured in 2014, the year he won a Goldman Prize recognizing his work protecting the Leuser ecosystem. Photo by Colleen Kimmitt*

**Local Indonesian elites also earn money from burning land.** Slash and burn is big business in the country, with burnt land commanding a higher price tag than land cleared through mechanical means because it is immediately ready for planting. A “fire economy” has emerged in Indonesia in which the blazes tearing through the country’s land and forests, driven largely by the global demand for palm oil, are lining the pockets of local elites and their patronage networks, according to a new study: [“Fire economy and actor network of forest and land fires in Indonesia.”](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1389934117300023) (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1389934117300023>).

Attempts by big palm oil buyers to improve their ‘environmentally friendly reputation’ is ongoing. **In January 2017, Unilever has signed a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with provincial and central governments in Indonesia to drive the sustainable palm oil sector and support a jurisdictional approach to sourcing at village level.** The agreement involves the provincial government of Central Kalimantan, the district government of Kotawaringin Barat and Yayasan Penelitian Inovasi Bumi (INOBU). It aims to create “sustainable villages” in Indonesia’s palm oil industry and put an end to deforestation in the tropics. **Unilever’s MoU follows an earlier announcement at the COP 21 climate negotiations in Paris last year, when the company said it would take a jurisdictional approach to commodity sourcing and will preferentially buy from areas that have comprehensive climate and forest policies in place.**

Aside for rules and regulations dealing with oil palm development and rehabilitation of peatlands, **Indonesia is also issuing new rules for miners which will cover contracts and permits, exports, taxes, divestment obligations and domestic processing requirements, among other issues.**



Indonesia announced in 2014 a ban on ore shipments to push miners to build smelters to process ore locally, but gave some concessions to concentrate producers after protests from the industry. As part of this push, a ban on the export of mineral concentrates from Indonesia is due to kick in on Jan. 12. Rules now being drafted will allow concentrate shipments to continue beyond that deadline in certain cases.

In **Myanmar**, on **January 29, 2017**, **Ko Ni, 65**, was **fatally shot in the head at point-blank range outside Rangoon International Airport**. The suspected gunman was later arrested and detained for questioning by police. Ko Ni had just returned from Indonesia, where he had joined a Burmese Government-organized trip to discuss democracy and conflict resolution. The program included a panel discussion about religious violence in Burma's Rakhine State. **Ko Ni was a prominent Muslim lawyer and member of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party**. In June 2016, Ko Ni played a crucial role in the establishment of the **Muslim Lawyers' Association**, an organization aimed at providing legal assistance to members of Muslim communities in Burma. The murder of Ko Ni is the latest in a series of killings targeting Burmese human rights defenders that have gone unpunished over the last three years.



People carry the coffin of Ko Ni during the funeral service at the Muslim cemetery in Yangon. Photograph: Nyein Chan Naing/EPA

Also in Myanmar, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders has been informed by reliable sources about **the arbitrary detention of environmental rights defender Mr. Khaing Myo Htun**, co-founder of the NGO Natural Resources for the People ([http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/urgent-interventions/myanmar/2017/01/d24173/#\\_ftn1](http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/urgent-interventions/myanmar/2017/01/d24173/#_ftn1)), board member of the Arakan Natural Resources and Environmental Network, member of the advocacy group Arakan Oil Watch, and Deputy Spokesperson for the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), in Rakhine State. According to the information received, on January 13, 2017, the Sittwe Township Court in Rakhine State denied bail for the second time to Mr. Khaing Myo Htun, despite his poor health condition. Mr. Khaing Myo Htun is said to have collapsed three times in prison since his arrest. His lawyer indicated that they would appeal the decision. Mr. Khaing Myo has been



detained in Sittwe prison since his arrest on July 25, 2016, pending a court decision on whether to charge him with sedition and incitement under Articles 505(b) and 505(c) of the Criminal Code.

Several advocates are now concerned that **more extra-judicial killing may take place in Myanmar as a response to communities opposition against large-scale oil palm expansion** which is also largely ignoring environment and workers' rights. In 1999, when Myanmar was ruled by a repressive military regime, the government laid out a plan for development, which included an aggressive expansion of palm oil in its southern provinces. Since then, **44 large-scale palm oil companies have transformed 350,000 hectares of pristine jungle into a series of plantations.**



Copyrights: Taylor Weidman (Al Jazeera)

Environmentalists decry (<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/business/21301-palm-oil-drive-under-review-in-tanintharyi.html>) the ecological devastation and habitat loss associated with clear cutting rainforest and implementing a monoculture system of palm oil. In addition, migrant workers from other parts of the country, rather than members of local communities, comprise the majority of the workforce on these plantations. And many of these men and women tell stories of the difficulties they have faced working on the plantations, from receiving no income while clearing the thick forests, to having months worth of wages withheld. **Moreover, many oil palm plantations were built in areas where ethnic groups were displaced due to the decades-long civil war that still persists today. Companies and individuals opportunistically seized the village lands - often illegally.** The now internally displaced groups have returned to their villages only to find them converted into plantations. Companies have gone so far as to sue some of these villagers, putting them in a legal quagmire as they fight these illegal land grabs. **More than 1.8 million acres of palm oil plantations in Burma's southern Tenasserim Division are surely doing more harm than good for local Karen villagers, causing land conflict, damaging livelihoods, destroying biodiversity, and polluting the environment.**



Following bilateral ceasefire agreement between the ethnic Karen National Union (KNU) and the Burmese government in 2012, **the one-time war zone was transformed into an economic zone, now attracting unscrupulous investors.** Civil society organizations emphasized the high risks of large-scale investment in areas where there is a combined administration of state officials and ethnic armed organizations, and where governance is weak. In such areas, local communities have no land tenure security. **Around 730,000 hectares (1.8 million acres) of rain forest have been allocated to more than 40 local companies owned by military-linked businesspeople and three international companies between 1999 and 2016 for a series of palm oil plantations,** according to a report by community-based organizations in the region. **However, only 216,506 hectares - or about 29 percent of the land area granted -- were planted by the end of 2016,** said the recently released “Green Desert” report. Environmental activists accused the companies involved of having already cleared nearly all the forest allocated for plantations, but failing to plant oil palms in its place.

In addition to the human rights violations cause by large agri-business, **the tragedy of the Rohingya minority remains unsolved.** Negotiations began in January between Myanmar and Bangladesh over the plight of the Rohingya minority, with 65,000 of them having already reached Bangladesh since attacks on border posts in October. Each country blames each other, as they both see the Rohingya minority as “the other’s problem”. **More than 500,000 Rohingyas live in Bangladesh, where they are perceived as Myanmar Muslims.** On the other hand, the Myanmar military has had a long history of persecuting this minority, as thousands began fleeing the country as early as the 1980s. Myanmar is certainly not eager to see the Rohingya return, as the stateless minority are denied citizenship and branded as illegal immigrants by a majority of Buddhists in the country.



Rohingya refugees protest against what organisers say is the crackdown on ethnic Rohingyas in Myanmar. Photo: Reuters/Adnan Abidi

In neighboring **Bangladesh**, at least **23 people**, including six women and girls of indigenous communities, were killed in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and elsewhere in the country last year, according to Human Rights Report 2016 on the ethnic people. In 2015, seven indigenous people were



killed in the CHT and three others elsewhere. **Last year, the most atrocious incident was the killing of three Santals allegedly by police in Gobindaganj of Gaibandha following a dispute regarding land.**



Dignitaries at the launching of "Human Rights Report 2016" prepared by Kapaeeng Foundation at the capital's The Daily Star Centre yesterday. Photo: Star

2016 has been one of the most critical years for the indigenous people of Bangladesh, especially for the Santals of Gobindaganj in Gaibandha," according to a report prepared by Kapaeeng Foundation, a human rights organization for indigenous peoples of Bangladesh in collaboration with Oxfam Bangladesh.

Claiming the ownership of the land of Sahebganj-Bagda sugarcane farm of Rangpur Sugar Mills, the Santals started erecting houses on the disputed land in June last year. They had cultivated paddy on 100 acres of land. **On November 6 last year, a tripartite clash broke out between the Santals, factory employees and police over eviction of indigenous people from the land.** The forcible eviction drive led to the killing of the Santals whilst many others were left injured. **Last year, at least 17 women were allegedly raped and six were killed after rape, according to the same report. Besides, at least 53 cases of violence against the indigenous women were reported.** Twenty-eight of them were from the CHT and 25 from other places. Last year, the number of cases on human rights violation against indigenous women was 69, while the number stood at 85 in 2015, the report denounces. **At least 96 members of ethnic communities were physically tortured and harassed, and 297 houses were ransacked allegedly by law enforcement agencies last year.** According to the report, "around 1,200 indigenous families in Gobindaganj were forced to run for their life as their houses were completely burnt to ashes. The incident of Gobindagonj is a glaring example of the extent of helplessness that indigenous peoples are thrust in," the report added.



In addition to human rights violations, pristine environment in **Bangladesh** are also irreparably damaged. For instance **mechanized stone mining is literally killing rivers.**

The conflicts are around (i) authorization for mechanized collection of stones from two rivers that are popular tourist spots, (ii) leasing out of part of the rivers as stone mahal (area that can be subjected to leasing), and (iii) employment both in manual extraction versus mechanized extraction. The division of Sylhet in the north-eastern part of the country has few crystal, transparent rivers including the *Piain* (55 km), *Dawki* (10.75 km), and *Dhala* rivers that flow through Companyganj and Goainghat Upazilas.



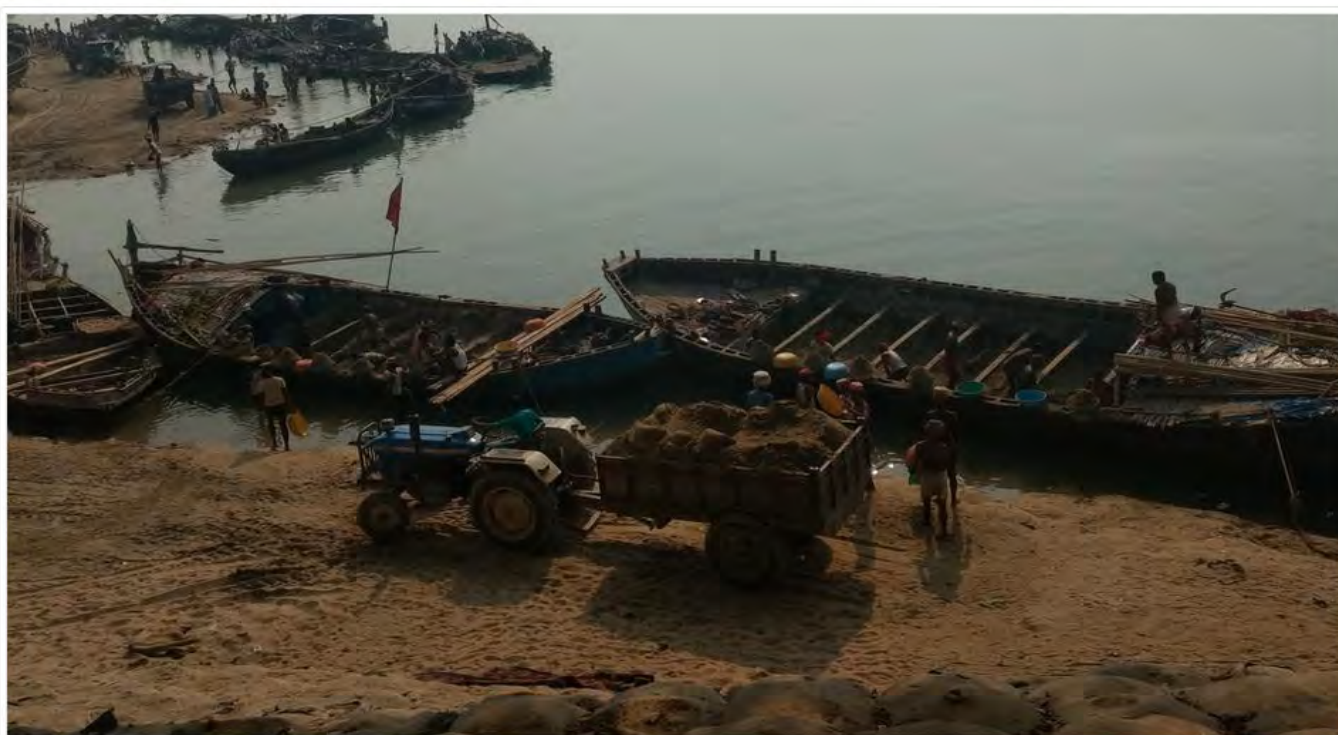
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These three rivers are popular tourist attractions of the country. Another significant economic contribution of these hilly rivers remain the supply of huge volume of stones that have resulted in declaration of Jaflong and Bholaganj stone quarries in the rivers. These stone quarries are two major sources of stones for the country. Traditionally stones were collected manually from the stone quarries of both Jaflong (within the rivers *Piain* and *Dawki*) and Bholaganj (within the river *Dhala*). **It was in 1998 that the Mineral Resources Development Bureau permitted the use of hydrolic excavators in the stone quarry of Jaflong.** This authorization came without any assessment of the environmental impact of the same although the area of Jaflong remains exposed to the risks of earthquake due to the presence of the Dawki fault. No environmental clearance was ever accorded in favor of the excavator machines (locally known as *Boma* (bomb) machines due to the extreme noise they create; basically locally manufactured engine driven heavy excavators) that were capable of extracting stones from 70-80 feet depth. **In addition to vibration, noise and dust pollution, the destructive and extremely exploitative mode of collection of stones was damaging the layers of the soil, changing the flows of the rivers and affecting adversely their navigability, increasing the risks of floods and eroding river banks and adjacent agricultural lands.** Local people have protested and continue to protest against the mechanized extraction of stones that severely affected their lives, properties and livelihoods.



In a troubling trend of renewed right violations and state control over religious and culture institution, on December 30th, 2016 the local authority in **Vietnam's** Travinh province took over portions of the Muniransi temple's land and forced the temple to sign over the tract to a Vietnamese resident who had allegedly bought the temple's land. **This is another assault on [freedom of religion](http://unpo.org/article/19700) and indigenous rights for the Khmer Krom population in Vietnam** (<http://unpo.org/article/19642>). The temple and indigenous residents were harassed by the alleged new owner of the land. **The story of new residents and authority together confiscating indigenous sacred land and farmland has been a shameful part of Vietnamese history and treatment of indigenous people such as the Khmer-Krom, Degar of Central Highlands, or the Christian Hmong groups.** Vietnam's Theravada form of Buddhism is originally only practiced and still predominately practiced by only the indigenous Khmer-Krom population today.

In January 2017, villagers on either side of the **India-Nepal border clashed over sand mining at Oriya Khola in Sikta police station area of Bihar's West Champaran district.** At least six persons were injured in the incident. Villagers of Gadiyani on the Indian side claimed that a mob from Piraiguthi in Parsa district of the neighboring country also opened fire in no-man's land as the clash turned violent. As tensions ran high, officials from both sides intervened to hold peace. Instances of clashes between people on either side of the border have been many and officials of India and Nepal have been hard pressed to contain sudden flare-ups at times. A similar incident was reported on September 13 last year at the same site after armed police force (APF) of Nepal, backed by people of the Himalayan nation stopped sand miners. A clash that ensued left about 10 people, including Nepal head constable Raj Kumar Manjhi, injured.



Nepal citizens claim right to mining in Oriya river, which flows through their territory. (Alok Mohit/HT photo)

Arbind Mandal, sub divisional officer (SDO) of Narkatiaganj in West Champaran district, said normalcy was fast returning after officials on both the sides held a border meeting and acted to quell the



trouble. "Nepal citizens claim right to mining in the river, which flows through their territory and allege that deep sand mining along the Indian border was changing the course of the river, affecting their habitations," he said.

In **India**, during the month of January, the South Punjab Minorities Land Rights Forum has pointed out residential and agricultural land issues, saying the minorities were forced to vacate lands where they had memories of their childhood and origin despite being the indigenous people of the land. "We are not nomads but indigenous people and we should be treated as equal citizens, and the government must provide us basic rights as well as protection," former Punjab Assembly member Naveed Amir Jeeva, forum's representatives Farhad Masih, Pervaiz John and Pandit Kishori Lal said in a press statement after addressing a press conference at the Lahore Press Club. They said that they were even deprived of the land of their centuries old graveyards as well as religious places. They said that they had put forward their demands, including right to their residential and agricultural land, graveyards and religious places, to the relevant authorities as well as opinion makers. They said that the government had to play a responsible role to end discrimination and protect rights of the minorities.

**In India, in another shocking mining accident, at least 50 miners were buried under tonnes of rubble when a mine collapsed** at the Lalmatia open-cast coalfields owned by ECL in Jharkhand. As rescue workers continue to dig for survivors, at least 18 fatalities have already been reported. According to eyewitnesses, the miners had been working 300 feet below ground when piles of rubble slid from one of the inner walls of the mine. Some miners have also accused officials of not stopping work when tell-tale signs of an impending collapse were detected earlier. **Mining is one of the most dangerous professions in India, with a mining fatality every 10 days last year. In the coal sector, on an average 7 lives were lost for extracting every 100 million tonnes of coal in 2015.**



The number of casualties from a coal mine accident in India has risen to 18, nearly doubling the 10 found dead soon after the Dec. 29 incident.



Surely the situation is not going to improve now that India plans to allow non-state mining companies to mine and sell coal for the first time in more than four decades. The nation's coal ministry will auction four mines to both state-run and private companies during the year starting April 1. The winning bidders will have the freedom to sell the coal, a privilege currently limited to a handful of state-run companies.

**In Australia, Wangan and Jangalingou Traditional Owners are ready to file a federal court paper challenging a document billionaire Adani group** "is trying to pass off as an Indigenous Land Use Agreement with our people" but which is "illegitimate" according to W&J Traditional Owner Council, Mr. Adrian Burragubba. The claim is over access to land near the mining town of Clermont in Central Queensland, 600 miles north of Brisbane. **Environmental concerns over this project stem from the threat to the survival of sacred springs and to the tradition of maintaining [songlines](http://dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/1566/) - ancestral lines connecting across the land to protect the Earth** (<http://dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/1566/>). With 12 billion liters of water, (the equivalent to 400 Olympic size pools) needed for the mine, there's unease over the future security of the Carmichael River and sacred Doongmabulla Springs. The springs are both central to the indigenous belief of dreamtime and the creation story and are an important ecosystem to the region. Australia's pro-mining Attorney General George Brandis wants to rush through new legislation allowing the Adani mine and the remaining 40 other mining projects in Queensland all affected by the McGlade ruling to go ahead. Where green groups have failed in the courts, the indigenous peoples still hope for success with a network of support and a different set of tools.

However, one should always be aware that victories for Indigenous people are always short-lived. That's why the people need a treaty, as soon as possible. For instance, in 1985, Uluru was



"When we arrived we were confused to see so many people in the assembly facing away from the screens, looking back in the direction of the Old Parliament House. We soon discovered those people were protesting the Liberal opposition leader Brendan Nelson." Photograph: Steve Bunbadgee Hodder Watt

handed back to the Anangu traditional owners. Momentarily - at least before they signed it back to the Australian government for joint management. During the ceremony, the Northern Territory's Country Liberal party flew a plane past the Mutitjulu community trailing a banner that read "Ayers



Rock for all Australians”. As an aboriginal commentator claims “it seems our victories are always short-lived. We had the bright beacon of Mabo for a moment, before John Howard cloaked it with his Wik 10-point plan, replacing traditional owner crowns with native title-holder trinkets. While in the media, fear tactics were used to wage a culture war against potential land entitlements for us. The national newspapers ran stories like, ‘they’re coming for our backyards’ ”.

As of now, tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are still affected by the racist policies of previous Australian governments. The issues of sovereignty and self-determination goes hand in hand with the ongoing dysfunction within Indigenous communities. Today, family violence in aboriginal communities is happening because young men and women have not been through a traditional process of learning to be responsible and preparing for respectful relationships. “Our rights to maintain justice has been revoked by Balanda institutions. The only way to fix this is with policies of self-determination, self-management, self-governance and ultimately, a treaty” says Indigenous speaker Steve Bunbadgee Hodder Watt.

New research released by the Rights and Resources Institute shows that despite improvements in respect for communities’ rights by global companies, land rights in **Africa** remain largely ignored. The study by Washington-based Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), a global network advocating for the land and forest rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, compares databases of conflicts in Africa and the world, focusing on three regions: West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa. It finds that **in West Africa, plantation agriculture—especially palm oil projects—drives a majority of disputes. Community displacement is the primary driver of 70 percent of the tenure disputes examined, while issues related to compensation are the primary driver for the remaining 30 percent. Entire communities get kicked off their land** (<http://www.dw.com/en/communities-being-left-behind-in-the-fight-for-land-in-uganda/a-37249161>) **to make way for hydropower plants, agro-industrial plantations, mining operations, and other large-scale projects.**





**Another tragic phenomenon taking place in Africa is the decimation of pristine coastlines due to sand mining.** African countries are raising the alarm because of their disappearing beaches. No everybody knows that houses, streets, telephones and microchips have something in common: they all contain processed sand. The coasts of Ghana and Kenya, as well as those of Cape Verde and Zanzibar, are lined by picturesque beaches strewn with the finest sand making them perfect postcard idylls. Official statistics from the Department of Forestry and Non-Renewable Natural Resources show that **almost three million tons of sand were mined on Zanzibar between 2005 and 2015.** This amount equals around 120,000 full truckloads. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates **around 40 billion tons of sand are processed worldwide every year. Around 30 billion tons of sand are used to make cement every year.** However, sand is a finite commodity. Alongside coal, natural gas and oil, sand is one of the world's non-renewable resources. That means that it cannot be regenerated as quickly as people remove it.



Much of the sand used to build the Jumeira Palm Island in Dubai was imported from Africa

**In the islands of Cape Verde, in on of the beaches where tortoises once buried their eggs, there is now only dirt and stones.** No sand holds back the tides, as a result salt water flows unhindered inland, ruining crops, plants and homes. In 2002, the government of Cape Verde banned sand mining in the city of Pedra Badejo on the island of Santiago. The black sand there is now protected by the military. In early February 2017, the government passed a resolution halting sand mining on all islands. The use of machines to extract sand is also banned. **Nevertheless poverty still drives residents ever deeper into the sea to bring back buckets full of sand from the seabed.**

In **Ghana**, sand mining is also illegal. Rising temperatures have forced fish to move elsewhere and coastal erosion is causing arable land to disappear. Many people can no longer earn enough from fishing and agriculture so they switch to mining sand, which exacerbates the problem even more.



In **Kenya**, illegal sand miners have focused on the Masaani, Kiungwani, Mbitini and Kwa Nditi rivers. But with the removal of sand, the miners are removing their own basis of existence. With less sand, the rivers dry out and cut off citizens and their cattle from valuable water resources.

In **Nigeria**, sand mining is also a problem, and is causing bridge and road foundations to become fragile.

It is not only African cement works, which profit from the exploitation of sand. **One of the main customers for African sand is the desert country of Dubai, which wants to enlarge its coast.** For the island project "The Palm Jumeirah" alone, 200 million cubic meters of sand and stone were used. Some of the sand was taken from the sea off Dubai's own coast but a large amount also came from African beaches.

Environmental activists from the African continent who are members of the Consortium on Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) says governments on the continent need to engage with indigenous people on the basis of mutual agreement as far as the use of biodiversity is concerned, particularly, traditional lands and territories. "If indigenous communities are involved in the decision making process with regard to natural resources, then we will not have problems associated with biodiversity conservation, but they are not part of the process. However, they are the custodians of the lands," said an environmental activist from Zambia, Vincent Ziba on December 2016, at a presentation organized by the ICCAs at the UN biodiversity conference, in Cancun, Mexico

In **Egypt**, [Nubian human rights defenders](http://www.albawaba.com/news/four-days-protests-come-end-nubians-reach-agreement-egyptian-authorities-ancestral-homeland-907) are still struggling to maintain their identity and to having rights to their homeland recognized (<http://www.albawaba.com/news/four-days-protests-come-end-nubians-reach-agreement-egyptian-authorities-ancestral-homeland-907>).

**The Nubian people are a minority in Egypt**, but have lived in what is now Sudan and southern Egypt for more than 4,000 years. As with indigenous peoples all over the world, their community was bisected by borders and forced off their native land by capitalist 'development' projects. In the early 1900s, Egypt began construction on a set of massive dams near Aswan city, turning the Nile river into a source of income for the Egyptian state. **By 1970, more than 50,000 Nubians had been forcibly relocated away from the river the Nile River, the body of water on which they had built a 4,000-year-old civilization.** Some were moved into 'temporary' housing miles from the Nile. Decades later, their descendants are still waiting for the return they were promised. Others fled to Alexandria, Cairo, Luxor, and other major cities across Egypt looking for work.



Egypt's tourism industry effectively asks tourists to help subsidise the oppression of Nubians, to give

Census data in Egypt is dicey at best - disjointed by revolutions, plagued by corruption-induced inefficiency, and for years neglecting to include data about the Nubians at all - but activists estimate that millions of ethnic Nubians are now scattered across the country, usually working more manual,



lesser paid jobs. Since forcibly displacing them from their homeland, the government has worked hard to relegate the remaining Nubian community in Aswan to a (profitable) relic of the past. Those who remain in what's left of old "Nubia" - living in poor villages around Aswan - are permitted to do so insofar as they generate tourism income for the government. **As with indigenous communities across the world, the Nubian people of Egypt have been placed in the past, systematically depicted as ancient relics rather than as living, breathing peoples.**

**Nubians, like the indigenous peoples of the Americas, have been relegated to a history rewritten by the state - a history that romanticizes the nature of their violent relocation from their native land.** The Nubian human rights defenders fighting for the right of return - now guaranteed by the constitution in Egypt - are slandered as anti-national trouble makers, digging up 'ancient history' to destabilize and disrupt Egypt's alleged march into the future.

Since forcibly displacing them from their homeland, Egypt's government has worked hard to relegate the remaining Nubian community in Aswan to a (profitable) relic of the past.

**Human rights defenders working on the Aswan-based 'NubaTube' project say cultural education is vital to counteract government attempts.** They produce weekly documentaries and animated shorts to reintroduce Nubian language, songs, dances, recipes, and traditions to their people.

"The government has worked hard to pretend our people are dead. We have to work harder to prove we've alive," says Hassam, a NubaTube producer. "We have to remind ourselves there was and is a better Nubian life than what we have now. This is just as important as protesting for our land."

**In Sudan, a large mining company had plans for a factory in Sebu in Dalgo locality in northern Sudan, using mercury and cyanide to separate gold and silver particles from ore.** The toxins can cause various serious and possibly fatal health problems. A series of protests against the permit lasted four days before the Governor of Northern state, Awad Ali, decided to categorically withdraw



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all the company's machineries from the site yesterday. The Popular Committee for Environmental Protection has welcomed the Governor's decision.

**However, elsewhere in Sudan more mining activities have popped up despite rejections by local committees and activists.** Companies, which allegedly also use cyanide in the gold extraction process have increased their

activities in several parts of South Kordofan, according to the committee for environmental advocacy. Activists and residents continue to reject the activities of such companies. According to a local advocate "There have been detentions of activists in a number of the localities, as well as harassment of the graduates' committee in El Tadamon," A lawyer working on a trial against a planned gold factory in Kadugli, South Kordofan was arrested by the security service mid-December.



In **Kenya**, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, **John H. Knox**, has urged the Government to take all necessary measures immediately to protect four environmental human rights defenders who have been assaulted, subjected to death threats, and forced into hiding since they filed a law suit against a lead smelter earlier this month. Their homes have been burned and all have been threatened with death. The twelve-year-old son of one of them was kidnapped earlier this week and held for three days before being released on the side of a road. All four are now living in hiding.

“Phyllis Omidio and the other members of the Center for Justice Governance and Environmental Action (CJGEA) are facing a life-or-death situation,” said Mr Knox. **“These human rights abuses undermine the ability of ordinary Kenyans to seek environmental protection without fear. It is vital that the Kenyan Government takes effective actions immediately to protect these environmental defenders from violence and harassment, that it investigates the actions and threats against them, and punishes those responsible,”** Mr Knox stressed. In 2015, Phyllis Omidio, the recipient of the prestigious Goldman Prize, also called the “environmental Nobel prize,” founded CJGEA to promote and protect human rights and environmental justice. Her three colleagues who are also in danger are Wilfred Kamencu, Anastacia Nambo, and Alfred Ogola.

**The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** has delayed its election until 2018, prolonging the political uncertainty that has held back projects that will impact its forests. Nonetheless, there remains very strong interest in developing mineral resources, building new infrastructure, establishing industrial plantations, and opening forests to logging. **In this context, the ‘pygmies’, widely known as Bambuti, are being pushed out of their native land to which they could assert no legal title.**



(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

Congo's Pygmies are among central Africa's oldest indigenous peoples. For millennia, they have lived as hunter-gatherers, surviving off the forest's bounty of plants, birds and monkeys. **Idjwi, in the middle of Lake Kivu, has been spared the ravages of wars in eastern Congo that have killed millions of people since 1996, mostly from hunger and disease.** But for its indigenous inhabitants, the advance of another culture has proved nearly as devastating. Like their ethnic kin across central Africa, Idjwi's Pygmies, widely known as Bambuti, have been pushed out of a native land to which



they could assert no legal title – in this case, to make way for an exploding ethnic Bantu population who now make up more than 95 per cent of Idjwi's 280,000 inhabitants.

Around 1980, the Bambuti say, local authorities and customary chiefs from the Bahavu, a Bantu people, expelled them from the forests and turned the land over to Bahavu to farm and build houses. The Bambuti lost their livelihood and, with few assets, no education and no experience of how to support themselves in an alien environment, their society has withered.

**"We are no more than 7,000 on the island, relocated on uncultivable land and scattered on the coast in makeshift camps on the fringe of villages, in total destitution,"** said Charles Livingstone, the chief of Idjwi's pygmies.



(Photo by Therese Di Campo/Reuters)

Most cannot read or write, and lack the money to send their children to school. "Before, in the forest, we had everything we needed for an easy and happy life: food, shelter, medicine, clothes," said Habimana, a Bambuti woman of 45. "It's in our nature to live like that." Idjwi's local customary authorities argue that the Bambutis sold their land, Muley said. Moreover, South Kivu was "a province where there are a lot of land issues, land disputes everywhere, so you are told that nothing can be done".

In **Gabon** palm oil cultivation has become controversial because ecologically diverse areas of rainforest are often cut down to allow cultivation to take place. **The concessions in question cover 300,000 hectares, of which palm oil is being planted on 58,000 hectares covering four parcels of land:** three of these are in the southwest of the country and the other in the northwest. Under a separate agreement, concluded last year, Olam has also taken a 49% stake in managing 70,000 hectares of smallholder plantations in Gabon. The two existing ventures involve total investment of \$1.7bn.



For its part, Olam argues that it promotes sustainable development, denies the allegations and states that its Gabonese plantations have created 5,400 jobs. It argues that it avoids primary rainforest and claims that 59% of the planted area comprises degraded secondary forests and the remainder savannah. Whatever the rights and wrongs of [Olam's activities in Gabon](http://africanbusinessmagazine.com/uncategorised/change-is-the-way-forward/), [it is clear that the African continent as a whole must become more aware of the undoubted problems associated with palm oil cultivation.](http://africanbusinessmagazine.com/uncategorised/change-is-the-way-forward/) Soon, governments may have to bring legislation in line with changing international opinion on the issue.



Olam International's warehouse and storage and distribution van. PHOTO: OLAM INTERNATIONAL

Recently, Olam International and US-based environmental lobby group Mighty Earth have agreed to collaborate on forest conservation and sustainable agriculture. Olam, majority-owned by Temasek Holdings, will suspend clearing forest in the West African country of Gabon for a year. On his part, Mighty Earth, chaired by former United States congressman Henry Waxmann, will suspend its campaign against Olam's oil palm and rubber operations for a year, including its complaint to the Forest Stewardship Council. During that year, both parties will support a multi-stakeholder process to develop further criteria for responsible agricultural development in heavily forested countries.

In **Cameroon**, instead, **180,000 people are calling on the President of Cameroon to end SGSOC palm oil plantation.** The petition is accompanied by 180,281 signatures collected in Cameroon and internationally. **"SGSOC palm oil project not only destroys the livelihood of the local people in South-West Region, it also threatens primary rainforests, national parks and forest reserves which are home to a unique biodiversity hotspot,"** says Reinhard Behrend, Director of Rainforest Rescue. "We never expected SGSOC to encroach on our farmlands and non-concession forest. We pray this petition will add traction to our plight and push the President to react accordingly," says Chief Ejuba of Babensi II. **Greenpeace Africa and its partners hope the Presidency will heed the voice of thousands of Cameroonians who strongly oppose this project situated in a biodiversity hotspot.**



The international community, through various embassies in Cameroon, have also been informed about the signed petition against the company's continuous presence in Cameroon.



Photo by Aaron Kessler

**The Nana Bouba Group, founded by the eponymous billionaire, launched in 2016 in the Littoral region of Cameroon, particularly Yabassi in the Nkam district, a gigantic project for the creation of oil palm plantations.** The first 500 hectares were planted last year, under the banner of a new company labeled Greenfield SA. It would appear that In 2017, this company which as part of this agri-industrial project (global investments estimated at FCfa 70 billion) is being coached by experts from the Malaysian public company Felda Ipco, is planning to plant **1,000 additional hectares of oil pam, to reach 30,000 hectares in the long term, with 1,000 hectares planted every year.**

**Also in Cameroon, two major charities are battling over the future of some 50,000 pygmies, beset by poverty, hunger and alcoholism after they were evicted from their lands to save iconic elephants and gorillas.** As wildlife populations shrink at an unprecedented rate, conservation groups are pouring millions of dollars into efforts to protect their habitats - which critics say often put animals before people. **In Cameroon, Survival International, a group campaigning for the rights of tribal people, has accused the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) of funding anti-poaching guards who have beaten and killed Baka pygmies with impunity.** Since being moved off their ancestral land, most of the largely-illiterate Baka live in huts made of leaves, bamboo and mud-baked bricks alongside southeast Cameroon's roads, just outside the protected areas that they need permits to enter. They divide their time between camping in the forest, particularly during fishing, caterpillar and mango seasons - where they often come into conflict with guards - and the villages, where they farm plantain and peanuts. "On paper, (WWF) supports indigenous people's rights... but in reality, they don't. Behind the scenes, they support this very repressive human-free idea of what national parks should be" said Michael Hurran, Africa campaigner with London-based Survival.



Millions of people across Africa have been expelled from their land to create protected areas like national parks, according to Charles Geisler, a sociologist at Cornell University, who dubs them "conservation refugees". Protected areas have doubled since the 1990s, according to the World Bank, covering 15 percent of land globally, often displacing indigenous people who lack political clout to resist.

## NIGERIA

Unfortunately, also in Nigeria (which imports about 55 per cent of the total volume of palm oil consumed), the massive expansion of the African palm is becoming a reality. 12,000 hectares has already been set aside to accommodate what is supposed to become the Africa largest oil palm plantation.

Meanwhile, in the Delta Region negotiations are taking place between the Federal Government and other Niger Delta stakeholders, including militants, who have been bombing oil assets to draw attention to challenges in the oil region. Meanwhile, the leader of the Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), Chief Edwin Clark, said the visit was not a substitute for dialogue. A statement from the Office of the Vice President, however, reassured that the government was committed to an effective dialogue with Niger Delta leaders.

Separately, the Urhobo ethnic nationality in Delta State, yesterday, urged the Federal Government to dialogue with PANDEF. The position of the ethnic group is contained in a statement, entitled: "Urhobo position on Niger Delta Development Issues Versus Federal Government of Nigeria," signed by the Urhobo Youth Leaders Association, UYLA, National President and Secretary, Messrs. Francis Arhiyor and Vincent Oyibode.

The group call for the immediate restructuring of the Amnesty Office to give equal opportunity to all ethnic nations in the Niger-Delta, adding: "We wish to quickly recommend that the security of the oil and gas facilities should be given to the youths of various ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta."

The 10-point dialogue issues suggested by the group include graduated increase in derivation from 13 per cent to 50 per cent over a five- year period; repeal and abrogation of all unjust and oppressive legislations, laws, policies that vest ownership and control of oil and gas resources in the Federal Legislature List in the 1999 Constitution as amended; and repeal and abrogation of all anti-federal and inequitable laws and policies related to the oil and gas industry such as pipelines, etc. Others are repeal of the Land Use Act and return of all lands to communities, families, and individuals; repeal of the 1997 Inland Waterways Act that vests in the Federal Government the ownership of all rivers and waterways and their banks; review of oil bloc licenses to ensure majority equity ownership by Urhobo investors; the next review is due this year; passage of Petroleum Industry Bill into law by 2017; and minimum of 75 per cent of workforce in all oil and gas business in Urhobo land to be reserved for Urhobo indigenes and professionals.

**In Nigeria's Cross River state, the struggle of the Ekuri people is paying off:** the governor is returning vast swathes of rainforest land to the community. **5,200 square km had been appropriated for a 20 km wide corridor along a planned "superhighway".** The road itself is not off the table yet, however. **The Ekuri indigenous community is staunchly resisting Cross River state's unprecedented land grab – a corridor 260 km long and 20 km wide.** Had it gone through, the inhabitants of more than 185 villages would have lost their land, their forest and their livelihoods with a stroke of the pen. Conservationists fear that the governor intended to open up the corridor – which would have crossed



through several protected areas, including Cross River National Park – to timber companies. Despite this initial success, the planned “superhighway” project has not been canceled. Even without the corridor, the new road would slice up the rainforest and give illegal loggers and poachers easy access. Men were recently observed inspecting a section of the planned route – a possible sign that forest will soon be cleared for the project. The residents of Ekuri Forest are remaining vigilant together with the staff of the “Ekuri Initiative” and the NGO Devcon and will not give up the struggle until this “superhighway to nowhere” has been canceled once and for all.

In **Liberia**, recently, a **Non-Governmental Organization**, the **Concerned Youth of Ganta for Reconstruction and Development**, and a **Liberian citizen** have sued the **Republic of Liberia** at the **ECOWAS Court of Justice**, praying it for an order directing **Liberia government** to pay **\$200 million** as compensation to over 500 families of **Ganta community** killed by the **Liberian armed forces** over **land dispute**. The Organization and Mr. Mamadee F. Donzo also asked the ECOWAS Court in Abuja for “a declaration that **the killing, violent attacks, Intimidation, arrest and incarceration of unarmed Indigenous People of Ganta by the Liberian Security Force** was unlawful and a crime against humanity.”



The plaintiffs also urged the court to hold that the continued banishment of the heads of families of Indigenous People of Ganta from having access to their ancestral home/lands and building is in gross violation of the rights of the Indigenous People of Ganta to own property. The suit was brought in



pursuance to the relevant provisions on rights violations in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Economic Community of West Africa State (ECOWAS) Revised Treaty dated 24th July 1993; African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced persons in African; and other related Human Rights Treaties.

**In Mozambique, the rate of children abandoning school to work in the artisanal gold mining sector is increasing.** Their parents also prefer illicit, and often dangerous mining to working the fields, even though Nacaroa is highly fertile. The problem is particularly pronounced in the regions of Nacope and



Mahepa, about 200 kilometers from Nacaroa town, where many schools are short of pupils, and farmland is abandoned. A team monitoring the 2016/2017 agricultural campaign recently visited Nacaroa and warned against the prioritizing of artisanal mining at the expense of education and agriculture. It urged the local administration to raise the awareness of the Nacaroa population that

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children should not be used as mine labour, and that peasant producers should prioritise agriculture. **Because of reckless digging, enormous craters have appeared in some roads, and watercourses have been poisoned.**

Elsewhere, in **Guinea** local communities are witnessing the changes being caused by the **withdrawal of mining from their areas.** The town of Fria in Guinea was built around bauxite mining in 1957. It used to have good facilities: water, electricity, schools, housing and hospitals. But since the last company mining there began to decrease activities in 2008 after the financial crisis and a fall in aluminum prices, the population has increasingly lived in poverty with high rates of unemployment. **Families that used to provide for their extended families cannot today afford to care for the needs of their own children and immediate relatives.** Many of the benefits the locals used to enjoy are being lost. While accommodation remains free, the children's nursery is closed, the swimming pool, athletics tracks and sports stadium have fallen into disrepair, water and electricity are now rationed. The Pechiney hospital, as the locals still call it, long recognized as the best in Guinea, is no longer regularly supplied with medicine.

**This, unfortunately, is the dreadful future that an increasing number of makeshift towns built around rural mineral extraction face in African countries such as Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Chad, Sudan, and Nigeria, which are being driven by growing [foreign investment in mining](http://www.dourish.com/classes/readings/Ferguson-SeeingLikeAnOilCompany-AA.pdf)** ([www.dourish.com/classes/readings/Ferguson-SeeingLikeAnOilCompany-AA.pdf](http://www.dourish.com/classes/readings/Ferguson-SeeingLikeAnOilCompany-AA.pdf)).



These new urban developments are sustained, managed and controlled by the mining companies. And although the nature of these towns vary between countries and what is being mined, they all share some common characteristics. They are all administered by foreign companies in accordance with the norms of “home” states, such as the US, France and Australia, and mostly managed by foreign nationals – with heavy support from outside investment. It means these enclaves develop economies that are totally disconnected [from the wider realities](https://www.dukeupress.edu/global-shadows) (<https://www.dukeupress.edu/global-shadows>) of the host countries. And in the case of Fria, the danger is that when mining activities stop, the people living there are left in extreme poverty with no alternative livelihoods.

This year again, **South Africa** has been highlighted in the in Human Rights Watch’s World Report of 2017. According to the report: **“in South Africa, public confidence in the government’s willingness to tackle human rights violations, corruption, and respect for the rule of law has eroded.”** “South Africa continued to face a number of human rights challenges,” the chapter concludes. Despite scoring major victories this year in its fight against mining near Xolobeni, the Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) and its allies believe neither mining companies nor the government has given up. “No, that one is a strategy,” Nonhle Mbuthuma, ACC secretary, said of a proposed moratorium that



A group of protesters referring to themselves as the 'Alternative Mining Indaba' rally outside the Mining Indaba in Cape Town in this February 2012 file photo. Picture: TREVOR SAMSON

could halt attempts to mine along the Wild Coast. “The government, the mining company are working hand in hand to make sure the mining takes place.” He said.

**A community coalition continues to fight mining companies in court, while residents in Eastern Pondoland brace for the next wave of fighting, which is expected to include both words as well as**



**guns.** The Amadiba community fought to keep mining off its land for nearly two decades before **the murder of ACC chairman Sikhosiphi “Bazooka” Radebe** in March 2016 suddenly brought the national spotlight to this group of villages. **In July, the Australian mining company attempting to mine sand to produce titanium announced it would fully divest from the project, noting the area’s violence.** When the Department of Mineral Resources published its intentions to place a moratorium on mining the area only two months later, it looked as if those opposing the mine had won the day.



Nonhle Mbuthuma, leader of the Amadiba Crisis Committee, which opposes a proposed titanium mine on South Africa's Eastern Cape. KRISANNE JOHNSON FOR YALE E360

**On September 15 2016, Mineral Resources Minister Mosebenzi Zwane outlined an 18-month moratorium, which would preclude any company from receiving decisions on mining right applications in the area and would temporarily halt new mining applications.** Attorney Henk Smith of the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) represents the community and he remains skeptical of the moratorium. “We don’t know if the minister has issued a moratorium or not. They won’t answer us on that question.” As in many mining areas around the country, the villages near Xolobeni subsist on communal land, meaning engagement with traditional authorities would not necessarily guarantee a company the right to mine.

Meanwhile, in the Soutpansberg range and on the flat lands beyond, an improbable coalition of local farmers, villagers, big agricultural businessmen and activists are fighting to halt the development of a large **opencast mine which, they say, would cause massive harm to the region.** The mine lays 30km north of the small town of Makhado. A South African company hopes it can extract some 5.5m tonnes of coking and heating coal for use locally and for export from a narrow and remote valley. Government officials broadly back the project, which developers argue will bring wealth to both the developing nation and to local people. **But campaigners fear the Makhado mine will wreak much damage, and that if it goes ahead much larger projects will follow, leading to the loss of irreplaceable cultural and biological resources.**

**Coal currently provides almost three quarters of South Africa’s energy production** and local officials say the fuel is still essential to ensure the developing nation’s energy security for decades to come. So too does Coal of [Africa](https://www.theguardian.com/world/africa) Ltd (CoAL), (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/africa>) the company behind the Makhado



mine project. **South Africa has pledged to lower its carbon emissions by 42% by 2025.** Half of these emissions come from the state generating company's coal-fired power stations.

Two vast new coal-powered power stations are being built – among the biggest in the world – and will need fuel. At present, most of the coal these and other similar installations need comes from the eastern province of Mpumalanga. Official estimates [official estimates](http://www.eskom.co.za/AboutElectricity/ElectricityTechnologies/Pages/Coal_Power.aspx) ([http://www.eskom.co.za/AboutElectricity/ElectricityTechnologies/Pages/Coal\\_Power.aspx](http://www.eskom.co.za/AboutElectricity/ElectricityTechnologies/Pages/Coal_Power.aspx)) suggest that South Africa has reserves of 53bn tonnes of coal, enough for “200 years” at present production rates. **Between a quarter and a third of coal mined in the country is now sold overseas.** More than half of the exports go to India, which is investing in a huge programme of construction of mines.

## ONLINE ARTICLES AND WEB LINKS

### GENERAL TOPICS

#### **2016 Was a Terrible Year for Human Rights Defenders: Report**

Across the globe in 2016, 282 human rights defenders were killed, and hundreds more were subjected to harassment, detainment, violence and other violations, according to a new report released this week, that also found a concerning number of people were killed defending land as well as Indigenous and environmental rights. The annual report from Front Line Defenders pointed out that the killings commonly occurred following threats and warnings, but were frequently ignored by authorities once reported to police. The report showed that 282 human rights defenders were killed across 25 countries, an increase from the previous year. The non-violent activities of human rights defenders were targeted by state and non-state actors and 49 percent of people were killed after working to defend land, Indigenous and environmental rights.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.telesur.tv/english/news/2016-Was-a-Terrible-Year-for-Human-Rights-Defenders-Report-20170105-0017.html>

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#### **Two-fold increase in human rights activists killed globally**

The number of human rights defenders killed throughout the world almost doubled in 2016 compared to the previous year. The Irish-based agency Front Line Defenders has reported that 281 human rights activists were killed in 25 countries last year, compared to 156 in 2015. The increase in numbers could be partly attributable to the fact the agency has “become better at collecting information”, said Andrew Anderson, executive director of Front Line Defenders.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/two-fold-increase-in-human-rights-activists-killed-globally-1.2926567>

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#### **More than 1,000 Human Rights Defenders killed, harassed in 2016**



More than 1,000 human rights defenders (HRD) were killed, harassed, detained, or subjected to smear campaigns and other violations in 2016, says the annual report of Front Line Defenders launched on Friday. The report titled 'Annual Report on Human Rights Defenders at Risk in 2016' documents hundreds of physical, legal, and social attacks on activists around the world in 2016. The report highlights the devastating effects of activist murders on communities and social movements; according to Front Line Defenders research in Bangladesh, refusal by police to investigate death threats and protect human rights defenders led to increased self-censorship, a breakdown in activist networks, and more than two dozen human rights defenders fleeing the country.

**READ MORE**

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/177449-More-than-1000-Human-Rights-Defenders-killed-harassed-in-2016>

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**“Serious Retreats” In Indigenous Rights Protection, Says UN Rapporteur**

As the 10-year anniversary for the Declaration on Indigenous Rights approaches, UN indigenous rights activists came together to assess the many challenges that still remain on the ground. “The UN Declaration is a declaration that contains the collective nature of the rights of indigenous peoples. (It) is meant to bring about remedies to kinds of historical and current injustices that indigenous people suffer,” said UN Special Rapporteur Victoria Tauli-Corpuz during a press briefing on 26 January. Though it is not legally binding, the declaration guarantees indigenous groups rights to self-determination, land, and to live free from any kind of discrimination. However, Tauli-Corpuz noted that there are “serious retreats” in the implementation of indigenous rights, including the threat of tribal land being taken away by extractive industries.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2017/01/serious-retreats-in-indigenous-rights-protection-says-un-rapporteur/>

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**UN Recognizes Ecuador, Bolivia for Support of Indigenous Rights**

10 years after the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Ecuador and Bolivia are unique in their efforts to enshrine the charter into law. In a press conference Wednesday reviewing the 10 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UNDRIP, the U.N. special rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples highlighted the efforts Ecuador and Bolivia have made to implement the historic document.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/UN-Recognizes-Ecuador-Bolivia-for-Support-of-Indigenous-Rights-20170127-0001.html>

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**The Rights of Nature: Indigenous Philosophies Reframing Law**

Indigenous battles to defend nature have taken to the streets, leading to powerful mobilizations like the gathering at Standing Rock. They have also taken to the courts, through the development of innovative legal ways of protecting nature. In Ecuador, Bolivia and New Zealand, indigenous activism



has helped spur the creation of a novel legal phenomenon—the idea that nature itself can have rights. The 2008 constitution of Ecuador was the first national constitution to establish rights of nature. In this legal paradigm shift, nature changed from being held as property to a rights-bearing entity. Rights are typically given to actors who can claim them—humans—but they have expanded especially in recent years to non-human entities such as corporations, animals and the natural environment.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://intercontinentalcry.org/rights-nature-indigenous-philosophies-reframing-law/>

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### **You may be Driving Species Extinct**

When we think of who is responsible for the depletion of natural resources and the impending extinction of rare species like tigers, we tend to think it's someone else: poachers, loggers, greedy business folk. But what if we, too, are personally responsible in our own way? According to a new study published in the journal Nature Ecology and Evolution, we indeed are. Many people in the developed and developing world are consuming natural resources so rapaciously, albeit unwittingly, that their consumption habits are causing rapid habitat losses for numerous species of wildlife in places like Sabah and Sarawak. In Borneo, for instance, oil palm cultivators continue to fell large tracts of forest to create new plantations simply because there's plenty of need from consumers for the products (everything from sweets to detergents) that use palm oil. Stop or scale back much of that consumer need, and you can stop or scale back much of the deforestation, the argument goes.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://cleanmalaysia.com/2017/01/07/may-driving-species-extinct/>

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### **Indigenous Peoples Lands Guard 80 Percent of World's Biodiversity**

They are more than 370 million self-identified peoples in some 70 countries around the world. In Latin America alone there are over 400 groups, each with a distinct language and culture, though the biggest concentration is in Asia and the Pacific— with an estimated 70 per cent. And their traditional lands guard over 80 per cent of the planet's biodiversity. They are the indigenous peoples. They have rich and ancient cultures and view their social, economic, environmental and spiritual systems as interdependent. And they make valuable contributions to the world's heritage thanks to their traditional knowledge and their understanding of ecosystem management.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://morungexpress.com/indigenous-peoples-lands-guard-80-percent-worlds-biodiversity/>

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### **Lessons We Can Learn From Indigenous Communities to Protect the Future of the Planet**

Approximately 370 million indigenous people, 5,000 tribes, reside in more than 90 countries worldwide, within this territory lies 80 percent of the world's biodiversity. The reason these two



things go together is testament to indigenous peoples' lasting relationship with nature – something we can all learn from. Not only that, but preserving indigenous homes, and the plant and animal species that dwell there, is a very good reason (if we needed one) to protect our forests. The masterful knowledge many indigenous people have of their environment is well documented. The Yanomami people of the Amazon, for example, make use of an impressive 500 different plant species every day. They possess such an intricate knowledge of their surroundings that they know which trees play host to tasty edible beetle grubs when they fall, and which species of flowers will be visited by wild honey bees. Nature is part of everyday life and it goes into everything, from building hammocks, to blending body paints. It just isn't exploited, and the Yanomami people take only what they need to survive. For them, dwindling game supplies is a trigger to move on to another place and allow for replenishment.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.onegreenplanet.org/environment/lessons-we-can-learn-from-indigenous-communities-to-protect-the-future-of-the-planet/>

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#### **What to expect for rainforests in 2017**

While 2016 lacked the drama of Indonesia's 2015 fire and haze crisis, surging deforestation in Earth's largest rainforest and ongoing destruction of forests for industrial plantations meant that it was far from a quiet year for the planet's rainforests. So what's ahead for 2017? Below are eight things we'll be closely watching in the new year.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/01/forest-forecast-2017-what-to-expect-in-rainforests-this-year/>

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## **OIL PALMS AND PALM OIL UPDATES**

#### **Documenting the consequences of palm oil production beyond Southeast Asia**

Most of the attention around palm oil production has focused on where the crop has the largest footprint: Southeast Asia. Yet oil palm plantations are rapidly mushrooming throughout the tropics, from the species' ancestral home in West and Central Africa to Pacific islands to Latin America. A new film, *Appetite for Destruction: The Palm Oil Diaries*, looks at some of the social and environmental impacts of that expansion, by visiting communities, forests, and plantations in Cameroon, Guatemala, and Colombia. During a January 2017 interview, Mongabay caught up with the film's director Michael Dorgan, who talked about his experience in making the film, including an experiment he conducted on himself in an effort to measure the effects of a palm oil-heavy diet on his health.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/02/documenting-the-consequences-of-palm-oil-production-beyond-southeast-asia/>

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## Latin America palm oil production doubled since 2001 without massive uptick in deforestation

The palm oil industry's rapid growth in Southeast Asia brought with it massive amounts of deforestation and associated impacts on local communities and biodiversity. So, as oil palm operations proliferate across the tropics, it's perhaps no surprise that the impacts of palm oil production outside of Southeast Asia are the subject of increasing scrutiny. For instance, a study published earlier this month in the journal Environmental Research Letters by researchers with the University of Puerto Rico looks at the types of land being converted to oil palm plantations in Latin America. The area of land planted with oil palm has doubled in Latin America since 2001, but the study finds that most plantations were established on land that had already been cleared.

### READ MORE

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/02/latin-america-palm-oil-production-doubled-since-2001-without-massive-uptick-in-deforestation/>

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## Indonesia ups efforts to gain EU recognition for palm oil

Indonesia is stepping up its efforts to gain recognition from the European Union for a palm oil product certification amid an intense anti-palm oil campaign in Europe on the back of sustainability concerns. The government planned to develop a palm oil legality scheme, similar to its domestic timber legality system (SVLK) implemented in 2013, which has gained recognition as the world's only timber legality scheme acknowledged by the EU. The legality scheme for palm oil is expected to improve the reputation of the country's palm oil industry, Environment and Forestry Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar said. "Because the palm oil industry is constantly protested internationally for allegedly creating problems, we have to find instruments that are internationally accepted," she said on Wednesday.

### READ MORE

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/02/23/indonesia-ups-efforts-to-gain-eu-recognition-for-palm-oil.html>

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## Why Killer Viruses Are On The Rise

Pygmy elephants. Monkeys with noses the size of beer cans. And a deer so small you could cradle it like a baby. And right there, sitting on a leaf, is the strangest bug we've ever seen. "Check out the size of it," says virus hunter Kevin Olival as he picks up a ginormous roly-poly. "It's the size of a ping-pong ball!" We're in the middle of Malaysia's Borneo rain forest. Olival has brought us here because this is the type of place where pandemics are born. HIV came from a rain forest. So did Ebola. Yellow fever. And Zika.

### READ MORE

<http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/02/14/511227050/why-killer-viruses-are-on-the-rise>

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## **Big palm oil is making the rules**

Today, palm oil is among the products that are in high demand around the world. Major corporations control prices, labour conditions and production quantities. Farmers work for meagre incomes and bear all risks. Grassroots movements, however, are beginning to have an impact. "Almost everything contains palm oil: chocolate, margarine, bread, chips, pizza, body lotions and cleaning detergents, for example," says Akua Britwum. The Ghanaian scholar states that, to meet growing demand, palm oil companies are expanding their operations, contracting small-holder farmers and buying land. Palm oil has become one of the most important globally traded goods.

### **READ MORE**

<https://www.dandc.eu/en/article/growing-demand-palm-oil-changing-agriculture-countries-far-apart-ghana-and-indonesia>

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## **How Green Am I: Is a life without palm oil possible?**

Palm oil is practically everywhere, whether it be food, cosmetics or gasoline. And it is not always easy to identify. So I decided to understand this ubiquitous stuff better. Turns out, I was naive. In the beginning, I have to admit, my approach to the subject was naive. "Clearly, palm oil is something I've heard of before," I said, "it's a product of the oil palm tree. Perhaps it is similar to coconut fat, maybe olive oil, it's most likely used for cooking." And I assumed that I would learn a lot about this fat relatively quickly. Boy, I was wrong. Avoiding it would be quite a challenge. And that was exactly my task.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.dw.com/en/howgreenami-is-a-life-without-palm-oil-possible/a-37398114>

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## **The real impact of palm oil and failed policies**

The true negative impact of palm oil, the interests that the trade serves and the failure of policy to deal with deforestation and other consequences, write Jakub Kvapil, Stanislav Lhota and Zoltán Szabó. Jakub Kvapil and Stanislav Lhota are founding members of Lestari, an NGO active on palm oil. Zoltán Szabó is a sustainability adviser in the bioenergy industry. Palm oil as currently produced is fundamentally unsustainable. This is mainly because of the draining of peatlands in Indonesia and Malaysia to make way for palm oil plantations. But there are also other impacts on the environment linked to this process that result in massive forest fires, drainage of rivers, soil erosion, pollution of soil and water that together affect the global climate. Those clearings result in prohibitive greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and are evidently triggered by market forces. This means that the palm oil market is closely linked to substantial land use change GHG emissions.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/opinion/the-real-impact-of-palm-oil-and-failed-policies/>

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## Heartbreaking Photo Reminds Us How Our Choices Impact Orangutans

The Leuser Rainforest in Sumatra is affectionately known as the orangutan capital of the world but during the past two decades, over 80 percent of the orangutan habitat has been destroyed and there is one culprit to blame for this widespread ruin – the palm oil industry. Palm oil can be found in around 50 percent of consumer goods, so the demand for this particular vegetable oil is devastating. The palm oil industry is big business in Indonesia and in order to keep up with ever-increasing demand, farmers clear-cut wide swaths of the Leuser Rainforest to make room for new tracts of farmland. Experts estimate that 300 football fields of rainforest are cut down every hour to make way for palm oil plantations. Sadly, this leaves orangutans with no choice but to seek out palm oil plantations for food and shelter, but the only thing they find there is death and misery. Orangutans are viewed as pests in the industry and if they are found on plantations, they are shot on sight or captured for sale into the illegal wildlife trade.

### READ MORE

<http://www.onegreenplanet.org/news/photo-reminds-us-of-how-our-choices-impact-orangutans/>

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## Survey: EU citizens supportive of conventional biofuels use

The vast majority of European citizens believe that food-based biofuels should be promoted by the EU, according to a new industry-funded opinion poll published today (23 January). Last July, the European Commission published a European Strategy for Low-Emission Mobility proposing that food-based biofuels be gradually phased out and replaced with “more advanced biofuels” The proposal triggered strong reactions in the biofuels industry, which blamed the Commission for being “prejudiced” and questioned the scientific basis of its proposal. In addition to environmental concerns such as the indirect land use change (ILUC), according to the EU executive, the decision to phase out conventional biofuels after 2020 was also driven by public opinion’s stance on first generation biofuels coming from food, particularly from crops such as sugar beet, corn, and wheat.

### READ MORE

<http://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/survey-eu-citizens-supportive-of-conventional-biofuels-use/>

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## Investor waves goodbye to palm oil

**Major US financial firm Dimensional Fund Advisors starts to divest itself of palm oil plantations in a move that hopes other investors will follow.**

A report released last year by Friends of the Earth US named companies with heavy investments that make billions of dollars in profits by clear-felling forests for palm oil plantations. This put pressure on fund managers who claimed that their investments were sustainable, and one of them, Dimensional, has divested two of its portfolios of all palm oil plantation companies. Texas-based with offices in eight countries, and managing investments of \$445bn, Dimensional is in the big league of fund managers. So getting current palm oil production practices labelled unsustainable is a major boost for the divestment movement. According to Bloomberg, the financial reporting agency, Dimensional has been trying to improve the credentials of funds they have called sustainable, and this has meant



divesting from industries that contribute to climate change. There's a lot more to be done by Dimensional and every other US investment firm — but this signals an important first step in moving away from funding destructive palm oil practices.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.eco-business.com/news/investor-waves-goodbye-to-palm-oil/>

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#### **Nutella is not the only product with disputed palm oil**

You may not know it, but palm oil is in many of the products you consume and use every day. The edible oil is currently in hot water after recent reports that it may have a potentially carcinogenic contaminant. And while some food manufacturers have banned the palm oil, Italian food giant Ferrero is fighting back against claims that palm oil, which is used in its Nutella spread, may cause cancer.

#### **READ MORE AND SEE VIDEO**

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/01/12/which-products-contain-palm-oil-nutella-cancer-causing-concerns/96483558/>

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#### **How Nutella plans to 'trick' you into thinking it's healthier than it is**

It's a lot of fuss over a little thing: a tablespoon, to be exact. But when the United States' Food and Drug Administration asked for the public's input on an obscure regulatory change that would cut Nutella's labelled serving size by half, it was flooded by comments - more than 650 of them. At issue is something called the RACC, or the "reference amount customarily consumed." It's the federal guideline companies use when labelling the serving sizes for packaged foods. Nutella is currently classified as a dessert topping, with a RACC of two tablespoons. Its manufacturer, Ferrero, would like to see it reclassified either as a jam or in a new category all its own, which would cut the serving size (and the sugar and calorie counts) that Nutella displays on its labels.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/health-and-wellbeing/nutrition/how-nutella-plans-to-trick-you-into-thinking-its-healthier-than-it-is-20170109-gtom2j.html>

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#### **Nutella maker Ferrero fights back over cancer risk fears after palm oil study**

The \$44 billion palm oil industry, under pressure in Europe after authorities listed the edible oil as a cancer risk, has found a vocal ally in the food sector: the maker of Nutella. Italian confectionery firm Ferrero has taken a public stand in defence of an ingredient that some other food companies in the country are boycotting. It has launched an advertising campaign to assure the public about the safety of Nutella, its flagship product which makes up about a fifth of its sales. The hazelnut and chocolate spread, one of Italy's best-known food brands and a popular breakfast treat for children, relies on palm oil for its smooth texture and shelf life. Other substitutes, such as sunflower oil, would change its character, according to Ferrero. "Making Nutella without palm oil would produce an inferior substitute for the real product, it would be a step backward," Ferrero's purchasing manager Vincenzo



Tapella told Reuters. He features in a TV commercial aired in Italy over the past three months that has drawn criticism from some politicians.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/11/nutella-maker-ferrero-fights-back-cancer-risk-fears-palm-oil/>

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**Sustainable Nutella: A New Report on Palm Oil Supply Chain Transparency**

It's been a difficult few years for Nutella, that delicious chocolate hazelnut spread made by Ferrero. First, it was linked to the loss of critical natural habitat for orangutans, due to one controversial ingredient: palm oil. Then, more recently, dramatic headlines claimed Nutella consumption have bigger health implications than ingesting all that sugar. "Could Nutella give you CANCER?" screamed the Daily Mail. And that was also due to one controversial ingredient: palm oil. Palm oil gives Nutella its spreadability, smooth texture and long shelf life, so the matter is not as simple as switching it out for a less controversial oil. And Nutella is far from the only product – food or otherwise – that relies on palm oil as an ingredient. So what's the problem with palm oil?

**READ MORE**

<https://spendmatters.com/2017/01/30/sustainable-nutella-new-report-palm-oil-supply-chain-transparency/>

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**EU food safety body to look again at palm oil health risks**

The European Food Safety Authority will re-examine its warning on health risks stemming from palm and other vegetable oils, a spokeswoman at the European body said in light of a recent study expressing less concern than EFSA. Food producers across Europe are closely monitoring independent authorities' indications on health risks related to palm oil, a low-cost ingredient which is used in a wide range of products from biscuits to chocolate spreads. Last May the Italian-based EFSA said palm oil generated more of a potentially carcinogenic contaminant than other vegetable oils when refined at temperatures above 200 degrees Celsius. It did not, however, recommend consumers stop eating it.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-palmoil-eu-idUSKBN15B1YP>

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**Palm Oil Might Not Kill You, But It Is Killing The Environment**

There have been reports surfacing online about the safety of an ingredient found in the chocolatey goodness of Nutella. It has been claimed that the palm oil used in the spread is carcinogenic. The company that makes Nutella, Ferrero, has vehemently denied these claims, but that hasn't stopped a proliferation of stories about major supermarkets in Italy pulling the product, along with others containing palm oil, from their shelves. The story actually began in May of last year, when the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a report looking into the potentially carcinogenic



properties of the oil. They found that palm oil may produce more carcinogenic products than any other oil tested when heated to 200°C (390°F), but they did not recommend that consumers stop eating it. Still, this hasn't prevented many from questioning its safety, with some now boycotting the oil, which is included in countless products from chocolate to soap.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.iflscience.com/editors-blog/palm-oil-might-not-kill-you-but-it-is-killing-the-environment/>

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**PALM OIL INNOVATION GROUP (POIG) & STEPHENSON PERSONAL CARE**

It's a complex and expanding environmental issue and we continue to be asked about the palm oil in our soap bases. As a manufacturer of soap and cosmetic base, we take our responsibility to creating a sustainable future in the Personal Care industry very seriously, explains our Sales and Marketing Director, James Clews: "A few years ago, we chose to be different when it comes to sourcing our raw materials. We were the first soap base supplier worldwide to use 100% RSPO Certified Sustainable Palm and Palm Kernel Oil in our production. This was a step, but not a solution; we continue to work hard to raise the bar on our soap base and ensure that wherever and whenever possible we are making a difference." We work with the RSPO and have developed an understanding that it is not necessarily bad to use Palm Oil as an ingredient. It ultimately comes down to the way in which this Palm Oil is farmed and harvested. By working closely with organisations such as POIG and RSPO, we are aiming to go above and beyond industry requirements, and set the standard for a more sustainable and ethical future in Palm Oil cultivation. The Palm Oil Innovation Group (POIG) was set up in 2013, and is a collective of progressive palm oil companies and brands together with environmental and social NGOs that are working to build on the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil standards and commitments by both demonstrating innovation to implement RSPO existing standards as well as additional critical issues.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.worldpressonline.com/PressRelease/palm-oil-innovation-group-poig-stephenson-personal-care-56294.html>

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**Palm Oil Girls crusading to save rainforest animals**

The Valley Springs Tigers can be a ferocious bunch at athletic matches and they are not looked at as being an endangered species in this part of the country. The Sumatran tiger on the other hand, is native to countries like Malaysia and Indonesia and is endangered. Its numbers are dwindling because of clear cutting of the palm oil tree. It's not just the tiger which is endangered by the harvesting of palm oil, but also species of orangutans, the pygmy elephant, the rhinoceros, Malayan Sun Bear and other rainforest animals. In defense of these animals, eight fourth-graders at VSS are on a crusade to stop or dramatically slow down the use of palm oil and clear cutting of palm oil trees.

**READ MORE**

[http://harrisondaily.com/people/palm-oil-girls-crusading-to-save-rainforest-animals/article\\_172d20ae-ce09-11e6-ab87-cbe0a937907c.html](http://harrisondaily.com/people/palm-oil-girls-crusading-to-save-rainforest-animals/article_172d20ae-ce09-11e6-ab87-cbe0a937907c.html)



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## **Greenpeace challenges HSBC on financing for palm oil companies**

In a report published on Tuesday, Greenpeace, the environmental group, said the UK-based bank, the biggest in Europe by market capitalisation, had extended financial support to companies “associated with the most unsustainable aspects of palm oil development”. The report challenges HSBC’s claims of being environmentally aware with detailed policies on deforestation and climate change. Stuart Gulliver, the bank’s chief executive, has recently made a high-profile push into green bonds, which finance environmentally friendly projects. Palm oil is a key ingredient in many supermarket goods ranging from shampoo and toothpaste to ice cream and fish fingers, and demand has been growing over the past few decades. Greenpeace highlighted HSBC’s relationship with palm oil companies, saying it was providing services to companies that allegedly breached its deforestation policy. HSBC said its deforestation policy prohibited the financing of operations that were illegal, damage high conservation value forests or violate the rights of workers and local people.

### **READ MORE**

<https://www.ft.com/content/9be9c174-dbe9-11e6-86ac-f253db7791c6>

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## **HSBC: what they've said about funding deforestation, and why it's wrong**

More than 200,000 people across the world - including many HSBC customers - have demanded that HSBC only provides loans and other financial services to companies that protect forests, including over 30,000 people in the UK who have sent emails directly to Stuart Gulliver, HSBC's CEO. HSBC has up until now been pretty quiet. But now, everyone who has emailed the bank to complain about its role in funding deforestation is receiving the same response. At face value, it looks reassuring but dig a little deeper and there are plenty of holes and unanswered questions. Let's take a look at what HSBC has said...

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/blog/forests/hsbc-debunked>

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## **HSBC promises to cut ties with forest-trashing palm oil companies**

Here's been a major breakthrough in protecting Indonesia's forests: HSBC has committed to breaking its links to palm oil companies destroying forests and peatlands. This is a fantastic result for everyone who has been campaigning over the last few weeks, although the hard work doesn't stop there. The real test now is how those words will be put into practice. HSBC's new policy - released today - says they will no longer provide funding to companies involved in any kind of deforestation or peatland clearance, both of which were missing from previous versions. Another big step forward is insisting that all HSBC's customers must publish their own forest protection policies by the end of June.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/Blogs/makingwaves/hsbc-palm-oil-deforestation-indonesia-new-policy/blog/58787/>



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## **Rapidly disappearing orangutans draw Long Beach woman to Indonesian rainforests**

Jill Sexton is haunted and hurt and she comes close to tears when the thought returns as it does relentlessly: Orangutans are headed toward extinction because of snacks. "Snacks," the Long Beach woman said, shaking her head at the absurdity that the magnificent apes may very well be gone in a decade so that humans, who share 97 percent of their DNA with the animals, can enjoy a sleeve of Oreo cookies or a bag of Lay's potato chips. "I can't wrap my mind around it," she said. Nobody's putting apes in candy bars, but the effect is the same for the orangutans and other animals. It comes down to palm oil, a sort of miracle ingredient that's in such massive global demand that great tracts of rainforests, including the sole habitats of the orangutan, are burned to make room for palm tree plantations.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.presstelegram.com/environment-and-nature/20161231/rapidly-disappearing-orangutans-draw-long-beach-woman-to-indonesia>

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## **Poachers turning to Sabah for ivory?**

Killing elephants for their ivory is unheard of in Sabah who have previously been poisoned to death for being a "nuisance" in plantations or ended up dead after being stuck in a quarry pit at the most. However, the grim discovery of a decapitated bull pygmy elephant in the vicinity of the Ulu Segama Forest reserve may be an indication that the world crackdown on the ivory trade lately is making poachers try their luck in Sabah. It was learnt that a single shotgun was fired at a male jumbo at an oil palm plantation boundary next to the Ulu Segama Forest Reserve. Its trunk was chopped off, its head hacked and tusks had disappeared without a trace. The latest killing field was a plantation road next the collapsed bridge of the Segama River, said Conservator of Forest, Datuk Sam Mannan.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news.cfm?NewsID=114904>

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## **Korean company bans forest clearing for Indonesian palm oil concessions**

Korean company Korindo has said they will stop clearing forest for palm oil concessions until sustainability assessments can be made. The company has promised to conduct an assessment of the 75,000 hectares of remaining forests on their palm oil concessions in Indonesian Papua. U.S.-based environmental group Mighty Earth said in a statement on January 10 that they and their partners will be meeting with Korindo at the end of the month in the hopes that the company will agree to use the High Carbon Stock Approach methodology (HCSA) in its assessments. HCSA is regarded as the industry standard methodology for distinguishing forest areas from degraded land. In order to follow the HCSA standard, Korindo must use credible assessors, make assessments available to the public, and seek independent verification of compliance. Korindo's moratorium and assessment comes just a few months after Mighty Earth and its partners released the report "Burning Paradise" on September



1, 2016. It alleged that Korindo had caused 30,000 hectares of deforestation and an estimated 894 fire hotspots since 2013, and led to swift investigations by the Indonesian government.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/01/korean-company-bans-forest-clearing-for-indonesian-palm-oil-concessions/>

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## **REGIONAL TOPICS**

### **LATIN AMERICA**

#### **ECUADOR**

##### **Court issues ruling in world's first "Rights of Nature" lawsuit**

After six and a half years of combined suspense and patience, finally on January 11 2017, Ecuador's Esmeraldas Provincial Court handed down its decision on the world's first constitutionally-based Rights of Nature lawsuit. This demand for justice—which simultaneously begs for a shift in merely human rights-based paradigms—was made by people who literally and figuratively live in the margins of Ecuador: The Canton of San Lorenzo. This once-rainforested Chocó ecoregion—part of the Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena Biodiversity Hotspot—is located along Ecuador's northwest Colombian border in the coastal province of Esmeraldas, which is the only province in the country where almost half the population is Afro-ecuadorian. Even many Ecuadorians themselves are not aware of the presence of Indigenous nationalities and territories in Esmeraldas, where—not by coincidence—you can find the majority of the remaining (less than 3%) Ecuadorian coastal lowland rainforests.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://intercontinentalcry.org/court-issues-ruling-worlds-first-rights-nature-lawsuit/>

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##### **As Ecuador's Presidential Election Looms, Its Fractured Indigenous Movement Takes Center Stage**

Gabriela Garces is 17, and over the past four years she has watched as the land of her ancestors transformed into an oil drilling battleground between her people and the state. The homes of her community near Puyo, Ecuador's southeast Amazon, have been evacuated and destroyed; their leaders persecuted and incarcerated. "The Earth is so beautiful, but to see it destroyed, to see there's nothing left of what we lived of..." Gaby told Remezcla, "if only they'd understand what the Earth is..." Gaby will have to cast her vote for a new President on February 19, but admits she doubts whether any candidate truly understands what makes the land so sacred to Indigenous people like her. While she hopes the center-left candidate Paco Moncayo will win, the latest polls indicate President Rafael Correa's appointed candidate Lenin Moreno and the banker-turned-politician Guillermo Lasso will likely battle it out in the second round of the elections on April 2. "To choose between those two (Lenin and Lasso)...I don't know, they follow the same line, they are both people who would kill us," the Kichwa high school student said.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://remezcla.com/features/culture/ecuador-presidential-election-indigenous-movement/>



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## **Ecuador's leading environmental group fights to stop forced closure**

Members of one of Latin America's most well-known environmental organisations, Acción Ecológica, are fighting for their survival against a controversial attempt by Ecuador's government to shut them down. The move by the government came six days after violence between soldiers, police and indigenous Shuar people opposed to a Chinese-run copper development, Panantza-San Carlos, in the Cordillera del Condor region, and just two days after Acción Ecológica had called for a Truth Commission to be set up to investigate events there. The attempt to close the organisation has sparked severe criticism from UN human rights experts and outrage from numerous civil society organisations in Latin America and elsewhere.

### **READ MORE**

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/andes-to-the-amazon/2017/jan/07/ecuadors-leading-environmental-group-fights-forced-closure>

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## **Shuar tribe face government in Amazon mining protests**

The death of a police officer during a standoff between military and indigenous Shuar people in a takeover attempt of a mining camp in Ecuador's southern Amazon on December 14, catalysed a government mobilisation of armed forces in the region. With a 30-day state of exception imposed across the entire Amazonian province of Morona Santiago, the government has reportedly mobilised up to 1,000 military and police personnel to protect the mining camp and hunt down what top officials have called an "illegally armed group" that they say does not represent the Shuar nation. Under the emergency decree, which has suspended rights such as freedom of expression and the inviolability of the home, reportedly five Indigenous Shuar and four mestizo men have been arrested and sentenced to 90-day preventive incarceration.

Human rights observers and Indigenous leaders have reported the arbitrary use of tanks, helicopters, rifle blasts and house raids by the military in what they say is an unprecedented "witch-hunt" against those threatening mega-mining projects in the Amazon.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/12/shuar-tribe-face-military-amazon-mining-protests-161228112853484.html>

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## **Amazon land battle pits indigenous villagers against might of Ecuador State**

Military drones and police helicopters circle above the Shuar indigenous village of El Tink, an Amazonian community in Ecuador where a high-profile dispute against a Chinese copper mine has become a standoff and a siege. Aerial surveillance is the only way the authorities can monitor this cloud forest enclave because residents have blocked the sole entrance to their home: a bouncing plank-and-cable bridge suspended 15 metres above the brown torrents of the Zamora river. Some wear masks to hide their faces. Others appear so casual, they could be out for an afternoon stroll. But



together, they take it in shifts to guard the crossing 24 hours a day. Friendly vehicles are allowed through. Government forces are turned back, but the siege is exacting a humanitarian toll on the villagers. "The river protects us. The military can't cross the bridge because we guard it day and night. If they come, we'll set fire to it," said Alfonso Chinkiun. "But we feel like we are captives. We can't leave this place because we fear we will be arrested. That means we can't work so we have to forage deep into the forest for food. Some days our children go to sleep without eating a single meal."

**READ MORE**

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/19/ecuador-indigenous-shuar-el-tink-mining-land-dispute>

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## COLOMBIA

### **Another mining activists in Colombia killed**

On January 7, Aldemar was assassinated by two unidentified gunmen on a motorcycle on the route from El Hatillo to La Loma in broad daylight. He was a community leader and active trade unionist, until recently employed in the mine of Colombian Natural Resources (CNR). He leaves his wife and three children behind. The murder of Aldemar is not an isolated incident. Unfortunately, this murder fits a pattern of violence against civil society and their leaders that we see across Colombia and in the mining region of Cesar. According to the report 'Civil society under Threat in Cesar at least 200 leaders became victims of threats, assaults and killings during the period 2012-2016. It is important to point out that all of these victims are social leaders whose efforts are considered by certain sectors of the Cesar population to be critical of the impact of mining activities in the region. Most of these acts are claimed by or carry the signature of neo-paramilitary groups, who claim to defend the interests of the mining companies and other economic actors in the region.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.facing-finance.org/en/2017/01/another-mining-activists-in-colombia-killed/>

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### **Colombian Human Rights Leader Assassinated**

On Tuesday police in the Pacific coast city of Buenaventura announced they had discovered the body of Afro-Colombian human rights activist Emilsen Manyoma, 32, and her partner Joe Javier Rodallega, who had been missing since Saturday. A prominent leader in the Bajo Calima region since 2005, Manyoma was an active member of the community network CONPAZ where she was an outspoken critic of right-wing paramilitary groups and the displacement of local by international mining and agribusiness interests. For the past year, Manyoma played a key role in documenting attacks on human rights leaders in the region as part of the recently created Truth Commission. The police said they had found the bodies in an advanced state of decomposition in a jungle area beside the highway. The Justice and Peace Commission, an ecumenical human rights group, reported that both bodies were severely wounded, with Rodallega's hands reported tied. Radio Contagio reported that both bodies were beheaded.



#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Colombian-Human-Rights-Leader-Assassinated-20170118-0002.html>

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#### **Amid Violence, Colombia Rights Activists Need Urgent Protection**

Amid an ongoing wave of fatal violence against Colombian social leaders despite the end of more than half a century of civil war in the country, a top official advocate called Monday for the government to improve protections for activists and human rights defenders, warning that assassinations of such leaders represents “an attack on the right to peace.” “Leaders and human rights defenders find themselves exposed today to an unprecedented risk of violence that threatens the country’s most vulnerable,” said Colombia’s Ombudsman Carlos Alfonso Negret. “But at the same time they are the most committed to peace and national reconciliation.” The ombudsman added that attacks and murders of social leaders is also a direct violation of the rights to freedom of thought and speech. The comments come after a slew of killings of campesino and Indigenous activists in some of the rural areas hardest hit by 52 years of internal armed conflict between government forces and left-wing guerrilla rebels.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Amid-Violence-Colombia-Rights-Activists-Need-Urgent-Protection-20170116-0013.html>

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#### **Another Indigenous Rights Leader Killed in Colombia**

Yet another human rights defender has been murdered in Colombia, adding to the list of victims of an ongoing wave of violence against activists in the country despite a landmark peace agreement that has brought an end to more than 50 years of civil war. According to eyewitnesses, activist Olmedo Pito Garcia was stabbed by two men who attacked him as he was walking home in the southwestern department of Cauca, one of the regions hardest hit by decades of armed conflict between government forces and guerrilla rebels. Police have ruled out the attack being linked to a robbery, but no information about the stabber's identity has been released.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Another-Indigenous-Rights-Leader-Killed-in-Colombia-20170111-0020.html>

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#### **Young Indigenous Women Killed in Colombia After 2nd Peace Deal**

The bodies of two Indigenous women from the community of Purace in the valley of Cauca have been found, a body representing the community announced Thursday amid an outcry from human rights organizations. The two women, who were residents of the municipality of La Plata, had been reported missing by their relatives since Tuesday, Nov. 29. Marly Yuliet Gomez Suarez and Shirley Daniela Lozada, both 23 years old, were found with gun wounds in the head and signs of physical



abuse. The women went missing at a sacred site called Andulbio lagoon, also known as San Rafael lagoon, between 2-3 p.m. The Cauca Regional Indigenous Council released a statement expressing sadness that the deaths could happen "in the middle of the peace process."

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.telesur.tv/english/news/Young-Indigenous-Women-Killed-in-Colombia-After-2nd-Peace-Deal-20161201-0035.html>

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#### **Groundbreaking win for indigenous people in Colombia**

The Colombian Constitutional Court has found in favour of an indigenous peoples' centuries-old fight for their territory, granting the petition for the protection of constitutional rights requested by the Embera Chamí people of the Indigenous Resguardo Cañamomo Lomaprieta, in western Colombia. The Resguardo's claim was accepted by the Colombian Constitutional Court, the final court of appeal for constitutional matters in Colombia. The court ordered that the Resguardo's lands must be delimited and titled within one year, during which time all further permits or formalisation of mining activities must be suspended. Any subsequent mining activities proposed on the delimited territories may only proceed on the basis of the effective participation of the Resguardo. The court also ordered that the map produced by the Resguardo of their land be registered provisionally until it is officially demarcated. This ruling is also relevant for other indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities whose lands are awaiting delimitation.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://yubanet.com/world/groundbreaking-win-for-indigenous-people-in-colombia/>

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## **BRAZIL**

#### **Brazil alters indigenous land demarcation process, sparking conflict**

In mid-January Brasília issued Ordinance 80, which moves decisions regarding indigenous land demarcation from Funai, the agency of Indian affairs, to the Justice Ministry. Large-scale landowners applauded the measure, while indigenous land rights activists are opposed to it. Brazil's population includes 900,000 indigenous people, of whom 517,000 live on officially recognized indigenous lands. About 13 percent of the country's territory is set aside as indigenous lands — 98.5 percent of it in the Amazon. The demarcation process has been fraught with controversy; demarcation of indigenous territory has been delayed for years by Funai, and in some places, by decades. Federal authorities argue that the shift of decision-making to the Justice Ministry will speed the resolution of land conflicts.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/02/brazil-alters-indigenous-land-demarcation-process-sparking-conflict/>

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## **Brazil stops demarcating land for indigenous people: ex-government agency official**

Facing pressure from agricultural interests, Brazil has stopped formally demarcating land for indigenous communities in a threat to rainforest conservation efforts, according to a former senior government agency official and campaigners. Brazil's constitution recognizes the right of indigenous people to live on their ancestral lands and the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), a government body, has been working to demarcate land for tribes, who make up less than 1 percent of the population. But new lands have not been demarcated for indigenous groups since August amid a push by lawmakers from Brazil's rural areas to change the process, said former

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-landrights-politics-idUSKBN14V24R?il=0>

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## **How Brazil's Proposed Environmental Laws Would Weaken Indigenous Rights, Forfeit Billions in Economic Benefits**

The bills were not subject to public debates, hearings or deliberative sessions, either by Congress or civil society. Grappling with Brazil's longest recession since the 1930s, government officials are under enormous pressure to combat rising unemployment, address widespread corruption and control inflation. Yet two recent bills designed to solve the problem are misguided attempts that could degrade the environment, diminish human rights and hurt the economy. The bills were not subject to public debates, hearings or deliberative sessions, either by Congress or civil society. The first proposes an overhaul of Brazil's environmental licensing laws, regulations that require companies to undergo an environmental evaluation before they begin operations in order to minimize detrimental impacts. The overhaul would make licensing more flexible for states, allow select corporations to provide their own licenses, exempt some agricultural activities from the licensing process altogether, and exempt financial institutions from the liability of their investments, among other modifications.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.alternet.org/environment/how-brazils-proposed-environmental-laws-would-weaken-indigenous-rights-forfeit-billions>

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## **Bid to reduce Amazon reserves corresponds with mining proposals: WWF**

A bill to reduce the size of four Amazon conservation reserves in Brazil and eliminate another may be related to proposals by mining industries to begin work in those areas, investigators from a conservation organization say. "We noticed that the majority of those exploitation requests are within the limits of the conservation units that the new bill wants to cut," said Mariana Ferreira, the science coordinator for WWF-Brazil, a non-governmental environmental protection organization. The national bill, proposed by legislators from Amazonas state, aims to eliminate the Campos de Manicore Environmental Protection Area and reduce the size of Acari National Park, the Manicore Biological Reserve and the Urupadi and Aripuana national forests. The protected areas were created last year, before the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in August.

### **READ MORE**



<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-amazon-mining-idUSKBN1631GN>

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### **Brazil's indigenous leaders push for Amazon land rights as Carnival kicks off**

Brazilian indigenous leaders left the Amazon rainforest for Rio de Janeiro to push for land rights on Friday, the opening day of the city's famous Carnival, as critics accused campaigners of politicizing one of the world's biggest parties. Artists from the Imperatriz Leopoldinense samba school, one of Rio's traditional dance academies, invited indigenous leaders to Rio because their theme for this year's float parade is "Xingu: The Clamor that Comes from the Forest". Deep in the Amazon, indigenous activists say the Xingu region of lush foliage and flowing rivers is threatened by proposed dams, agricultural plantations and infrastructure projects. Those themes are showcased in the school's floats, costumes and elaborate dance routines. Indigenous leader Alessandra Munduruku said she would prefer to be at home with her people in the rainforest rather than attending press conferences on the opening day of the Carnival. But she said outside investors have come into the jungle where her people live, so the Munduruku have no choice but to get organized and fight to protect their land.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-4257562/Brazils-indigenous-leaders-push-Amazon-land-rights-Carnival-kicks-off.html#ixzz4cGRrHnbA>

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### **Brazilian farm owners form militias to attack land activists - rights group**

Large farm owners in Brazil are forming private militias to attack land rights campaigners, Human Rights Watch said on Thursday, as rural violence in Latin America's largest country hits its worst levels in a decade. At least 54 people were killed in rural land conflicts in Brazil in 2016, said a Human Rights Watch (HRW) campaigner, citing the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), a Brazilian organisation linked the Catholic Church. This is highest level of rural bloodshed in Brazil since 2003 when 71 people were murdered, the CPT said. "Those who use violence to maintain control of the land can act with impunity; they can kill," HRW campaigner César Muñoz told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Nearly five million families across South America's largest country are landless, according a 2016 study from the University of Windsor in Canada. One percent of Brazil's population owns about 45 percent of the country's land, the study said. Brazil's government says it is working to improve land distribution but conflicting claims over different pieces of land and unclear titles in rural areas have slowed the process.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://news.trust.org/item/20170112174918-p005e/?source=hpbreaking>

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### **Brazil changes land demarcation procedure in blow to indigenous groups**



Brazil has announced changes to the procedure for demarcating indigenous lands in a move campaign groups fear will weaken the land rights of communities facing mounting pressure from illegal logging and big agricultural operations. Under the decree, demarcation of indigenous lands will be decided by the Ministry of Justice rather than the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), a government body set up to carry out policies relating to Brazil's 900,000 indigenous people. Supporters of the decree published in the government's Official Gazette on Wednesday said the change would improve agricultural investment in rural areas of the recession-hit nation by better safeguarding land investments. Activists, however, say the change weakens the land rights of indigenous people to benefit large landowners in the world's top exporter of soy, coffee, sugar and tobacco. "We feared the government would take this brazen step to deeply undermine indigenous land rights," said Christian Poirier from the U.S.-based campaign group Amazon Watch.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/brazil-changes-land-demarcation-procedure-blow-indigenous-groups-180346223.html>

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## **GUYANA**

### **Indigenous lands study recommends amendment to allow joint titles**

A continuing prohibition on joint requests for land title has led to the fragmentation of collective lands and a weakening of joint decision-making on land use among Guyana's indigenous peoples, according to the findings of a recent study conducted by the Amerindian People's Association (APA) in 42 Indigenous settlements across regions 1 and 2. As a result, the study recommends that the government should amend the 2006 Amerindian Act to allow for joint title requests and also establish an independent national tribunal to hear the indigenous peoples' claims and grievances about land, territorial and resource rights. The study, titled 'A Participatory Assessment of the Land Tenure Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Guyana: Regions 1 and 2,' was conducted between 2012 and 2015 by the APA and its partner, the Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), through engagements with communities in region 1 and seven in region 2. Of the number of settlements in the two regions, 29 were titled villages, while 13 were not. The report of the study highlights concerns raised by these communities in relation to the implementation of Guyana's recent land policies and its impact on indigenous communities.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.stabroeknews.com/2017/news/stories/01/07/indigenous-lands-study-recommends-amendment-allow-joint-titles/>

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## **MEXICO**

Isidro Baldenegro López was shot dead on January 15 in the Coloradas de la Virgen community in the Guadalupe and Calvo municipality of Chihuahua state. The murder quickly drew attention to collusion between drug trafficking cartels and the illegal timber industry, which López was known for speaking out against. "Tribal figures [cacicazgos] involved with the illegal timber trade and organized crime are



the material and intellectual authors" of the crime, a human rights activist told [BBC Mundo](#) under condition of anonymity as a safety measure. For years, criminal groups have used illegal logging in the region as a means of laundering the dirty money obtained from marijuana and opium poppy cultivation. According to the *Proceso* correspondent Patricia Mayorga, the illegal trade is not only used to generate profit from the wood sales but also to build houses for those who control the plantations and the drug trafficking, reported [La Sierra](#). López attempted to defend the Sierra Tarahumara for years. But the area where the states of Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua converge is one of the main marijuana and poppy producing regions in [Mexico](#). This has created fertile ground for the [illegal timber trade](#), as well as growing violence and corruption in the area.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/democraciaabierta/laura-vila/isidro-baldenegro-assassinated-in-mexico-another-case-of-lethal-collisi>

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#### **Murder of Mexican activist triggers calls for better protection of campaigners**

A prominent environmentalist in Mexico was shot dead over the weekend, highlighting the dangers facing activists in Latin America and prompting calls for better protection of land and indigenous rights campaigners. Isidro Baldenegro, an environmental rights activist, was killed by gunmen on Sunday in Mexico's northern state of Chihuahua after having received death threats. A community leader of Mexico's indigenous Tarahumara people, Baldenegro was known for his fight against illegal logging in the country's Sierra Madre mountain region. For years he led non-violent protests against logging projects, including sit-ins and human blockades. "The killing of Isidro Baldenegro Lopez is a tragic illustration of the many dangers faced by those who dedicate their lives to defend human rights in Latin America, one of the most dangerous regions in the work for activists," said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas director at Amnesty International, in a statement on Wednesday. "It is imperative that Mexico investigates this crime and that all governments across the Americas take more action to promote and protect the very important work human rights activists do with so much courage." Baldenegro, one of Mexico's most prominent environmentalists, was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in 2005 for his work against deforestation.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/murder-mexican-activist-triggers-calls-better-protection-campaigners-231439111.html>

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#### **UN rights expert condemns murder of Mexico indigenous activist**

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Michel Forst [official website] on Thursday condemned [press release] the execution of Raramuri indigenous activist Isidro Baldenegro Lopez. Lopez was an environmental activist in Mexico who fought to for indigenous land rights and protections from looters. He was murdered on Sunday by an unknown assailant. His death prompted Fors to speak out against the killing. "We condemn the outrageous and senseless killing of environmental defender Isidro. It is a tragic reminder of the dangers and risks facing environmental and indigenous defenders in Chihuahua." Lopez is the second indigenous Latin American human rights activist [teleSur report] murdered this week.



## READ MORE

<http://www.jurist.org/paperchase/2017/01/un-rights-expert-condemns-murder-of-mexico-indigenous-activist.php>

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## HONDURAS

### What It's Like To Be A Human Rights Defender In One Of The Deadliest Countries On Earth

Pull back the label on a T-shirt or a pair of trainers and you might see “Made in Honduras”. Fish your favourite long-lasting lipstick out of your makeup bag and it may contain palm oil, another of the tiny Central American country’s major exports. But although Honduras is one of the smallest countries in the world, it boasts one of the highest murder rates per capita. Human rights defenders, many of them women, pushing for better conditions in these industries and beyond, often find themselves in the crosshairs of the violence. So what is it like to wake up each morning and fight for change in a place where such efforts could cost you your life? “We can’t say that we are superwomen. The fear exists, but what is important is to not let the fear paralyse us and to keep moving forward,” said Miriam Miranda, a human rights defender from the African-indigenous Garifuna community. “For me, my identity and spirituality have been very important. From a cultural and spiritual perspective, our fight is a basic, fundamental one.”

## READ MORE

<http://sports.yahoo.com/news/human-rights-defender-one-deadliest-063700033.html>

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### Honduras: Global Witness report exposes killings & attacks against environmental & human rights defenders

Global Witness recently published a report on killings and attacks against indigenous and environmental human rights defenders in Honduras. The report concludes that “shocking levels of violence and intimidation suffered by rural communities for taking a stand against the imposition of dams, mines, logging or agriculture on their land – projects that are controlled by rich and powerful elites, among them members of the political class. The root causes of these abuses are widespread corruption and the failure to properly consult those affected by these projects”.

Global Witness invited companies and actors to comment on the two-year investigation report. Previously, the B&HRRRC invited some of the companies to respond to the abuses documented in the document

## READ MORE

<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/honduras-new-report-by-global-witness-exposes-killings-attacks-against-indigenous-and-environmental-defenders-opposing-mining-dams-tourism-logging#c151650>

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## GUATEMALA

### **Guatemala Environmentalists Win Case Against Canada Mining Firm**

Seven Guatemalan men won an appeal Thursday against Tahoe Resources Inc in a Canadian court, which ruled that their lawsuit accused the miner's private security guards to have shot them can proceed in British Columbia. In June 2014, the seven Guatemalan men accused the company of being responsible for a violent attack in April 2013 when private security opened fire on peaceful protesters outside the controversial Escobal silver mine in southeastern Guatemala. Video footage revealed the demonstrators were shot at close range while fleeing. The win comes after the Supreme Court in British Columbia refused to hear the case in November 2015, saying that it fell under Guatemalan jurisdiction. "Today's landmark ruling shows that Canadian courts are open to victims of abuses linked to Canadian companies operating abroad," said Matt Eisenbrandt, Legal Director of the Canadian Centre for International Justice. "Despite a lack of regulation by the Canadian government, we hope these recent developments in the courts signal an end to corporate impunity for human rights violations," Eisenbrandt said.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Guatemala-Environmentalists-Win-Case-Against-Canada-Mining-Firm-20170126-0013.html>

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## EL SALVADOR

### **Catholic church in El Salvador calls for mining ban**

Archbishop Jose Luis Escobar Alas said Monday that the country's mining law is so obsolete that it makes El Salvador especially vulnerable to exploitation. In October, El Salvador celebrated a victory in international arbitration against a multinational mining company. Pac Rim Cayman had demanded \$250 million for potential profits lost when the government did not grant it a license to mine gold. Australia-based OceanaGold, which purchased Pac Rim Cayman in 2013, was ordered to pay the government's \$8 million in legal fees. Other proposals to ban mining have been introduced to the legislature, but conservative parties have kept them from advancing.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/02/07/church-in-el-salvador-calls-for-mining-ban/>

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### **Spurred by Catholic leaders, El Salvador becomes first nation to ban mining**

El Salvador has become the first country in the world to ban mining for gold and other metals. The vote by its legislative assembly on March 29 marked the culmination a multi-year campaign in which the archbishop of San Salvador and the Jesuit-run Central American University (U.C.A.) played a major role. The ban's proponents say industrial mining practices posed a grave risk to the country's already limited water supply. Last week when El Salvador's bishops were in Rome for their *ad limina* visit, Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas, leader of the Archdiocese of San Salvador



and president of El Salvador's Episcopal Conference, told Pope Francis that mining "would threaten our country with disaster."

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2017/04/03/spurred-catholic-leaders-el-salvador-becomes-first-nation-ban-mining>

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## **PERU**

### **Indigenous federation sues Peru over new national park**

One of the almost 100 resolutions adopted by the World Conservation Congress (WCC) held in Hawai'i in September 2016 was that "protected areas" such as national parks should be "no go" for mining, oil and gas operations, agriculture, dams, roads and pipelines. Another resolution was that indigenous peoples' territories overlapped by "protected areas" should be recognised and respected, calling upon International Union for the [Conservation](#) of Nature (IUCN) members, non-member States and others to do so. While it might not seem particularly significant or startling to demand that "protected areas" should be, er, *protected* from such damaging activities as oil operations, and while WCC resolutions aren't legally-binding on anyone, such calls do urgently need to be made.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/andes-to-the-amazon/2017/jan/31/indigenous-sues-peru-new-national-park>

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### **Peru Indigenous and Campesinos Fight over 150 Mining Projects**

Indigenous and campesino communities in Peru are currently engaged in fighting 156 mining giants, which they claim are threatening their natural resources and land, according to a recently published report by the country's ombudsman. Peru's Minera Antamina has caused the most problems, with conflict in seven of its mining projects across the country, followed by Hudbay Peru with five, Barrick Misquichilca — a subsidiary of Canada-based Barrick Gold Corporation — with four, and Southern Peru also with four. The communities facing the most mining projects and land-related conflicts are located in the region of Apurimac, which currently faces 25 such conflicts. Apurimac is followed by Ancash, which faces 23 land-related conflicts, and Cusco, which is faced with 92. In total, 102 protests with a "social-environmental" focus were recorded across the country, but only 81 projects are currently being negotiated.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Peru-Indigenous-and-Campesinos-Fight-over-150-Mining-Projects-20170104-0030.html>

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## Peru in fight to save its endangered languages

Amadeo Garcia has no one left to talk to in his mother tongue, Taushiro. Neither does Pablo Andrade, the last living speaker of Resigaró. The two indigenous languages are among 17 that are critically endangered in Peru, where modern life's advance into the isolated Amazon basin region has wiped out many native peoples' way of life, and their languages along with it. Garcia, 67, is the last living Taushiro, an indigenous group native to northern Peru that was decimated by malaria, conflicts with rubber tappers and toxic oil spills in its rivers. Andrade, 65, has likewise watched his people and their language fade away. He lived until recently with his sister, Rosa, the other surviving speaker of Resigaró. But she was mysteriously murdered last month, leaving him with no one to talk to in their dying Amazonian language.

### READ MORE

<http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/world/peru-in-fight-to-save-its-endangered-languages/article/485329#ixzz4c9k5LwJd>

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## ARGENTINA

### **United Colors of Persecution: The Struggle of Patagonia's Indigenous People against Benetton**

On January 10, 2017 Argentine armed forces opened fire on a community of Mapuche indigenous people in the Chubut region fighting to reclaim ancestral lands currently in the hands of the multinational corporation Benetton. According to local news, close to 200 gendarme guards blocked Highway 40 and proceeded to attack the community of Lof en Resistencia del Departamento de Cushamen, which comprises fewer than two dozen adults and five children. The attack left most of the community residents injured, two in a critical state. The armed forces ransacked the main house where the women and children were hiding, and detained them. At least ten members of the community were arrested and nothing has been heard from them since. Among the little news available about the events were reports of harassment and physical abuse of the women and children.

### READ MORE

<https://globalvoices.org/2017/01/28/united-colors-of-persecution-the-struggle-of-patagonias-indigenous-people-against-benetton/>

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## CHILE

### **Mining and Port Megaprojects Threaten World's Largest Colony of Humboldt Penguins**

Six hundred kilometers (360 miles) north of Santiago, Chile, the National Humboldt Penguin Reserve reverberates with the braying of 26,000 Humboldt penguins — around 80 percent of the species' entire population. Sea otters and migrating blue whales glide through the waves close to colonies of nesting seabirds. This global biodiversity hotspot, part of a cluster of protected islands near the fishing community of Punta de Choros, now faces an unwelcome newcomer: The Dominga megaproject, which includes two massive open-pit mines, a commercial port and a desalination plant. With construction slated to begin as early as March, environmental groups and local fishermen are racing to stop Chile's latest "sacrifice" to industry. Led by Andes Iron, the Dominga copper and



iron mines directly threaten the region's unique land species, including the fox-like *culpeo* and the *guanaco*, a caramel-colored llama relative. The project also comes packaged with a desalinization plant on the coast and a large-scale port that will strengthen the region's trade connections with Santiago and other major cities, and will likely mobilize additional industrial development. "These two projects together would cause an irreversible impact to the area," said Liesbeth van der Meer, the executive director of Oceana Chile. "They want to make this a sacrifice zone. This is only the starting point for more industry."

#### READ MORE

<http://oceana.org/blog/mining-and-port-megaprojects-threaten-worlds-largest-colony-humboldt-penguins>

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## NORTH AMERICA

### USA

#### Indigenous people rights activists protest DAPL

In the wake of President Donald Trump's announcement that he would resume construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, indigenous organizers, tribal leaders and Providence community members protested the controversial pipeline in front of Citizens Bank Wednesday Feb. 8. Demonstrators argued that the DAPL would threaten area access to clean water, violate Native American tribes' — specifically the Sioux tribe's — treaty rights by unfairly impinging on tribal land and cultivating corporate greed at the expense of civilian welfare. The protest was organized the day of an announcement that the Army Corps of Engineers would grant the final permission necessary to begin legal construction of the pipeline, which it approved Wednesday. Trump's revival of the pipeline does not come as a surprise. As early as December, he said that he supported completing the pipeline, which spans four states and may carry as many as 550,000 barrels of oil per day to Illinois from its starting point in North Dakota.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.browndailyherald.com/2017/02/09/indigenous-people-rights-activists-protest-dapl/>

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#### Why we stand with Standing Rock

Autumn Peltier's eyes were streaming with tears as she presented a sacred water bundle to Justin Trudeau during the Assembly of First Nations national assembly last week. Wearing the water dress her mother crafted for the occasion, 'pipelines' was one of the few words this courageous young Wikwemikong leader could manage as she came face-to-face with the Prime Minister. She told him she is unhappy with the choices he's made, in reference to the federal government's recent approval of Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline expansion and Enbridge's Line 3 pipeline replacement. 'I understand that,' is how she related the Prime Minister's response. And while she prays the Prime Minister will indeed protect the water, we are left wondering how. This summer we joined



Indigenous leaders from both sides of the Canada-United States border to answer a call to action from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to support their rights to oppose to the Dakota Access Pipeline. Representatives of Nishnawbe Aski Nation attended the camps, and our flag still flies above the concrete barriers that separated water protectors from those sent to break their resolve with water cannons and rubber bullets.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.wawataynews.ca/blogs-columns/why-we-stand-standing-rock>

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**Learning from Standing Rock & each other**

The campaigners protecting their indigenous lands have come a long way. They have sustained a powerful movement to protect their land—the source of life and livelihood for the indigenous peoples—but power blocs have refused to acknowledge the current and past injustices that have led people to transform their lives in the spirit of the campaign. These people, in the past and now, have not just protected their land but stood by the land and rights of other indigenous peoples too. This is a summary of the nonviolent resistance that the indigenous people of Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota, United States of America, are waging to protect their lands from a proposed oil pipeline that will destroy their ancestral water sources and other cultural artefact. Many nations away, however, it is also the story of the peoples of Manipur State in the Indian Union. This time, it is a protest to protect the indigenous lands from forceful bifurcation by the Government of Manipur (GoM). Yesteryears saw the indigenous communities in Manipur State form a strong alliance, much like the one we saw over the past few months at Standing Rock, to protect people from getting alienated from their land—this was the result of a sustained campaign against the three bills passed by the Manipur Legislative Assembly in lieu of an ‘inner line permit’ system without drawing any consent from the people.

**READ MORE**

<http://morungexpress.com/protectors-not-protestors/>

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**In the fight for climate justice, indigenous people set the path – and lead the way**

Many believe the fight to combat climate change hinges on the aligned interests of capital and state. Give the Elon Musks of the world enough time and resources and they will innovate us out of impending climate catastrophe. Get the G20 in a room and they will hammer out a deal and create regulations to enforce it. Or so the thinking in some circles goes. Yet throughout history, the interests of the state have slid into alignment with big oil and big profits rather than lining up with our rivers, our air, our wildlife and our people. On Friday, men who disavow climate change and profit mightily from fossil fuels will take charge. In a global race to the bottom, there’s no telling how far downriver these shortsighted profiteers will sell our future generations. Capital may flow soullessly to the highest return, and for now, the state at all levels may be in the hands of reactionaries. But the first people of this land, who often live on the frontlines of our metastasizing climate disaster, remain resolute.

**READ MORE**



<http://www.northjersey.com/story/opinion/contributors/2017/02/14/ramapough-have-protected-right-self-expression/97890224/>

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### **House Republicans Vote To Overturn Rule Protecting Waterways From Mining**

House Republicans voted to overturn a regulation meant to protect U.S. waterways from coal mining operations on Wednesday. The measure will now move to the Senate, where GOP leaders are expected to quickly follow suit. Earlier this week, lawmakers in both houses announced bills to block the stream protection rule, an update to regulations that the Department of Interior finalized toward the end of President Barack Obama's tenure. The update overhauled requirements for coal mining operations in order "to avoid mining practices that permanently pollute streams, destroy drinking water sources, increase flood risk and threaten forests." The stream protection rule mandates testing and monitoring of waterways before, during and after mining operations, and requires companies that have used controversial practices like mountaintop removal mining to restore land to its "previous condition" after operations are finished. It updates regulations that were more than three decades old.

#### **READ MORE**

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/stream-protection-rule-coal\\_us\\_5891385fe4b02772c4ea2a31](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/stream-protection-rule-coal_us_5891385fe4b02772c4ea2a31)

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### **Why we march against Trump: violence against women and the Earth is linked**

Indigenous Americans – the poorest of the poor and the most likely to be killed by law enforcement – won a monumental victory for the planet, indigenous rights and the forces of conscience against capital. Their rallying cry, "Water is Life!" echoed around the world. To win, leaders at Standing Rock marshaled thousands – even millions – of allies. They paired indigenous and treaty rights, recognized, affirmed and protected in various ways by the United States and the United Nations, with a moving, spiritual narrative and on-the-ground direct actions. Their message was simple, their aims clearly defined, their strategies and tactics inclusive and their voices authentic. While lighting the seven council fires of the Oceti Sakowin and reasserting abrogated treaty rights, indigenous leaders simultaneously articulated a radical indigenous vision for a more just and harmonious relationship between land, water and people. Before the frightening might of an ascendant right wing, which aligns capital and state against people and planet, many are ripe for despair and poised for retreat. But the indigenous movement is pointing the way forward. That way consists of forming alliances, building community and taking direct action. It is rooted in recognition of indigenous rights and sovereignties. It is initiated by people on the ground where the environment is under threat, and it builds into a global call to action.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/19/fight-climate-justice-indigenous-people-lead-the-way>

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### **San Carlos Apache Tribe, environmentalists battle Oak Flat copper mine bid**



Oak Flat, a desert landscape and 90-minute drive outside Phoenix, lies in the midst of an environmental and economic controversy. Members of the San Carlos Apache Tribe revere the federally owned land as sacred. Environmentalists consider it a sanctuary for wildlife and vegetation. Climbers, hikers and campers gravitate to Oak Flat for outdoor recreation. And Resolution Copper Co. covets the rich veins of copper running below the surface of Oak Flat. In December 2014, Congress passed and President Obama signed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, which authorized Resolution, a Phoenix-based affiliate of foreign mining companies Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton, to perform mining operations in Oak Flat in exchange for other land in Arizona. The lengthy document is primarily made-up of military reform and funding and has passed consecutively for about 50 years. Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona, secured Resolution's bill on the act, according to a Cronkite News article.

#### **READ MORE**

[http://azdailysun.com/news/local/san-carlos-apache-tribe-environmentalists-battle-oak-flat-copper-mine/article\\_973f44ef-a64a-5ace-a0e6-663fdc0305af.html](http://azdailysun.com/news/local/san-carlos-apache-tribe-environmentalists-battle-oak-flat-copper-mine/article_973f44ef-a64a-5ace-a0e6-663fdc0305af.html)

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#### **The genocide of the indigenous people of North America is proof immigrants can be dangerous**

The Bill of Rights, legally encoded in our Constitution, is also an aspiration, a prayer for attaining what is best in the human spirit. We have a long way to go, though, and even the principles of law currently under threat, so well described in the Altamont Enterprise editorial, "Don't Reverse the Bill of Rights," do not address rights of American Indians. First Nations are under trusteeship to the federal government, which often functions more like a guardian for minors or incompetents than as a partner of equal standing. In matters of conflicts of interest, "under the current administrative structure, Indian interests often suffer," according to a federal policy paper. The very model for our form of government has basis in the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. A 1987 article in The New York Times, "Iroquois Constitution: A Forerunner to Colonists' Democratic Principles" reported, "One forum to share ideas between the colonists and the Iroquois ... was the Albany Congress [in] 1754. At the meeting, representatives of the six Indian nations and seven colonies heard Benjamin Franklin champion the Iroquois example as he presented his Plan of Union." Haudenosaunee women, long before Columbus, had "the right to choose all political representatives, and to remove from office anyone who didn't address the wishes and needs of the people. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage, the two major theoreticians of the early women's rights movement, had direct knowledge of the Haudenosaunee, writing about the superior social, political, religious, and economic status of women in the Iroquois nations. Their work for women's rights was inspired by the vision they received from the Haudenosaunee of gender balance and harmony," according to a Sally Roesch Wagner lecture summarized by the National Endowment for the Humanities website.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://altamontenterprise.com/02092017/genocide-indigenous-people-north-america-proof%C2%A0immigrants-can-be-dangerous>

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## **CANADA**

**True colours begin to shine through for Justin's government**



Last week, Justin Trudeau's government tried to stop Ontario Superior Court Justice Edward Belobaba from issuing a ruling promised for February 15, 2017 on the liability of Canada for Ontario Indigenous children's loss of cultural identity during the Sixties Scoop. The Sixties Scoop era from 1965 to 1984 placed 16,000 indigenous children from Indian-reserves in Settler foster homes. Plaintiffs in the \$1.3 billion lawsuit claims that the Settler government's foster care policy harmed children's identity. In response, the federal Justice Department letter last week to Justice Belobaba said Canada "would like to address the timing of the release of your decision on the summary judgment motion, given the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's stated intent to launch negotiations towards an agreement in principle to all Sixties Scoop litigation and the potential benefits to the negotiations that an abeyance of your decision might have." The Trudeau government's Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett offered to negotiate an out-of-court settlement process for the Sixties Scoop she called a "dark and painful" chapter in Canada's history.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://tworowtimes.com/opinion/true-colours-begin-shine-justins-government/>

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#### **One Year and Counting A review of PM Trudeau's relationship with Indigenous Peoples in Canada**

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau wrote in his [mandate letter](#) to the newly-minted Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Carolyn Bennett, that "no relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples." This came just before he was to take on his first year in office. At the time, he earned a lot of public praise with this inclusive language, his plans for policy reforms and his assurances that things were going to change in Canada. Let's take a step back and review what Trudeau has done—or hasn't done since becoming Canada's 23<sup>rd</sup> Prime Minister. Back in October, Indigenous communities across Canada rallied together to demand that Trudeau bring forward "deeds, not words". Tori Cress, an organizer for the Idle No More movement from the Beausoleil First Nation in Simcoe County, Ont., raised concerns at the time that Trudeau wasn't following through on his laundry list of promises. Environmental cooperation and sovereignty over land were key concerns at the day of action. According to Cress, Trudeau's press releases have consistently misled Canadians into thinking that their prime minister was doing something for these communities since he stepped into office. "It's just a photo-op. Follow up," said Cress, "Follow up and see what's really happening in those communities."

#### **READ MORE**

<https://intercontinentalcry.org/one-year-review-trudeau-first-nations/>

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#### **Manitoba premier says he supports indigenous hunting rights and is not a racist**

Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister has told a Winnipeg newspaper that he used imprecise and possibly inflammatory language earlier this month when he told rural municipal politicians that tension surrounding night hunting is leading to a "race war." Pallister was meeting with officials in Virden on Jan. 16 when he mentioned his concern about what he called indigenous people going out and shooting moose. His comments were recorded by a radio reporter and were widely condemned by indigenous leaders and the Opposition. In a Sunday night telephone interview with the Winnipeg



Free Press, Pallister says he wishes he had used different language to broach the subject. Pallister says he is not a racist and has advocated for indigenous rights in the past. He says he supports the right of indigenous people to hunt at night in areas where they have a legal right to harvest wildlife. "Quite frankly, it was an unfortunate choice (of words)," the newspaper quotes Pallister as saying. "There are court-established, well-established indigenous hunting rights. Jurisprudence is very clear on this: indigenous people have the right to hunt on their land. They have the right to hunt on Crown land. They have the right to night hunt on private land with the permission of landowners."

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.timescolonist.com/manitoba-premier-says-he-supports-indigenous-hunting-rights-and-is-not-a-racist-1.9541316#sthash.a7HgX6UY.dpuf>

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### **An Indigenous Perspective on Resource Development**

Cheryl Cardinal gives in-depth insight into how energy firms can build win-win partnerships by understanding the communities they need to work with. Resource development in Canada is changing. The way the energy industry has done business in the past clearly is not working, and we need to start examining why. Understanding the history of Indigenous people in this country and the inclusion of Indigenous peoples through resource and energy developments is important because energy and resource development is happening in and around our communities. There are so many considerations that we have to examine when we are looking to be involved. Indigenous leaders always consider the environmental impacts and how they will affect our future generations while examining the opportunities and how they can benefit their communities.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.albertaoilmagazine.com/2017/02/an-indigenous-perspective-on-resource-development/>

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### **Less talk, more action: Inuit body wants progress on UN declaration**

The body that represents Canada's 50,000 or so Inuit is telling the Justin Trudeau government to quit paying lip service and get to work entrenching Aboriginal rights into Canadian law. In a position paper called "Implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada," released Jan. 24, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami says Trudeau and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett have not lived up to their promise to entrench those international rights in Canada. "It has been more than a year since the prime minister promised to renew Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples, including specific direction to the minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs to prioritize implementing the UN Declaration. However, Canada's work to date on this file can best be characterized as inaction," said ITK President Natan Obed, in a Jan. 24 news release. Instead, ITK argues, the government is suggesting that Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution, along with modern treaties and land claim agreements, mirror the United Nations declaration and already entrench those rights here in Canada.

#### **READ MORE**

[http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674less\\_talk\\_more\\_action\\_inuit\\_body\\_wants\\_progress\\_on\\_un\\_declaration/](http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674less_talk_more_action_inuit_body_wants_progress_on_un_declaration/)



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## **Until Canada gives Indigenous people their land back, there can never be reconciliation**

On January 11, 2017, the world lost one of its fiercest warriors against colonialism when Art Manuel passed away. This article, published last year in the First Nations Strategic Bulletin, is characteristic of his clarity, honesty and vision. It is reprinted here with permission. 2017 marks the fact that we have been officially colonized by Canada for 150 years. This is an important milestone and it is time for us to decide if we want to continue to be colonized peoples or if we want to seek self-determination. We have to face the fact that Canada is a settler state that was created by Great Britain to take over our Indigenous territories for use and benefit of Canada. This kind of human exploitation is called colonization and it is designed to give settler Canadians ownership over all Indigenous lands. Indigenous peoples basically subsidize the Canadian economy with free land and resources. Colonization is a complex relationship but simple to understand if you know that dispossession, dependency and oppression are the consequences that it is designed to produce between the colonizer and the colonized. It is important to understand the United Nations has condemned colonization in all its manifestations because the moment you dispossess someone of their land and make them dependent upon the colonizer, you create a person willing to fight to be free and independent again. In this way, colonialism is against world peace.

### **READ MORE**

<http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/views-expressed/2017/01/until-canada-gives-indigenous-people-their-land-back-there-ca>

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## **Indigenous leader and land defender Arthur Manuel dies in B.C.**

Arthur Manuel, a long-time outspoken indigenous leader in British Columbia, has died at age 65. The former chief of Neskonlith First Nation near Merritt, and former elected head of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, founded the Indigenous Network on Economies and Trade and was one of the leading critics of Canada's policies towards First Nations. His father, Grand Chief George Manuel — co-founder and former president of the National Indian Brotherhood, which became the Assembly of First Nations — is considered one of the most influential indigenous leaders in B.C.'s history.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.metronews.ca/news/vancouver/2017/01/12/indigenous-leader-and-land-defender-arthur-manuel-dies.html>

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## **Giving Indigenous communities access to offshore oil opportunities could help lift them out of poverty.**

If I had to count the number of times I have heard that we need to “lift Indigenous people out of poverty” and “make Indigenous people equal and productive partners in Canada’s social and economic fabric,” I just would not know where or when to begin. It seems I have been hearing similar sentiments going back more than 45 years. We heard it from politicians dating back to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Calder* in 1973. We heard it from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in



1996. We heard it from Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the government's apology on residential schools on June 11, 2008. We heard it during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process and in the commission's calls to action in 2015. And we are especially hearing it now in what appears to be the Liberal government's desire to open nation-to-nation relationships with Indigenous peoples and to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is just a smattering of what has, up to now, proven to be nothing more than lip service. Indigenous people still lag behind the rest of the country in educational achievements. Many Indigenous people live in overcrowded homes in communities that lack the infrastructure to provide safe drinking water to their people. It is a well-known fact that the rate of incarceration of Indigenous persons in our prisons far exceeds that of the non-Indigenous population, as does the proportion of Indigenous children in foster homes.

**READ MORE**

<http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/february-2017/an-offshore-deal-for-indigenous-people/>

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**150 years of half-truth: Festivities for Canada's anniversary neglect its violent past**

It's been little more than a week since 2017 began, and I am already fed up with Canada's 150th anniversary celebrations. Advertisements for the country's anniversary are appearing everywhere: there are new posters at major monuments across the provinces, radio advertisements, television commercials dramatizing Canada's history, and maple leaf logos as far as the eye can see. The most troubling, and clearly problematic, aspect of the stifling patriotism on display through the year is that all of it is in celebration of a violent, settler-colonial state. Canada not only has its roots in the killing and exploitation of Black and Indigenous peoples, but is also currently enacting violence upon marginalised bodies – all while maintaining a frighteningly pristine reputation in the eyes of the rest of the world.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.mcgilldaily.com/2017/01/150-years-of-half-truth/>

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**Indigenous people are not the 'ghosts of history'**

It is time to recognize the achievements of indigenous people as one of the three pillars of Canada's foundation and to bring about the changes that will allow them to finally flourish. Canadian indigenous people have been described as "ghosts of history," spectres lingering in the background, haunting our legacy. This refers to the fact indigenous people have been ignored to a great extent in Canadian history, yet Canadians are fully aware that indigenous people were here long before the arrival of the Europeans. Canadians are also generally aware that indigenous people were mistreated over time. Their lands and culture were stripped away through questionable means leaving generations traumatized. For many Canadians, ignorance is bliss — it has been easier on the conscience to just ignore this unpleasant chapter in Canadian history and pretend the displacement, oppression and trauma of indigenous people never happened. In the short run, ignoring this history



may make it easier for Canadians to have pride in being Canadian. But, in the long run, ignoring this history rather than facing it head on, has costs. It weighs heavily on the Canadian psyche.

#### READ MORE

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2017/01/02/indigenous-people-are-not-the-ghosts-of-history.html>

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## ASIA

### Human Rights Watch: negative record in Asia

Human Rights situation in Asia has seen a negative record in 2016, a year characterized by the promotion of extrajudicial killings and the failure of some Asian countries to protect its vulnerable groups. This fact was revealed by the annual report of Human Rights Watch, as a press release stated on Thursday, according to DPA. In some countries, like the Philippines and China, 'the strong leaders have imposed their authority to the detriment of the government, that was unable to respond to their actions, as rulers of the law, guaranteeing the prosperity and security of the state', showed the 687 pages report of HRW. The report details cases of arrest or even physical elimination of governments' critics, executions, religious and racial discrimination, censorship of the press and other such abuses that contravene The Human Rights.

#### READ MORE

<https://stocknewsusa.com/2017/01/13/human-rights-negative-record/>

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### Southeast Asia is in the grip of a biodiversity crisis

Rich in wildlife, Southeast Asia includes at least six of the world's 25 "biodiversity hotspots" – the areas of the world that contain a remarkable concentration of species, and are exceptionally endangered. The region contains 20% of the planet's vertebrate and plant species and the world's third-largest tropical forest. In addition to this existing biodiversity, the region has an extraordinary rate of species discovery, with more than 2,216 new species described between 1997 and 2014 alone. Global comparisons are difficult but it seems the Mekong region has a higher rate of species discovery than other parts of the tropics, with hundreds of new species described annually. Southeast Asia's biodiversity is under serious threat; some parts of the region are projected to lose up to 98% of their remaining forests in the next nine years. It's also thought to be the world's most threatened region for mammals. Sadly, the region's fragile biodiversity is frequently forgotten by the global media. It also suffers lower publishing rates than other tropical regions for ecology and biodiversity research. It's perhaps no surprise, then, that Southeast Asia has some of the highest rates of deforestation on the planet, having lost 14.5% of forests in the last 15 years.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.atimes.com/article/southeast-asia-grip-biodiversity-crisis/>

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## **For a better Borneo, new map reveals how much terrain has changed**

Incorporating 40 years of maps of Borneo (the world's third largest island), the tool reveals both the forest remaining and what is being reshaped due to degradation and extraction industries. With the ability to search by oil palm or pulpwood concessions, and view the locations of intact peatland, as well as determine the speed with which forest is converted to plantation, the atlas offers the first significant opportunity to distinguish companies that are avoiding deforestation to a large degree. CIFOR scientist David Gaveau, who developed the atlas, said, "The tool is an open platform for researchers, advocacy groups, journalists and anyone interested in deforestation, wildlife habitats and corporate actions." The data provided by the atlas is free to download, and informs whether a particular oil palm concession is certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)- the organization that implements a global standard for sustainability in the palm oil industry.

### **READ MORE**

<http://blog.cifor.org/48167/for-a-better-borneo-new-map-reveals-how-much-terrain-has-changed?fnl=en>

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## **THE PHILIPPINES**

### **Palm plantation boom fuels discontent on Palawan**

The western Philippine province of Palawan, widely considered the country's last ecological frontier, was declared a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) Man and Biosphere Reserve in the 1990s. Yet a long stretch of land on the southern tip of Palawan is now covered by palm plantations as far as the eye can see. In recent years, palm plantations have expanded in a big way, bringing with them deforestation, a decimation of the local coconut farming industry and, farmers say, broken promises of profit-sharing. Ten years ago, Mr Amirul Marinse, a former coconut farmer in Irray Sofronio, Espanola, Palawan, rented out his 7ha of land to the Agumil Company for 1,000 pesos (S\$28) per hectare annually. The agreement, he said, included profit-sharing from palm oil harvests after three years. But to this day, Mr Marinse — a 68-year-old member of the Pala'uan tribe — said he has not received any profits. He is also trapped in a 30-year contract.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/palm-plantation-boom-fuels-discontent-palawan>

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### **Palm oil plantations threaten biodiversity in Palawan**

A long stretch of land, as far as the eye can see, on the southern tip of Palawan, is now the preserve of massive palm plantations. This is not a scene straight out of a disturbing film but it is a reality that reflects the growing threat to the country's last frontier, declared a Unesco Man and Biosphere Reserve in the 1990s. But the moderate climate and rich soil of Palawan ironically made it the ideal hub for growing palm trees to the detriment of local coconut farmers. Ten years ago, Amirul Marinse,



68-year-old member of the Pala'uan tribe and former coconut farmer in Iraray Sofronio, Espanola, Palawan rented out his seven hectares of land to the Agumil Company for P1,000 per hectare annually with the agreement that aside from the rent, after three years, there would be profit-sharing from the palm oil harvest on the land. But to this day, Marinse told Manila Times, there has been no such profit-sharing and he found it frustrating that the contract is for 30 years. He said he wishes to be freed from his contract with Agumil but knows it is not possible. A decade after signing the contract, Marinse added, he cannot even afford a carabao-drawn carriage. "We were promised that we can have a big house or even buy a car in one year (with the profits) from one hectare alone. Unfortunately, we cannot even buy food and medicine for my maintenance," he said. Palm oil comes from these trees that are native to West Africa but also thrive in any hot and wet tropical climate.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.gulf-times.com/story/533613/Palm-oil-plantations-threaten-biodiversity-in-Pala>

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**Killing Us Won't Shut Us Up! — Another Environmental Journalist Gunned Down in the Philippines**

On Jan. 6, 2017, environmental journalist Mario Contaoi was shot dead in the Northern Philippines. According to the *Manila Times*, Contaoi was riding his motorcycle when he was shot by tandem riders on the national highway. He later died in the hospital. While no official motive has been giving for the murder, many Philippine media outlets, and those familiar with Contaoi, are linking the death to his journalistic work. The Philippines is one of the deadliest countries in the world for environmental journalists. According to *UCANews*, Contaoi's death makes a total of eight killed over the last six months and 105 in the past six years. The two previous government regimes in the Philippines suffered four (Arroyo's government) and 10 (Aquino's administration) cases per year respectively, according to the *Manila Times*. The death toll in six months under newly elected Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, is already twice what the earlier Arroyo regime faced.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.environews.tv/world-news/killing-us-wont-shut-us-another-environmental-journalist-gunned-philippines/>

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**6 years later, Doc Gerry's kin still waiting for justice**

Today marks the 6th death anniversary of broadcaster and environmentalist Gerry Ortega, known to many as Doc Gerry. He was shot dead while shopping for clothes at a thrift shop in Brgy. San Pedro, Puerto Princesa City. Family and friends of Ortega offered prayers at the crime scene this morning to remember his death. Six years after being gunned down, slowly, the wheels of justice have turned for the family. The gunman, Marlon Recamata, was found guilty of murder. Other accomplices Percival Lecias, Dennis Aranas and Atty. Romeo Serratubias are already dead, while Arturo "Nonoy" Regalado who allegedly stalked Doc Gerry's whereabouts before the crime has also been found guilty of murder. In 2015, the alleged masterminds, former Palawan governor Joel Reyes and Coron mayor Mario Reyes, were arrested in Thailand. The former governor is currently detained in Puerto Princesa City Jail while Mario Reyes was allowed to post bail on May 2016. For the family and friends of



Ortega, 6 years may seem fast compared to other cases but they are still hoping that the wheels of justice would turn faster.

**READ MORE**

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/01/24/17/6-years-later-doc-gerrys-kin-still-waiting-for-justice>

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**Graft arraignment of ex-Palawan governor Reyes re-set to April**

Reyes, Guieb and Araullo, along with Masaganang Ani Para sa Magsasaka Foundation, Inc. (MAMFI) officers Marina Sula and Nathaniel Tan, were accused of misusing a P3.25-million allocation under the Farm Inputs and Farm Implements Program in 2004. The former governor is currently detained at the Puerto Princesa City Jail pending trial for the 2011 murder of environmentalist broadcaster Gerry Ortega.

**READ MORE**

<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/876207/graft-arraignment-of-ex-palawan-governor-reyes-re-set-to-april#ixzz4cGYrE318>

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**Environmental lawyer murdered in Philippines – police**

Her death brings to 112 the number of environmental campaigners murdered in the Philippines over the past 15 years, according to Filipino environment monitor Kalikasan. A Philippine lawyer who specialized in investigating crimes against the environment has been ambushed and shot dead, police said Friday, February 17. The murder on Wednesday of Mia Manuelita Mascarinas-Green deepened concerns that the Philippines is one of the world's most dangerous places for environmental campaigners, with more than 100 killed over the past 15 years. Four motorcycle-riding gunmen opened fire after surrounding a van being driven by Mascarinas-Green -- with her children and nanny in the vehicle -- near her home on the central island of Bohol, the authorities said. Mascarinas-Green was pronounced dead at a hospital but her children were unharmed, regional police spokesman Senior Inspector Reslin Abella told AFP. "The victim is a known environmental lawyer. Investigators are checking whether the attack had any link to the cases she had handled in relation to environmental issues," Abella told the Agence France-Presse by telephone.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.rappler.com/nation/161782-environmental-lawyer-murdered-philippines>

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**Philippines: Killing of lawyer Mia Mascariñas-Green brings to 112 the number of environmental campaigners murdered in the country in the last 15 years**

A Philippine lawyer who specialized in investigating crimes against the environment has been ambushed and shot dead, police said Friday, February 17. The murder...of Mia Manuelita Mascarinas-Green deepened concerns that the Philippines is one of the world's most dangerous places for environmental campaigners, with more than 100 killed over the past 15 years. Four motorcycle-riding



gunmen opened fire after surrounding a van being driven by Mascarinas-Green -- with her children and nanny in the vehicle -- near her home on the central island of Bohol...

**READ MORE**

<https://business-humanrights.org/en/philippines-killing-of-environmental-lawyer-mia-mascari%C3%B1as-green-brings-to-112-the-number-of-environmental-campaigners-murdered-in-the-country-in-the-last-15-years>

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**Indigenous Anti-Mining Activist Killed in the Philippines**

In an era where standing up to corporations often warrants a death sentence, the latest casualty in the fight for Indigenous and environmental rights is 27-year-old Veronico "Nico" Lapsay Delamente, a leader of the Mamanwa tribe in Claver, a mining town of the Philippines. An outspoken critic of nickel mining corporations wreaking havoc on ancestral lands, he was shot the same day that the Indigenous Lumad and Mamanwas groups were set to hold a meeting with National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) representatives to discuss community conflicts linked to large-scale nickel mining. Kasalo, a Lumad organization, reported that two men aboard a motorcycle with their faces covered drove by and shot Delamente several times. One of the bullets hit a bystander, a child who is still being treated in hospital.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Indigenous-Anti-Mining-Activist-Killed-in-the-Philippines-20170124-0022.html>

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**Mindanao (Philippines): Indigenous Anti-Mining Activist Killed**

Just last month he had expressed fear over threats to his life due to his outspoken opposition to mining activities in the region. In an era where standing up to corporations often warrants a death sentence, the latest casualty in the fight for Indigenous and environmental rights is 27-year-old Veronico "Nico" Lapsay Delamente, a leader of the Mamanwa tribe in Claver, a mining town of the Philippines. An outspoken critic of nickel mining corporations wreaking havoc on ancestral lands, he was shot the same day that the Indigenous Lumad and Mamanwas groups were set to hold a meeting with National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) representatives to discuss community conflicts linked to large-scale nickel mining. Kasalo, a Lumad organization, reported that two men aboard a motorcycle with their faces covered drove by and shot Delamente several times. One of the bullets hit a bystander, a child who is still being treated in hospital. "The assailants were not apprehended despite the presence of a military detachment of the Task Force Diamond of the Philippine Army at the entrance of the road exiting Punta Naga," the group said, as reported by *Davao Today*.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40100>

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## **Philippines: Indigenous anti-mining activist shot dead on day that tribal members were set to discuss community conflicts linked to large-scale nickel mining**

A leader of Mamanwa tribe was gunned down by unidentified gunmen riding a motorcycle on Friday, Jan. 20 in Claver, a mining town in Surigao del Norte. The anti-mining activist and tribal leader, identified as Veronico “Nico” Lapsay Delamente, 27, was shot dead...in Punta Naga, Brgy. Caagdianao, according to Kalipunan ng Mga Katutubong Mamayan ng Pilipinas... “The assailants were not apprehended despite the presence of a military detachment of the Task Force Diamond of the Philippine Army at the entrance of the road exiting Punta Naga,” the group [Kasalo, a lumad organization] said.

### **READ MORE**

<https://business-humanrights.org/en/philippines-indigenous-anti-mining-activist-shot-dead-on-day-that-tribal-members-were-set-to-discuss-community-conflicts-linked-to-large-scale-nickel-mining>

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## **Asia Minute: Deaths of Environmental Activists Spike in Philippines**

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has now been in office for nearly 8 months. There’s been a lot of publicity about his administration’s war on drugs—and drug dealers. But this week there is a new focus on other killings: those of environmental activists. HPR’s Bill Dorman has details in today’s Asia Minute. A human rights group says a dozen environmental advocates have been killed in the Philippines since President Rodrigo Duterte took office at the end of June. The latest incident came last week. Police say a lawyer was shot by four motorcycle gunmen while she was driving a van with her children and her nanny. The vice president of the Philippines wants an investigation into all the deaths calling for authorities to “eliminate the culture of impunity in the country.” Vice President Leni Robredo is herself a former human rights lawyer. She left an additional post in the Duterte cabinet late last year because of what she called “major differences in principles and values” with the president.

### **READ MORE**

<http://hawaiipublicradio.org/post/asia-minute-deaths-environmental-activists-spike-philippines>

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## **DOJ okay of guidelines on media killings hailed**

Media players, particularly from the ranks of the Publishers Association of the Philippines Inc. (PAPI), hailed the recent approval by Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre of the Implementing Guidelines for Malacañang’s Administrative Order No. 1 (AO 1) creating the Presidential Task Force on Media Security (PTFOMS). Signed and issued by President Rodrigo Duterte immediately after he assumed office, the order was in response to a Human Rights Watch World Report that the Philippines remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists, and that extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances remain a serious problem and rarely result in successful prosecution and punishment of perpetrators.



**READ MORE**

<http://www.manilatimes.net/doj-okay-guidelines-media-killings-hailed/308990/>

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**Philippine minister says Duterte agrees with mining ban in watershed areas**

The Philippines' environment minister on Thursday said President Rodrigo Duterte had backed her decision to ban mining in watershed areas at a meeting earlier this week, winning his support once more for her crackdown on the sector. Duterte who warned last year that the Southeast Asian nation could survive without a mining sector had supported Lopez's decision this month to shut over half the country's mines. But he later did not rule out reviewing her order amid the potential revenue losses from mining. "He said: 'I agree with you. Don't worry, you are my cabinet secretary and I also believe that there should be no mining in watersheds'," Regina Lopez told a media briefing, recalling her meeting with Duterte on Monday. Lopez on Feb. 2 ordered the closure of 23 of 41 mines in the world's top nickel ore supplier for environmental violations, saying many of them were in watershed zones that threaten water supply and quality. Another five mines were suspended.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-mining-idUSKBN1620IQ>

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**DENR begins consultation with communities affected by mine audit**

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has embarked on a comprehensive consultation and engagement with communities affected by the mining audit recently conducted by the agency. The consultation kicks off in the Caraga region, where majority of mining operations ordered closed by the DENR are located. In a special order she signed on February 20, DENR Secretary Gina Lopez authorized the conduct of simultaneous community consultation and engagement in the provinces of Dinagat Islands, Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur on February 20-24. Lopez said the exercise was meant to assist the communities and households affected by the mining audit, "particularly ensuring that they will be able to transition well from being mining workers or mining communities to an empowered social entrepreneur or a vibrant community enterprise, impelled by the principles of ecosystems integrity and social justice." Lopez tasked Forest Management Bureau (FMB) Director Ricardo Calderon to head the DENR team that will conduct the consultation. Calderon will be assisted by DENR Caraga acting regional director Charlie Fabre and Director Nonito Tamayo.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.update.ph/2017/02/denr-begins-consultation-with-communities-affected-by-mine-audit/14847>

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## **Watchdog blasts populist Duterte for 'rights calamity'**

International rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) has included Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte among populist leaders who have intensified the "flouting of human rights." In HRW's *World Report 2017*, released Thursday, January 12, HRW Executive Director Kenneth Roth warned of "a new generation" of authoritarian populists turning human rights protection on its head. "When populists treat rights as an obstacle to their vision of the majority will," Roth said, "it is only a matter of time before they turn on those who disagree with their agenda." The report is a 687-page review of human rights practices in more than 90 countries. In his introduction, Roth spoke of the appeal of populism, coming at a time of "mounting public discontent over the status quo," with "an increasing sense that governments and the elite ignore public concerns."

### **READ MORE AND WATCH VIDEO**

<http://www.rappler.com/nation/158187-human-rights-watch-2017-report-duterte-populism>

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## **EU reviews Philippine trade perks tied to human rights**

The European Union is reviewing whether the Philippines can still qualify for trade incentives that are pre-conditioned on compliance with international agreements, including those on human rights, its envoy said Monday. A monitoring team from the EU will arrive in the country later this month for an assessment, said Ambassador Franz Jessen. The Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) allows the Philippines to export to the EU without duties or with reduced tariffs. "We have an ongoing monitoring on the conventions, that work is on going and I will not predict how it will come out in the end, we'll see, we'll see" Jessen said. Last month, the US-led Millennium Challenge Corp. deferred its decision on fresh funding for the Philippines, citing "significant concerns around rule of law and civil liberties." The GSP+ is based on ratification and compliance with international conventions on human rights, labor rights, environment and good governance. The Philippines was given preferential status under the European Union-GSP+ in December 2014, allowing the duty-free export of some 6,000 eligible products to the EU market.

### **READ MORE**

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/01/16/17/eu-reviews-philippine-trade-perks-tied-to-human-rights>

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## **Report: EJKs, attacks on IPs hounded Philippines in 2016**

Extrajudicial killings of drug suspects, attacks on indigenous peoples, violations of reproductive health rights, child labor and discrimination related to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are the key issues that the Philippines faced in 2016, a human rights group said. International watchdog Human Rights Watch (HRW) released its *World Report 2017* which reviews human rights practices in more than 90 countries. For the Philippines, the report centered on President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs which led to an unprecedented level of apparent extrajudicial killings by law enforcement officers since the new chief executive took office.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/01/13/1662364/report-ejks-attacks-ips-hounded-philippines-2016>



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## **Philippine gov't launches attacks on peasants, indigenous**

Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippine president described in the West as a “populist,” has shown his class allegiance to the big landowners and mining interests in the Philippines by unleashing his military against the New People’s Army. The NPA, formed in 1969, had declared a unilateral ceasefire last August, when the National Democratic Front of the Philippines entered peace talks with the government. At the end of January, the NPA announced that government killings of four peasant and Indigenous leaders were forcing the group to end its ceasefire, beginning Feb. 10. But the government showed no interest in preserving the ceasefire. On the contrary, since the NPA announcement, Duterte has designated the group as “terrorist” and his soldiers have launched offensives in several areas, killing and arresting people suspected of being insurgents.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.workers.org/2017/02/07/philippine-govt-launches-attacks-on-peasants-indigenous/#.WNQEuo6LlZ0>

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## **Philippines: AFP’s “All-Out War” is a war against IPs and the Filipino people – KATRIBU**

Katribu Kalipunan ng Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas (KATRIBU) denounces the alarming spate of violence taking place in IP communities around the country perpetrated by the AFP, a few days after the declaration of “all-out war” by Department of Defense Secretary Lorenzana against the New People’s Army (NPA). Instead of the NPA, indigenous communities are now taking the brunt of the attacks. On February 7, soldiers hit a Tumandok man repeatedly in Barangay Tacayan Tapaz, Capiz (Panay Island). The AFP unit was supposedly conducting military operations against the NPA but was actually harassing the locals for being “NPA sympathizers.” On February 11, a Kaulo village in Alabel, Sarangani was bombed after an encounter between AFP and NPA fighters. Around 100 families were forced to evacuate as a rain of bombs hit their communities. A school for indigenous peoples set up by the Center for Lumad Advocacy and Services (CLANS) was affected and its students and teachers were among those who fled for safety. Emergency relief and assistance from the local government units and NGOs can’t access the area where the evacuees are because they are being blocked by soldiers.

### **READ MORE**

<http://iva.aippnet.org/philippines-afps-all-out-war-is-a-war-against-ips-and-the-filipino-people-katribu/>

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## **Philippines fail at human rights**

2016 saw Aquino fail to address violations, while Duterte's war on drugs and the prospect of the death penalty paints a bleak future. The Philippines flunked in its human rights performance in 2016. A culture of death has brought about an atmosphere of fear. The last months of former President Benigno Aquino's term saw his failure to implement his social pledge of leadership, economic



reforms, good governance, human rights, and justice and peace. Aquino stepped down without solving cases of torture and enforced disappearances despite an administrative order that was supposed to create a body to look into rights violations. Among the unresolved human rights violations were the killings and massive exodus of tribal people who were displaced by mining operations. On enforced disappearances, six years of pleas by families of the disappeared for Aquino to sign the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances fell on deaf ears. Disappointed by Aquino's promise of "straight path" governance, 16 million Filipinos voted Rodrigo Duterte, who vowed to bring change, into power. Duterte became president despite warning that 1,000 victims of summary executions in his home city of Davao would grow to 100,000 deaths.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/philippines-fail-at-human-rights/4430>

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#### **Extrajudicial killings: UN human rights chief urges investigation into Duterte**

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has urged the Philippines' judicial authorities to launch investigative processes following a recent admission by the president of the Philippines that as mayor of Davao he had killed people and encouraged others to do the same. President Duterte told business leaders at the presidential palace on 14 December 2016 that he had patrolled the streets personally on his motorcycle and killed people. In an interview with the BBC, he confirmed he had personally killed "about three" people during his term as mayor. Duterte served as mayor for three terms between 1988 and 2016. He has previously stated the three people killed in 1988 were suspected of rape and kidnapping. "Such acts directly contravene the rights enshrined in Article III of the Philippine Constitution," the high commissioner said. "The killings described by President Duterte also violate international law, including the right to life, freedom from violence and force, due process and fair trial, equal protection before the law, and innocence until proven guilty.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://aliran.com/civil-society-voices/2016-civil-society-voices/extrajudicial-killings-un-human-rights-chief-urges-investigation-duterte/>

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#### **Civil society groups want human rights on ASEAN Summit agenda**

President Rodrigo Duterte, who is this year's Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) chairman, may not like the issue of human rights, but civil society organizations (CSOs) are determined to put it in the upcoming summit's agenda. With 2,230 people killed in police anti-drug operations and over 4,000 more due to vigilante killings, alleged human rights violations in the Philippines have caught the world's attention, including the United Nations. The U.N. has asked the Philippine government to conduct investigations on the rise of extrajudicial killings in the country. Duterte told police in late September that they should not put too much stock on human rights.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/01/13/groups-want-human-rights-on-ASEAN-Summit-agenda.html>



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### **IP group says NDFP's socio-economic reform draft well-received in communities**

A local indigenous people's group in the Philippines expressed its support to the program of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines for the indigenous peoples. The Katribu or Kalipunan ng Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas said they are recommending for the government to forge an agreement with the NDF based on their draft program for indigenous peoples. Based on the NDFP's draft of the CASER on February 26, 1998, it blames "imperialism, the industrial backwardness and agrarian character of the Philippine economy and the consequent grossly iniquitous social and economic relations and massive poverty" as the cause of the armed conflict that spans for more than four decades.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://davaotoday.com/main/politics/ip-group-says-ndfps-socio-economic-reform-draft-well-received-in-communities/>

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### **Indigenous peoples call for recognition of rights in peace talks**

The international Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self-Determination and Liberation (IPMSDL) supports the ongoing peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). We commend the efforts of both parties toward an agreement on social and economic reforms. We note with high appreciation the efforts of the NDFP to hold consultations with indigenous peoples' (IP) organizations and communities in the past months. These have resulted in provisions upholding the rights of IPs to their ancestral lands and territories.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.rappler.com/views/imho/158848-indigenous-peoples-call-recognition-rights-peace-talks>

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### **Philippine communist rebels end ceasefire, accuses Duterte's government of human rights abuses**

The move comes after a third round of peace talks aimed at ending decades of bloodshed wrapped up in Italy last week with no deal on a permanent truce. Philippine Maoist rebels said on Wednesday they would end a five-month ceasefire, accusing President Rodrigo Duterte's government of treachery and human rights abuses. The move comes after a third round of peace talks aimed at ending decades of bloodshed wrapped up in Italy last week with no deal on a permanent cessation of fighting. The Communist Party of the Philippines said it would continue to support the peace negotiations, but ordered its 4,000 fighters to resume "military campaigns and tactical offensives" against government forces from February 11. "The [government] has treacherously taken advantage of the [rebels'] unilateral declaration of ceasefire to encroach on the territory of the people's democratic movement," the rebels said in a statement. Soldiers and police had used the truce as a licence to "engage in hostile actions" including "human rights violations" in rebel-influenced rural villages.



**READ MORE**

<http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2067244/philippine-communist-rebels-end-ceasefire-accuses-dutertes>

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**Gunmen claiming to be NPA torch Philex Mining trucks in Benguet**

Masked gunmen who introduced themselves as guerrillas of the New People's Army burned two trucks delivering ore concentrates from the Philex Mining Corporation's Padcal mines in Itogon, Benguet Thursday morning. Eduardo Aratas, legal officer of Philex Padcal, said the trucks were taking the ore to Poro Point in La Union when they were flagged down by the gunmen along the Philex Road between Sitio Tapak and Barangay Ampucao Central. Benguet police director Florante Camuyot said the gunmen, armed with assault rifles and estimated to number almost 50, did not harm drivers Rogelio de la Cruz and Danny Butay Aglugob and their security escort Danny Halip Bag-an when they stopped and torched the vehicles around 7:20 a.m.

**READ MORE**

<http://interaksyon.com/article/136959/gunmen-claiming-to-be-npa-torch-philex-mining-trucks-in-benguet>

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**Karapatan warns death penalty may target HR activists, political prisoners**

Human rights group Karapatan warned Wednesday that the proposal to reinstate death penalty in the country will affect human rights defenders, dissenters, and especially political prisoners. "The executive branch, Congress, military, police, prosecutors and courts may collude to criminalize the exercise of political beliefs and political actions that seek to institute meaningful and comprehensive reforms and change," Cristina Palabay, Karapatan secretary general, said in a statement. Karapatan is strongly denouncing the re-instatement of death penalty, saying "it will mostly affect the poor who have far less or no access to resources to defend themselves before courts. Apart from the HR defenders, activists, and political dissenters, Palabay also said that the lives of political prisoners will be endangered under the proposed measure.

**READ MORE**

<http://davaotoday.com/main/human-rights/karapatan-warns-death-penalty-may-target-hr-activists-political-prisoners/>

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**HR group slams AFP, PNP arrest frenzy vs. activists**

A human rights group on Tuesday slammed both the Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police after they have gone on an arrest spree against political activists, peace consultants, development workers and civilians on trumped-up charges. "President Duterte's 'cancellation' of the formal peace talks of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) has further emboldened State security forces to arrest and detain



activists....in line with the counter-insurgency program Oplan Kapayapaan,” Karapatan Secretary General Cristina Palabay said in a rally at Camp Crame Tuesday. Palabay said that “instead of releasing political prisoners, the Duterte administration seems to be in a rampage to increase the number of individuals suffering from this kind of injustice.” Karapatan said at least 19 activists and civilians were illegally arrested from Feb. 3 to 12. The group said that 15 of the arrested individuals are still detained including activists Ferdinand Castillo, 57, who was arrested in Caloocan City.

**READ MORE**

<http://davaotoday.com/main/human-rights/hr-group-slams-afp-pnp-arrest-frenzy-vs-activists/>

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**Philippines: 50th IB troopers harass Kalinga villagers**

The officers of the 50th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army harassed, intimidated and belittled representatives of Western Uma, Lubuagan, and members of the Justice and Peace 10. Previously, the community had sent a petition making the same demands but nothing happened, it was not acted on by the PA officers. For one year and two months, the soldiers were encamped in civilian homes and public facilities in Ag-agama, Western Uma, Lubuagan, Kalinga despite the villagers’ continued clamor for pull-out. JPAK and ten representatives of Western Uma trooped and sought audience at the headquarters of the 50th IBPA to submit the peoples declaration demanding the pull out of soldiers stationed specifically in Western Uma. The community petition and the peoples’ declaration were formulated because of numerous human rights violations committed by the soldiers including threat, harassment, intimidation, endangering civilian population, political persecution against community leaders, and disrespect for their women.

**READ MORE**

<http://iva.aippnet.org/philippines-50th-ib-troopers-harass-kalinga-villagers/>

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**Dinagat village chiefs warn of bloodshed if mining enters their place**

Blood will flow if mining companies set foot on our place, the village chiefs of Gibusong Island of Loreto town in Dinagat province warned. The village chiefs aired the warning Tuesday during the 4th anniversary of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office where they claimed victory in defending the island against the entry of a large-scale mining company. They recalled how people last year brandished bolos, spear guns and even stones to prevent the entry of Oriental Vision Mining Corporation of Cebu-based businessman Fernando Borja. The company has an existing Mineral Production Sharing Agreement issued by Mines and Geosciences Bureau to mine Gibusong, which has an area of 1,150 hectares and three barangays namely, Liberty, Helen and Magsaysay. Borja also runs Adnama Mining Resources Inc. that is operating in Claver town in Surigao del Norte. “We don’t want the mining company to operate because we don’t want pollution that would destroy our natural resources,” said Nathaniel Dalago, the barangay chair of Liberty.

**READ MORE**



<http://www.mindanews.com/environment/2017/02/village-chiefs-warn-of-bloodshed-if-mining-enters-their-place/>

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### **Bugkalot tribe receives land titles**

Bugkalo For the Bugkalot tribe, it is a blessed New Year receiving their Certificates of Land Ownership (CLOA) as Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) from Agrarian Reform Secretary Rafael Mariano. Covering some 4,600 hectares of resettlement area at Keat and Matmad in this town to be used productively, the CLOA was recently given to around 1,150 ARBs led by Bugkalot chief Rosario Camma, also former mayor of this town. Camma said the beneficiaries are the actual occupants and tillers from the Bugkalot tribe, and who also forged a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), stating the obligations of each party. The Bugkalots are Indonesian in origin and are recorded as being among the first people to come to the Philippines, also known as the Italon Tribe, Kadayakans, Egongots or Ipagis and Abacas or Tamsis.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.manilatimes.net/bugkalot-tribe-receives-land-titles/304832/>

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### **Legarda: Tap Indigenous Communities in Conservation of Protected Areas**

Senator Loren Legarda said that indigenous communities have an important role in conserving the country's protected areas and should be utilized by the government. "Indigenous peoples communities have always played an important role in the conservation and preservation of the country's protected areas. They employ age-old traditions in caring for our environment and natural resources. We should tap their knowledge to effectively maintain the integrity of our biodiversity and ecosystems," said Legarda, Chair of the Senate Committee on Climate Change and United Nations Global Champion for Resilience. In line with this, the Senator filed Senate Bill No. 1185, the proposed Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Conserved Areas Act. Legarda said that there are indigenous communities conserved areas (ICCA), which are areas within ancestral domains including lakes, coastal seas, forests, and watershed imbued with deep spiritual and cultural values for IPs. An example of an ICCA is the ancestral domain of the Tagbanuas in the island of Coron in northeastern Palawan. Only traditional fishing methods are allowed within its ancestral waters given the sacred nature of the place among the Tagbanuas.

#### **READ MORE**

[http://www.senate.gov.ph/press\\_release/2017/0214\\_legarda1.asp](http://www.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2017/0214_legarda1.asp)

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### **Mining village residents claim drying up of water sources due to OceanaGold operations**

Barangay officials of Didipio in the Municipality of Kasibu claimed that their water sources are drying up due to the operations OceanaGold Philippines, Inc (OGPI) in the area. Roman Ballogan, a Didipio resident said water sources have dwindled since OceanaGold Philippines, Inc.(OGPI) started its open pit mining operations in the village. "As the open pit got deeper in 2012, our water supply started to get dry," he said. Ballogan said the OGPI vowed to provide a huge water tank to store water for the



community while smaller tanks were already distributed to every household in the area. "The water supply is not enough to cover all households and it is not even safe for drinking and cooking. Since they are the cause of our problem on water, they should provide us with a reliable water supply," he said. Ballogan added that the mining company has not responded to the demand of residents for a permanent source of potable water in the area.

**READ MORE**

<http://northboundasia.com/2017/02/08/mining-village-residents-claim-drying-water-sources-due-oceanagold-operations/#.WNQFao6LlZ0>

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**Lopez says money from mining investment goes out of the country**

Environment Secretary Gina Lopez belittled the claims of mining companies that the Philippines stands to lose P1 trillion of investments from her closure and suspension orders, saying most of the money does not benefit the economy. "To whatever they invest, most of the net income goes to them. They get a seven-year tax holiday, and at the end of the mine they can sell all their equipment and keep the money ... So how are we benefitting here?" Lopez said in a text message to GMA News Online. "They rape the country and the money goes out of the country ..." Lopez noted. "They get 82 percent of the net income and 95 percent of this goes out of the local economy," she said.

**READ MORE**

<https://www.msn.com/en-ph/money/topstories/lopez-says-money-from-mining-investment-goes-out-of-the-country/ar-AAmGKKz>

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**'Eco-tourism an alternative to mining'**

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is set to develop mined-out areas into eco-tourism zones that would help rehabilitate the mining sites and provide livelihood to affected communities. Environment Secretary Gina Lopez said they are now looking at areas that have big potential for becoming eco-tourism sites, consulting with community members on the transition. "In fact, we already identified 13 towns in Dinagat and Surigao that can be developed as such. We call this 'mine sites revegetation'," Lopez said during a discussion with The STAR editors and reporters yesterday. DENR Undersecretary Philip Camara said the area would be treated as one eco-tourism site, just like what is being done in Palawan, which has many tourist destinations. He said it is more beneficial to divert the sites' orientation because eco-tourism gives better quality jobs. This way, he added, 95 percent of the income will go to the affected communities as opposed to the mining business where the bulk of profits goes to investors.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/02/22/1674651/eco-tourism-alternative-mining>

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## Indigenous peoples worried about loss of royalty

Manobo Datu Ben Tindogan is worried about what will happen to his people after they lose the royalty share from mining companies operating in their ancestral lands. “What will happen to our children if they lose their scholarships? What do we do if we lose our livelihood?” Tindogan asked after Environment Secretary Gina Lopez ordered the closure of 23 mines on Feb. 2 for damaging watersheds. Tindogan’s family is among the 155 indigenous families that will be adversely affected by the closures. The families get livelihood assistance and 160 of their children get full scholarships from the mining companies.

### READ MORE

<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/871939/indigenous-peoples-worried-about-loss-of-royalty#ixzz4cEuzg2tE>

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## IPs most affected by mining

Pictures of mountains and rivers ravaged by mining companies should remind us of a quote from the Cree Indians of North America: “Only when the last tree has died, the last river has been poisoned, the last fish has been caught, will we realize that we can’t eat money.” Often told but almost always ignored is the fact that the mountains and rivers are the source of food and water. In the Philippines, most affected by the sacrilegious practices of mining firms are our indigenous peoples (IPs) whose life and culture revolve around mountains and rivers. In fact, the Manobo call the mountains “bobongan” (which in English means roof or, metaphorically, “shelter.” The IPs are also often the victims of militarization, so much so that when there are so-called “bakwit” (evacuees), we think of IPs. Military presence and the mining operations must therefore not be mere coincidence because the IP habitat and mining areas are common grounds.

### READ MORE

<http://opinion.inquirer.net/101734/ips-affected-mining#ixzz4cEuRKzDS>

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## Cordillera IP group backs Lopez on mining

An indigenous people's group opposed to large-scale mining has thrown its support behind Environment Secretary Gina Lopez for deciding to close and suspend some mining companies.

“No [Department of the Environment and Natural Resources] secretary has ever done this before—to make a decision for social justice for all communities who have been demanding for a stop to the operations of mining companies that have historically violated indigenous peoples’ rights, destroyed and plundered ancestral lands and the natural resources therein, said Igorot leader Abigail Anongos, secretary general of the Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA). Anongos said they are supporting Lopez in cancelling 75 Mineral Production Sharing Agreements in watershed areas, five of which are located in the Cordillera region. “In fact, mining companies should not be allowed to operate in the Cordillera because the Cordillera is the watershed area of the entire Northern Luzon,” she said. The CPA is also hoping that DENR will also recommend that instead of just a suspension, Lepanto Mining should actually be included to the list of 23 mining companies for closure.



**READ MORE**

<http://www.philstar.com/nation/2017/02/23/1675025/cordillera-ip-group-backs-lopez-mining>

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**Alamon: Emergent Lumad consciousness from systemic discrimination**

HERE are fourteen to seventeen million indigenous peoples of the Philippines from one hundred ten distinct ethnolinguistic groups. They roughly make up fifteen percent of the country's total population. Most of these, about (61 percent), are found in the Southern island of Mindanao, while a significant number are located in the Cordillera Administrative Region (33 percent) of the North. In January 2010, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues revealed that the indigenous peoples of the world make up a third of the world's poorest people and that they suffer disproportionately in areas of health, education, and human rights, and regularly face systemic discrimination and exclusion. These features and qualities are reflected in the condition of the country's indigenous peoples who are relegated to the margins of political, social, and economic life. This is most especially true among Mindanao's indigenous peoples who fall under the collective term "lumad." Various studies have indicated the dire situation of the southern island's Lumad because Mindanao is also home to the country's poorest regions.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/cagayan-de-oro/opinion/2017/01/02/alamon-emergent-lumad-consciousness-systemic-discrimination-517976>

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**BAN Toxics, ILO call for an end to child labor in small-scale mining**

BAN Toxics, together with the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of Labor (DOLE), today called for an end to child labor in the Philippines. The call came during the event, (One with children to end child labor) which featured the launch of three major initiatives to combat child labor in the country. BAN Toxics in particular called for an end to child labor in small-scale mining. Together with ILO, the group launched the initiative CARING Gold, a three-year strategy to eliminate child labor in small-scale mine sites, with Camarines Norte as the pilot site. The project, funded by the US Department of Labor, is eyeing the formalization of the small-scale mining industry as a critical solution to prevent boys and girls from working in mines. "Child labor is complex and deeply rooted in poverty. Children suffer and risk their health or even their lives to work for their family's survival. Ending child labor requires strong commitment and collective effort," said Khalid Hassan, Director of the ILO Country Office for the Philippines. As an informal livelihood and unregulated industry, artisanal and small-scale mining reproduces poverty and vulnerability in many ways. It is associated with poor labor practices, environmental destruction and social problems.

**READ MORE**

<http://news.pia.gov.ph/article/view/1141483794826/ban-toxics-ilo-call-for-an-end-to-child-labor-in-small-scale-mining#sthash.cfbcAnIj.dpuf>



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## **Government, NGOs launch projects to combat child labor in Philippines**

Various government and non-government agencies on Thursday opened the new year by launching three major projects aimed to combat the problem of child labor in the Philippines. These initiatives include programs against child laborers in the gold mining industry, as well as setting up help desks, a local registry on child labor, and a new child labor module aimed to raise awareness in conditional cash transfer beneficiaries. These are in support of the Philippine program against child labor, which aims to take at least 1 million kids out of child labor by 2025. According to the 2011 Survey on Children conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority, about 2.1 million Filipino children between 5 and 17 years old are currently engaged in child labor, with a number of them performing physically demanding and hazardous work. Sixty-two percent of these children work in the agriculture industry. Khalid Hassan, the local director of the International Labor Organization (ILO), noted that even though the Philippines has progressed significantly to address child labor, there is still a lot to be done.

### **READ MORE**

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/01/12/17/government-ngos-launch-projects-to-combat-child-labor-in-philippines>

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## **Gov't, ILO vow to free 1 million kids from child labor**

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) estimates that there are around 2.1 million Filipino children exposed to hazardous labor, which includes mining. Among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations (UN) is to eliminate child labor by 2025. To help achieve this objective in the Philippines, national agencies have teamed up with the International Labor Organization (ILO). Their campaign #1MBatangMalaya (1 million free kids) aims to intensify the fight against child labor, and add to the gains accomplished since 2012. "Progress has been made to address child labor in the country. The annual US Department of Labor findings on the worst forms of child labor showed that the Philippines has made significant advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor since 2012 or 4 consecutive years," said ILO Country Director Khalid Hassan.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.rappler.com/move-ph/158137-one-million-batang-malaya-child-labor-campaign-launch>

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## **DENR to start the year shutting down non-compliant mining firms**

As if 2016 was not yet bad enough for them, mining companies will have every reason to be more cautious in 2017 as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) plans to start the year by suspending them. If last year the DENR failed to suspend as many companies as Environment



Secretary Gina Lopez wants, the DENR chief will make sure that within this month, more mining operations will close down. Lopez said in an interview that the results on the nationwide audit on mining companies will be disclosed by the second week of January, adding that she expect more miners to be suspended in 2017. Ever since Lopez officially took over the agency in July, she's already been eager to shut down mining companies that she believes are not compliant with environmental standards. In the same month, she called for a nationwide crackdown on mining firms, which has ended in August.

**READ MORE**

<http://business.mb.com.ph/2017/01/02/denr-to-start-the-year-shutting-down-non-compliant-mining-firms/>

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**Group calls for mandated definition of 'responsible mining'**

Anti-mining group Alyansa Tigal Mina (ATM) on Thursday called for President Rodrigo Duterte and Environment Secretary Gina Lopez to endorse a measure that seeks to have a clear cut and legal definition of "responsible mining." "We recommend that the President and Secretary Lopez endorse the passage of a new mining law that best approximates 'responsible mining' and this is the Alternative Minerals Management Bill (AMMB), now filed in the 17th Congress," ATM National Coordinator Jaybee Garganera said in a statement. Gina Lopez is the secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). In August last year, the group launched a week-long series of mobilizations to push for the passage of the bill.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/594744/money/economy/group-calls-for-mandated-definition-of-responsible-mining#sthash.C3iMYsgc.dpuf>

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**Lopez not keen on approving new Minahang Bayan sites this year**

The government is not keen on approving any application for Minahang Bayan, the centralized program for processing of minerals within a specific area—where the government can better monitor gold production—this year, as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) steps up the campaign against irresponsible mining operations. An environmental advocate, Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez said in a text message that if she would have it her way, she would rather see small-scale miners having alternative sources of income and livelihood to protect and conserve the environment, and promote sustainable development based on ecologically sound economic activities—such as agri-forestry and ecotourism. Small-scale miners, particularly in Mindanao, are appealing to Lopez to help boost the sector and to legalize small-scale mining, starting with the establishment of Minahang Bayan, where they can extract and process gold.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.businessmirror.com.ph/lopez-not-keen-on-approving-new-minahang-bayan-sites-this-year/>

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**Mayor pushes for palm oil plantation promotion, expansion**



The least known palm oil industry in the province has got a new advocate pushing for its promotion as "a viable high-value crop" farmers can consider. Leonardo Talania, in mixed English and local dialect, said "not known to many, palm oil as a crop is a revenue generator even better than the traditional rubber." Talania, who is now the mayor of Titay town in Zamboanga Sibugay, usually spent his early morning everyday supervising the 150-hectare palm oil plantation he owns. The plantation is nestled across the border of Titay town and Kalawit town in Zamboanga del Norte. He started planting palm oil in 2007 on a 15-hectare land after he learned about palm oil from other palm oil farmers in other parts of Mindanao. According to Talania, unlike rubber and other crops, palm oil raw products are not prone to thief. "It is easy for people to steal raw rubber and sell it to buyers without you knowing it," he said. But no chance for people to steal in the case of palm oil, he added. Above all, he confided, palm oil farming could be a viable alternative with the problem besetting the rubber industry.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/zamboanga/local-news/2017/01/09/mayor-pushes-palm-oil-plantation-promotion-expansion-519157>

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#### **DENR chief toughens up on issuance of ECC**

The government will no longer issue environmental compliance certificates (ECCs) to companies that have yet to fully comply with all the specific measures, conditions and qualifications set by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). This is the new direction set by Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez, although she assured that the current DENR review on existing ECCs will be decided based on previously set parameters. "If any ECC is canceled now, it has to be withdrawn in the legal parameters at that time. But for the future, we are saying that if any ECC is given, it should not be given unless all the conditions are first met," Lopez said in a statement. In announcing her new policy, Lopez also issued show-cause orders to about 10 more companies, including Benguet Corp., putting them at risk of also losing their ECCs.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.businessmirror.com.ph/denr-chief-toughens-up-on-issuance-of-ecc/>

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#### **Eco-warrior lays waste to Philippines' mining industry**

Mining industry chiefs had just assailed her order to shut down more than half of the Philippines' mines, and Regina Lopez was in a combative mood: but, to keep her cool before an interview, she slipped into a side room and meditated for a few minutes. There is a spiritual side to Lopez, the daughter of a media mogul who, at 18, left a life of privilege behind in the Philippines, took a vow of celibacy and became a yoga teacher and missionary in Africa, living in slums among the poor. But Lopez is also a fiery environmental crusader. She has no qualms about attacking the powerful and flouting convention, just like the country's blunt-spoken president, Rodrigo Duterte, who appointed her as his environment minister last year. Since then, she has become the bane of big mining companies, which she accuses of earning "blood money" in the fifth-most-mineralised country in the



world. "Where does the money go? It goes to a few people who are already very rich and to foreigners. We're raping the local economy for their wealth," the 63-year-old secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said in conversations with Reuters in Manila this week.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-mining-minister-idUSKBN15O337>

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### **Philippines Plans To Shut 23 Mines Because Of Environmental Concerns**

In the Philippines, it's not just President Duterte who is stirring up controversy. His environment secretary this month shocked world markets by announcing the closure of 23 mines over environmental concerns. The Philippines is a leading mineral exporter. And as Michael Sullivan reports from Manila, the mining industry is not happy about it.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.npr.org/2017/02/27/517458885/philippines-plans-to-shut-23-mines-because-of-environmental-concerns>

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### **Duterte 'normalized act of extrajudicial killing'**

International watchdog Front Line Defenders also calls out the President for threatening to kill human rights defenders who criticize his campaign against illegal drugs. A recent report by international human rights watchdog Front Line Defenders said President Rodrigo Duterte "normalized the act of extrajudicial killing in his war on drugs" – a campaign which has already seen over 6,200 deaths in the Philippines in the last 6 months. "In the Philippines – which already ranks as the most dangerous country in Asia for [human rights defenders] – President Rodrigo Duterte normalized the act of extrajudicial killing in his war on drugs, lowering the political cost of murder and thus raising the risk to defenders whose work threatens powerful interests," the Front Line Defenders said in its Annual Report on Human Rights Defenders at Risk in 2016.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.rappler.com/nation/157528-duterte-extrajudicial-killing-human-rights>

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## **TAIWAN**

### **Aboriginal land boundary draft rules meet criticism**

Draft regulations for the establishment of boundaries for Aboriginal land and villages, announced on Tuesday by the Council of Indigenous Peoples and said to be the means to re-establish rights to land for Aborigines across 800,000 hectares of traditional territory, met with strong criticism from Aborigines and lawmakers yesterday. The Indigenous Youth Front and legislators across party lines criticized the draft for not including privately owned land, adding that the draft regulations are a



slight against Aborigines. The Indigenous Youth Front said that by excluding privately owned land from traditional territories, the end result would be fragmented traditional territory. Excluding such land would be to sell out their ancestors, it said.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2017/02/16/2003665090>

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## **MALAYSIA**

### **Malaysian court's decision sets back Indigenous land rights**

Indigenous rights and the preservation of Malaysian rainforests have suffered a major setback as a result of two developments over the holiday break. In a majority ruling the Federal Court of Malaysia has rejected the approach previously taken by lower courts in Malaysia and by the Australian High Court in its Mabo case, ruling that indigenous people have no title claim over foraging lands. And the death earlier this month of the Chief Minister of the Malaysian State of Sarawak, Adenan Satem, is another blow to Indigenous rights. Adenan Satem succeeded long-serving chief minister Abdul Taib Mahmud in 2014 and went on to take his Barisan Nasional party to a resounding state election victory in 2016. In his short time in office Adenan showed some willingness to listen to Indigenous voices, reversing his predecessor's commitment to build a series of major dams on the Baram River.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/malaysian-courts-decision-sets-back-indigenous-land-rights-20170127-gtzzra.html>

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### **Forest Department confirms issues of intrusion at forest reserve**

The Forest Department has confirmed there were issues of intrusion in the Lavang Forest Reserve (Lavang FR) in Bintulu as previously reported by The Borneo Post. On Tuesday, The Borneo Post had a front-page report titled 'Claims of intrusion', which reported the intrusion by an Occupation Ticket (OT) licence holder in recent months at Lavang FR. "However, this matter is still under further investigation by the Forest Department," said director Sapuan Ahmad in a statement issued here. An oil palm plantation company has claimed that 150ha of its land planted with oil palm trees had been damaged and about 50ha of a nearby forest reserve had been illegally logged by the OT license holder. A spokesman from Sebekai Plantation Sdn Bhd (Sebekai) told The Borneo Post that a short-term licence under OT/4479 was issued to Dynamic Sungreen Sdn Bhd in October 2015 to enable the licensee to carry out clearing of gazetted Native Customary Rights (NCR) land at Lavang FR in Bintulu.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.theborneopost.com/2017/02/12/forest-department-confirms-issues-of-intrusion-at-forest-reserve/>

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## **Natives Want Swift Resolution of Land Rights Issues**

Sarawak's newly-formed committee on territorial domain (pemakai menoa) and communal forest reserves (pulau galau) should quickly resolve issues pertaining to land claims based on native customary rights (NCR), according to People's Justice Party (PKR) Chairman Baru Bian. He said many from the indigenous community are deeply concerned over the matter and want the Committee Head, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah, and the new Chief Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg to swiftly act on this issue. "There are no two ways about it but to amend the Sarawak Land Code if the state government is serious about protecting the NCR land of the native community in Sarawak," Baru told The Star Online. "I am aware that some people are concerned that the recognition of such adat (custom) may cause huge areas of land to be subjected to claims by the natives. This is not true as NCR claims require proof." More importantly, this arrangement must first be recognised by the authorities.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.propertyguru.com.my/property-news/2017/2/146312/natives-want-swift-resolution-of-land-rights-issues>

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## **Land encroachment angers Kampung Sungai Limo residents**

The folk at Kampung Sungai Limo, Sampadi, have been living at their village for eight generations, spanning 100 years, but now they risk losing it all. Provisional leases have been issued over their native land including the very lot where their houses were built on at the village. According to acting village chief Balang Dusing, three companies have encroached on their land, clearing trees, oil palm plantations and other farming plots. The native land areas that have been cleared, including communal forest reserves and territorial domain, was estimated close to 1,600ha. The land grab is affecting more than 40 households involving some 200 villagers, he said, while adding that native customary rights (NCR) land belonging to neighbouring villages is also affected. "We were assured by the late Tan Sri Adenan Satem (former chief minister and Tanjong Datu assemblyman) that this issue would be resolved but there were no updates on the matter even till his recent passing. "The provisional lease not only affected our oil palm plantation and agriculture lots but also the houses we built at this village.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.thestar.com.my/metro/community/2017/02/09/land-encroachment-angers-kampung-sungai-limo-residents/#mSdTRVzjbSrCDHpu.99>

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## **Discontent in Malay heartland may spell trouble for Najib**

The Malaysian plantation district of Sungkai has become an initial - and unlikely - battleground for an election that embattled Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak is expected to call this year. Sungkai is home to ethnic Malays who work for the national oil palm plantation operator, Federal Land Development Authority (Felda). Known as "Felda settlers", they have long been among the beneficiaries of government affirmative action programmes for Malays, who form the majority of the population. The Felda settlers have been a rock solid vote bank for Najib's ruling coalition, even as



urban Malays have poured into the opposition camp in recent years, alienated by a series of political scandals. Najib's coalition lost the popular vote in the last general election in 2013, but still won a majority of seats in Malaysia's gerrymandered constituencies. Malaysia's opposition is hoping the settlers could be the next to defect, which was why opposition lawmaker Rafizi Ramli on Sunday night was in Sungkai, a former mining town that now mainly relies on palm oil and rubber planting.

#### READ MORE

<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/368993#ixzz4ZsqcOfWf>

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#### Police raid oil palm estate, rescue 18 in human exploitation case

Police rescued 18 people including five children after they were alerted of alleged exploitation at an oil palm estate at Kg Tasek, Pengkalan Hulu. Perak Crime Investigation Department (CID) officers together with the help of the Pengkalan Hulu CID team conducted the raid at 12.10am Sunday. Five men, six women, two teenagers aged 13 and 17 and five children aged between two and seven years old were found living in a run-down shelter at the estate. The team also arrested a 43-year-old man and a 24-year-old woman in the raid, said Perak CID chief Senior Assistant Commissioner Datuk Gan Tian Kee. He added that one of those rescued said that their employers used to beat them if they did not work at the estate. "The couple also cheated them of their salary and threatened them when asked about their salary. They even forced the children to work in the estate without salary or reward," said SAC Gan. He added that the police seized a white Mitsubishi Fuso and a black Nissan Navara as well as two identification cards, a diary, a record book and 11 copies of Etiqa insurance policies.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/02/26/police-raid-oil-palm-estate-rescue-18-in-human-exploitation-case/#RMt2TzfKs3yYEVel.99>

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#### Implement native courts alongside civil system, Dayak land rights forum urges

A Dayak native customary rights (NCR) land forum today called on the state government to constitute a native court system which runs parallel with the civil court. In a draft memorandum to be submitted to Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem, the forum said the native court system must have jurisdiction over cases involving native customs, including NCR lands. The forum, organised by the Dayak Intellectual Group, also urged that a Royal Commission of Inquiry be established with its panel members to comprise the Dayak elders and experts in the Dayak customs. "It must have powers to investigate, summon and arrest and further excise out and issue titles over *pemakai menoa* or over infringement by any leases and licences of all kinds," the forum said, adopting the draft memorandum read out by former Sessions Court judge Henry Joseph. '*Pemakai menoa*' refers to a virgin forest where the Dayaks in rural longhouses go to forage for food and other forest products "Alternatively, a Native Customary Rights Land Ordinance must be enacted to provide for the recognition and administration of tenure of native customary rights land," the forum said. It also wanted the Dayak Council of Customs and Traditions be re-constituted and made an independent



body with power and authority to issue documents of titles including communal titles without interference from any third party.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/implement-native-courts-alongside-civil-system-dayak-land-rights-forum-urge#sthash.lJrM2YMz.dpuf>

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**Plantation claims intrusion by villagers in Ulu Mukah**

A police report was lodged on Monday after an oil palm plantation in Mukah claimed a group of longhouse folk had set up a blockade outside their estate and intruded on the estate to collect oil palm fruits. Manager of Kenyana Estate, 12 km from Mukah, belonging to Rimwood Pelita (Mukah) Plantation Sdn Bhd said dozens of tons of the fruit had been taken away by the intruders which he described as “illegally” done. In his report he claimed that “the group of up to 30 men and women had entered illegally to collect our company’s oil palm fruits”. Identifying himself as Yong, the manager said he had taken the police investigating team to the plantation and both he and the police had seen the group in the act of “illegally” collecting the fruits, which he regarded as “theft”. Yong admitted the incident stemmed from the NCR land dispute but said it was fortunate that both parties had remained calm. He said none of the parties was armed, and both sides refrained from violence.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.theborneopost.com/2017/01/04/plantation-claims-intrusion-by-villagers-in-ulu-mukah/>

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**S4S: Iban ‘can’t steal’ fruits on their own land**

The plight of a group of Iban in Mukah, accused of “illegally collecting fruits” from land that is currently under dispute between them and a private company, has raised a sharp response from the pro-autonomy advocacy coalition Sarawak4Sarawakians (S4S). Asked to comment on a police report made by the manager of Kenyana Estate in Mukah on Monday, S4S chairman Peter John Jaban replied that it was like claiming one was stealing from one’s own land. “No one can be accused of stealing fruits from his or her own land, but with that police report, the estate had in effect accused them (Iban) of stealing fruits growing on their own land,” Jaban said. He also referred to Global Witness, an investigative website, which covered land disputes between the indigenous groups and companies developing plantations in Sarawak. “The Orang Asal were dismissed by the daughter of a former chief minister and former governor as squatters. That’s what she had told Global Witness in an interview,” Jaban said, adding that the Global Witness programme best illustrates the mindset at work in Sarawak among the elite. “How can the Orang Asal be described as squatters on their own land?”

**READ MORE**

<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2017/01/04/s4s-iban-cant-steal-fruits-on-their-own-land/>

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## **A blow to indigenous rights**

A recent majority Federal Court decision dealt a fatal blow to the customary rights of indigenous peoples to freely access the forest for food, medicines and such like. Such a right has existed since time immemorial as universally recognised. Indeed the immense contribution of traditional knowledge associated with the forest resources to modern medicine has been acknowledged by the World Health Organisation. In the Bakun Dam case the Appeals Court pronounced that the forest provided the sustenance of life for indigenous peoples. All this is now set to be negated. The Federal Court (Sandah's case) ruled that such a right – to freely access the forest for such sustenance – does not exist in law. The majority three judges ruled that this customary practice of the indigenous peoples did not have the force of law because – even if shown to exist – it did not fall within the definition of customary laws under Sarawak State Laws. In the words of Justice Raus Shariff: *"Put simply, there are customs which the laws of Sarawak does not recognise and hence do not form part of the customary laws of the natives of Sarawak and remain merely as practices or usages of the native. They are not integral to the particular community in question and remain incidental. As such they do not come within the definition of law under Article 160(2) of the Federal Constitution. We must not lose sight of an important fact that recognition alone that such custom or practice exist is not enough."*

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.thesundaily.my/node/422902>

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## **NGOs admit oil palm not main cause of deforestation**

UCHING: Beef and soya bean industries are the main culprits for more forest disappearing internationally and not palm oil as often claimed. Sarawak Oil Palm Plantation Owners Association (Soppoa) in a statement yesterday said international scientific communities were now being rightly informed of the latest findings with regards to these two industries as the main drivers of deforestation. It cited a Dec 14, 2016 posting by Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) member and scientific advisor for Climate and Energy Doug Boucher, who clearly admitted that oil palm plantations had been wrongly targeted over the years for deforestation. "In fact, based on a scientific study conducted by Climate Focus 2016 (<http://climatefocus.com>), 'the biggest driver of deforestation is beef. Soy is second ... and palm oil and wood products are even smaller drivers, causing only about a tenth as much deforestation as beef'," said the statement.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.theborneopost.com/2017/01/19/ngos-admit-oil-palm-not-main-cause-of-deforestation/>

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## INDONESIA

### Indonesia's land rights decision a major victory for indigenous peoples

"THIS is only the beginning," declared Indonesian President Joko Widodo at a special ceremony at the presidential palace, "[the land being handed back] is still so very small." Jokowi, as he is known, ushered in the new year by returning some 13,000 hectares of *tanah adat* or customary land to nine indigenous groups in northern Sumatra, making good on a 2013 Constitutional Court ruling and a promise from when he was elected in 2014. Back then, the Indigenous People's Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) successfully brought a case for land rights before Indonesia's highest court, winning a ruling in favour of the community in question's rights to their *hutan adat* – customary forest – which had previously been unilaterally claimed as state forest. The Constitutional Court's ruling modified the wording of the 1999 Forestry Law, thus dividing public forest land between customary and individual state forests. Judge Muhammad Alim of the Constitutional Court said that "[i]ndigenous Indonesians have the right to log their forests and cultivate the land for their personal needs, and the needs of their families." The 2013 legislative change was estimated to apply to some 32,000 villages and some 40 million indigenous people across the Indonesian archipelago, but until Jokowi's action in 2017 has scarcely seen change in practice.

#### READ MORE

<https://asiancorrespondent.com/2017/01/indonesias-land-rights-decision-major-victory-indigenous-peoples/>

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### After the customary forest recognition

At the end of 2016, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo signed a decree that acknowledged nine indigenous communities' rights to customary forests covering a total of 13,100 hectares. The historic event followed the Constitutional Court's ruling back in 2012, which states that customary forests are not part of state forests. It took the government four years to comply with the court's decision. Anyhow, the presidential decree signals the government's political support for efforts to fulfill the constitutional rights of indigenous peoples, many of which have been ignored. Forests play an important role for indigenous people. Their territory is a unitary area consisting of forests, gardens, fields and settlements, with all their facilities. For indigenous people living in coastal areas, beaches and small islands are an inseparable part of their territory. The government's recognition should not rest with these nine communities. Not just because indigenous peoples have for decades fallen victim to the state's unilateral claim upon forest areas, but also because their rights to their land should be restored as a basic foundation and invaluable wealth of our diversity.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2017/01/26/after-the-customary-forest-recognition.html>

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## **Jokowi grants first-ever indigenous land rights to 9 communities**

For the first time, Indonesia's central government has recognized the rights of nine indigenous communities to the forests they call home, a milestone for a national indigenous peoples movement that is seeking to bring to a close an era of abuse and discrimination at the hands of the state. That movement still has a long way to go. The nine "customary forests" — known as *hutan adat* in Indonesian — acknowledged by President Joko Widodo's administration last week encompass a total of 13,100 hectares (32,370 acres). But the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) has mapped more than 8.2 million hectares of customary lands it says belongs to the nation's *adat* groups, as those who practice ancient modes of knowledge, belief, community and economy are called here. By point of comparison, Indonesia's nine biggest oil palm firms in 2013 had planted nearly 2 million hectares. "This is only the beginning," President Jokowi, as he is popularly known, declared in a speech marking the occasion. The area handed out is "still so very small," he said.

### **READ MORE**

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/01/jokowi-grants-first-ever-indigenous-land-rights-to-9-communities/>

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## **Indonesia's land transfer a breakthrough for indigenous rights: activist**

Indonesia's decision to return customary lands to indigenous peoples is a breakthrough for their rights and a boost to campaigners pushing for a slowdown in deforestation in the Southeast Asian country, a leading rights activist said. President Joko Widodo announced on Dec. 30 that Indonesia would return 13,000 hectares of customary lands to nine indigenous communities, and committed to giving back a total of 12.7 million hectares to local and indigenous groups. Veteran indigenous rights campaigner Abdon Nababan, who attended the announcement at the presidential palace, said it was an encouraging sign for the traditional custodians of Indonesia's forests. "In our constitution, since (independence in) 1945, there has been strong recognition and respect for indigenous rights, but until the end of last year, there has been no real legal recognition," said Nababan, secretary general of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN).

### **READ MORE**

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/indonesias-land-transfer-breakthrough-indigenous-rights-activist-125725982--finance.html>

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## **COMMENTARY: Who will benefit from Jokowi's land reform?**

The government has made a bold move with its plan to grant people wider access to land under its agrarian reform. More than 9 million hectares, comprising roughly 4.5 million hectares of degraded forest and 4.5 million ha of uncertified plots, will be owned by citizens under land objects for agrarian reform (TORA), while another 12.7 million ha will be managed by indigenous people. The government has introduced the land reform as part of its equity policy, which aims to ensure equal access to land, infrastructure and basic services and reduce widening inequality. While the plan may gain nods from development economists and proponents of a welfare state, a closer look at the program is necessary



to avoid failures of past agrarian policies. Indonesia has seen a long record of land conflicts and citizens deprived of the rights to their land in favor of the rise of the plantation and mining sectors. As most land gained state forest status during Soeharto's New Order, logging and mining exploitation became rampant during the authoritarian regime. The military, as virtual guardians of the state forests, together with exclusive concessions to businesses became the pillars of natural resource management. Those living inside and around the forests were excluded.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2017/02/21/commentary-who-will-benefit-from-jokowis-land-reform.html>

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#### **Government to restore 400,000 hectares of peatland in 2017**

The government aims to restore 400,000 hectares of critical peatland in 2017, a lower target compared to 600,000 ha in 2016. Environment and Forestry Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar has said the government will speed up canal and pond construction to maintain water levels in peatland areas. "We need to keep the water level at least 40 centimeters below the surface. During the latest fire in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, the water level was only 50 to 60 centimeters from the surface," Siti said at the State Palace in Jakarta on Wednesday, adding that from 2009 to 2016 the permissible water level for palm oil plantations was 80 cm. In 2016, 16,615 canals and 2,581 water ponds were built in Sumatra and Kalimantan. Presidential chief of staff Teten Masduki said Indonesia had 2 million ha of critical peatland that had to be rewet, of which 1.4 ha was located on concession land. The government therefore has to work with plantation companies.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/01/12/government-to-restore-400000-hectares-of-peatland-in-2017.html>

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#### **Indonesia Needs to Rejuvenate Palm Oil Plantations**

With some 11.6 million hectares of plantations, Indonesia needs to rejuvenate its palm oil trees to maintain its position as the world's largest crude palm oil (CPO) producer. The country needs to rejuvenate its palm oil plantations to increase its CPO production, as in the midterm, the Industry Ministry has accorded priority to increasing investment in the palm oil processing industry that needs raw material. Hence, anticipatory efforts must be undertaken to meet the need for raw material for the production of about 40 million tons of CPO by 2020. However, as the plantations are old, there has been a downward trend in CPO production. Bayu Krisnamurthi, president director of the Palm Oil Plantation Fund Managing Board (BPDP), had stated last month that CPO exports fell two percent by volume in 2015, while production dropped by about seven percent. "At the end of 2015, palm oil fruit production fell due to the El Nino-induced drought in 2015. Exports fell two percent by volume, as production dropped by seven percent," Krisnamurthi, who has recently stepped down from the post of BPDP president director, noted.

#### **READ MORE**



<http://www.en.netralnews.com/news/business/read/1128/indonesia.needs.to.rejuvenate.palm.oil.plantations>

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### **NGOs Refuse Draft Bill on Palm Oil**

A number of organizations namely Human Rights Working Groups (HRWG), the Public Research and Advocacy Institution (ELSAM), and Auriga Foundation consider that the Bill on palm oil is yet necessary. They argue that there is no new norm offered by the Draft Bill. “The existence of the Draft Bill regarding palm oil could worsen the regulation since the draft bill legalizes violating acts in peat areas,” said the Advocacy Deputy Director of ELSAM, Andi Muttaqien, on Sunday, February 5, 2017. According to Andi, the Bill legalizes the palm oil plantation that is currently considered illegal. It is written in article 23 of the Draft Bill. The article regulates the rights of cultivating palm oil on a land after acquiring a business permit. The plot of land that is referred to is mineral land and/or peatland. “It’s clearly being used as an instrument to [legalize] or provide an opportunity for companies to operate on a peatland,” Andi said.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://en.tempo.co/read/news/2017/02/06/055843394/NGOs-Refuse-Draft-Bill-on-Palm-Oil>

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### **Wilmar Has Violated The Rights Of The Kapa Indigenous Community Of West Sumatra, Concludes RSPO**

Wilmar owns 27% shares in SIFCA, a company that operates Maryland Oil Palm Plantations and Cavalla Rubber Plantations in Pleebo-Sodoken District, Maryland County. Wilmar is a member of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. As a member of the Roundtable, Wilmar is obligated to operate in accordance with the objectives of the Roundtable. One of the objectives of the Roundtable states that “plantations apply accepted best practices and that the basic rights and living conditions of millions of plantation workers, smallholders and indigenous people are wholly respected.” But SIFCA argues that Wilmar does not own majority shares in the company, so the company is, therefore, not obligated to abide by the rules of the Roundtable, thereby leaving the hapless people of the district hopeless as the GOL continues to pay deaf ears to the rigor of plight of the people of Pleebo-Sodoken District. More besides, can the Roundtable apply the same formulae used in **Kalimantan** in 2015 and now in Kapa to **Golden Veroleum**, which is a member of the Roundtable, operating in Southeastern Liberia?

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.theperspective.org/2017/0206201702.php>

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### **RSPO rules on community complaint against Wilmar unit**

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) has ruled that a unit of Singapore-listed palm oil giant Wilmar had violated indigenous community rights in Indonesia’s West Sumatra region, signalling



progress in a two-year long dispute between the company and rights activists. In a decision announced on February 1, the industry association for sustainable palm oil said that Wilmar-owned PT Permata Hijau Pasaman I (PT PHP1) had not followed the proper legal process for obtaining land from the indigenous Kapa community and beginning to plant oil palm on it.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.eco-business.com/news/rs-po-rules-on-community-complaint-against-wilmar-unit/>

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### **Papuans still unhappy over Merauke food and oil palm project**

Jakarta has thrown high level support behind the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, or MIFEE, a project in the far south east of Papua province. Eventually expected to cover 1.6 million hectares, MIFEE has attracted dozens of investors, looking to grow food crops and palm oil. Billed as a project to address food security concerns for parts of the country, local Papuan communities have complained that MIFEE is alienating them from their land. A member of the video-based advocacy organisation Papuan Voices, Wensi Fatubun, said young Papuans in Merauke have begun using video to convey their opposition. "We try to empower the community to do how they can protect their own land, their own rights, from the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate project." However, the government said MIFEE was aimed at helping create improved living standards for Papuan communities. Indonesia's President Joko Widodo has personally visited the MIFEE site as part of his campaign to foster greater economic development in Papua.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/323368/papuans-still-unhappy-over-merauke-food-and-oil-palm-project>

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### **Indonesia's orangutans threatened by expansion of palm oil plantations**

Palm oil plantations are the single largest threat to the existence of orangutans in Indonesia's fast depleting forests, according to Orangutan Foundation International. The foundation, which supports the conservation and protection of orangutans, estimates that up to 5,000 of the animals are killed every year in palm oil concessions - a worrying situation for their survival as a species. Indonesia, the world's biggest producer of palm oil, plans to expand its plantations from 8 million hectares to 13 million hectares in four years. The habitat of some orangutans was destroyed in the process and the Orangutan Care Centre and Quarantine in Central Kalimantan is one facility that tends to the primates which were either held in captivity or orphaned.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/indonesia-s-orangutans-threatened-by-expansion-of-palm-oil/3453882.html>

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### **Politician's son named a suspect over illegal land clearing in Leuser Ecosystem**



The son of a local parliament chief has been named a suspect over illegal land clearing in the Singkil Swamp Wildlife Reserve, a heavily protected area home to the densest population of Sumatran orangutans (*Pongo abelii*). Teuku Popon Rizal is the son of Teuku Zulhelmi, the head of the legislature in South Aceh district. Rizal is alleged to have had a hand in the destruction of a corner of the reserve where last October authorities discovered three workers operating an excavator. The men were apparently preparing to establish an oil palm estate. Hauled in for questioning, they said Rizal had sent them. Rizal himself was interrogated in November, Ipda Adrianus, the head of the South Aceh Police unit in charge of the case, said on Tuesday. As Adrianus told it, Rizal admitted to ordering the land clearance while also claiming that he didn't know it was a protected zone and that the land belonged to his family.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/01/politicians-son-named-a-suspect-over-illegal-land-clearing-in-aceh-wildlife-reserve/>

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#### **Unilever Partners with Indonesian Governments in Palm Oil Pledge**

Unilever has signed a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with provincial and central governments in Indonesia to drive the sustainable palm oil sector and support a jurisdictional approach to sourcing at village level. The agreement involves the provincial government of Central Kalimantan, the district government of Kotawaringin Barat and Yayasan Penelitian Inovasi Bumi (INOBU). It aims to create “sustainable villages” in Indonesia’s palm oil industry and put an end to deforestation in the tropics. Unilever’s MoU follows an earlier announcement at the COP 21 climate negotiations in Paris last year, when the company said it would take a jurisdictional approach to commodity sourcing and will preferentially buy from areas that have comprehensive climate and forest policies in place. Unilever says it is working with the governments to improve yields and livelihoods of smallholder farmers, in exchange for their support in the fight against deforestation. This model is also known as ‘Produce & Protect’.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.foodingredientsfirst.com/news/Unilever-Partners-with-Indonesian-Governments-in-Palm-Oil-Pledge?type=article>

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#### **Local NGOs: Ecosystem services, not orangutans, key to saving Leuser**

Five years ago, there were likely very few people outside of Indonesia who’d ever heard of a place called the Leuser ecosystem. Today, this enormous and besieged tropical rainforest on the Indonesian island of Sumatra is on its way to becoming as well known as the Amazon in terms of its unique wildlife and its worldwide conservation significance. Leuser has received visits from countless international media crews, been the focus of major global NGO campaigns, and, most recently, was the backdrop of Leonardo DiCaprio’s Instagram and Twitter photos. Orangutans have, arguably, continued to generate much of this attention. Leuser is one of the last refuges of these Critically Endangered primates, found only on the islands of Sumatra and Borneo, and the “last place on earth” — as Leuser has been billed in media campaigns — where they exist alongside tigers, elephants and rhinos.



**READ MORE**

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/01/local-ngos-ecosystem-services-not-orangutans-key-to-saving-leuser/>

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**How local elites earn money from burning land in Indonesia**

Slash and burn is big business in the country, with burnt land commanding a higher price tag than land cleared through mechanical means because it is immediately ready for planting. A “fire economy” has emerged in Indonesia in which the blazes tearing through the country’s land and forests, driven largely by the global demand for palm oil, are lining the pockets of local elites and their patronage networks, according to a new study. “Fire economy and actor network of forest and land fires in Indonesia,” published in the journal *Forest Policy and Economics*, details the ways in which a variety of people “benefit directly and indirectly from the business of fire, enjoying pr The study — carried out by scientists from the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the University of Riau and Bogor Agricultural University — focuses on four districts in Riau province, on Indonesia’s main western island of Sumatra.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.eco-business.com/news/how-local-elites-earn-money-from-burning-land-in-indonesia/>

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**Indonesian government challenges another green group over freedom of information request**

The Indonesian government is going to the Supreme Court over an NGO’s freedom of information request for detailed maps of land on which oil palm companies have been licensed to operate in Kalimantan, the country’s portion of Borneo island. Civil society groups have tried for years to pry away the maps, said to be crucial if the public is to effectively monitor an industry rife with illegality. Oil palm plantation firms routinely clear outside of their permitted areas, destroying forests and community lands with little oversight from local officials. The lack of clarity over who has been authorized to operate in precisely which areas can play into the hands of companies who dismiss watchdog allegations as based on faulty data.

**READ MORE**

<https://news.mongabay.com/2017/01/indonesian-government-challenges-another-green-group-over-freedom-of-information-request/>

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**Indonesia to issue new mining rules this week -minister**

Indonesia will issue new rules for miners this week, the mining minister said late on Tuesday, which will cover contracts and permits, exports, taxes, divestment obligations and domestic processing requirements, among other issues. Indonesia announced in 2014 a ban on ore shipments to push miners to build smelters to process ore locally, but gave some concessions to concentrate producers after protests from the industry. As part of this push, a ban on the export of mineral concentrates



from Indonesia is due to kick in on Jan. 12. Rules now being drafted will allow concentrate shipments to continue beyond that deadline in certain cases, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Ignasius Jonan told reporters after a cabinet meeting. The new rules were needed "to clarify agreements on downstream mineral processing and other related matters," Jonan said, referring to directions from President Joko Widodo and rules on domestic processing set out in the 2009 Mining Law. The rules would have to maximise returns on Indonesia's natural resources, as mandated in the Constitution, while also considering increasing state revenues and employment opportunities, he said.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.reuters.com/article/indonesia-mining-idUSL4N1F043P>

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**Indonesia aims to bury slash-and-burn**

For the past several months, farmers in a small village in Riau province have been learning to clear their land without burning. They hack away at overgrown shrubs and weeds in a field, shred them and then pile them into a hole in the ground. As if making a giant bowl of salad, they toss in chicken manure, rice water and brown sugar. The mixture is then shovelled onto plastic sheets and wrapped up. "Composting is new to me. I was sceptical it would work at first but now that I know it's possible, I will not use fires any more," one of the farmers, Mr Misiyanto, told The Straits Times. The hope is that come April, when the dry season returns, their village will not have to face crippling haze again. "The dry season is from April to October so there's potential for fires from June to September," said Dr Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, spokesman for Indonesia's National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB). Hot spots have in fact reappeared for the first time this year, with the highest number so far recorded on Jan 10 - there were 15 in Sumatra while another four were in Riau.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-aims-to-bury-slash-and-burn>

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**Will Indonesia's palm oil moratorium injure SGX's agri giants?**

Indonesia's plan to impose a moratorium on new palm oil concessions is expected to have minimal impact on Singapore-listed agribusiness players, according to a report by DBS. DBS noted that most of Singapore's agri players have already adhered to sustainable planting practices, including High Carbon Stock and High Conservation Value studies prior to undertaking new planting. However, DBS added that the planned moratorium may have a favorable effect on palm oil prices in the long term. "We do not expect any immediate impact on global palm oil supply, as available and suitable land has long dwindled, causing new plantings to slow down since 2013. [However], there is an upside risk to palm oil prices if there is any large-scale replanting programme in Indonesia; as these would remove some palm oil supply from the market, as it takes newly planted oil palm tree four years to start bearing fruit," DBS said.

**READ MORE**

<http://sbr.com.sg/agribusiness/news/will-indonesias-palm-oil-moratorium-injure-sgxs-agri-giants#sthash.4EmEwDaw.dpuf>



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## MYANMAR

The Burmese Government must immediately conduct a swift, thorough, and impartial investigation into the murder of Ko Ni, a prominent Muslim lawyer and member of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party, and bring those responsible for his death to justice, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (an FIDH-OMCT partnership) and the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma) said today. “With the murder of Ko Ni, Burma loses an important voice of moderation and a courageous advocate for religious tolerance and the rule of law. The NLD-led Government must quickly get to the bottom of this appalling murder to show that it is serious about combating rampant impunity and religious intolerance,” said FIDH President Dimitris Christopoulos. On January 29, 2017, Ko Ni, 65, was fatally shot in the head at point-blank range outside Rangoon International Airport. The suspected gunman was later arrested and detained for questioning by police. Ko Ni had just returned from Indonesia, where he had joined a Burmese Government-organized trip to discuss democracy and conflict resolution. The program included a panel discussion about religious violence in Burma’s Rakhine State.

### READ MORE

<http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/urgent-interventions/myanmar/2017/01/d24195/>

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### The human cost of palm oil production in Myanmar

In 1999, when Myanmar was ruled by a repressive military regime, the government laid out a plan for development which included an aggressive expansion of palm oil in its southern provinces. Since then, 44 large-scale palm oil companies have transformed 350,000 hectares of pristine jungle into a series of plantations. Although the inception of the palm oil sector in Myanmar has provided regular jobs to unskilled labourers seeking regular employment and is increasing the internal supply of cooking oil within the country, the industry at large is being criticised on a number of fronts. Environmentalists decry the ecological devastation and habitat loss associated with clear cutting rainforest and implementing a monoculture system of palm oil. In addition, migrant workers from other parts of the country comprise the majority of the workforce on these plantations. And many of these men and women tell stories of the difficulties they have faced working on the plantations, from receiving no income while clearing the thick forests, to having months worth of wages withheld.

### READ MORE

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2016/11/human-cost-palm-oil-production-myanmar-161120085639460.html>

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### Palm Oil Projects Destroy Local Livelihoods: Report

More than 1.8 million acres of palm oil plantations in Burma’s southern Tenasserim Division do more harm than good for local Karen villagers, causing land conflict, damaging livelihoods, destroying biodiversity, and polluting the environment, according to a new report. Companies and



businesspeople have taken over land that once belonged to local communities who were displaced by civil war, destroying their crop plantations for palm oil projects without compensation, according to the new report titled Green Desert, which was released by several local civil society organizations after 18 months of research. At a press conference in Rangoon on Thursday, representatives of the organizations and affected villagers said that companies had taken control of their land. “They took our land by force. We changed from landowners to workers. It [the palm oil project] had many negative impacts on us,” said local villager Saw En P’reh at the press conference. The report highlighted a controversial project—the Myanmar Stark Prestige Plantation (MSPP)—as a case study, out of the many land grab cases in the Tenasserim region. Its concession overlaps with 38,900 acres of community and agricultural lands belonging to four villages, which were incorrectly classified as “vacant land” by the Burmese government, said the report.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/palm-oil-projects-destroy-local-livelihoods-report.html>

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#### **Promises broken, land grabbed in Myanmar’s ‘oil bowl’**

The “oil bowl of Myanmar” -- a promised land of southern rainforests toward which hundreds of thousands of workers flocked in 1999 when the former junta initiated an industrial oil palm scheme. But more than halfway into the 30-year plan to transform the Thaninthary region, workers are lamenting broken promises of better jobs and homes for their families, while the ethnic Karen community remains uprooted from lands cleared for plantations. Maung Nyo Win, now 33, was among those drawn by the state-owned newspapers, television and radio channels used by the junta to recruit workers from other parts of the country. With his parents and two brothers, Maung Nyo Win moved in 2001 from his native town of Hinthada in the delta of the Ayeyawaddy region to Thaninthary --one of the country’s most important biodiversity areas with 2.5 million hectares of intact lowland rainforest.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/promises-broken-land-grabbed-in-myanmar-s-oil-bowl-/726891>

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#### **Palm oil plantations create landlessness in Myanmar**

Massive palm oil projects are being built on grabbed land that is causing severe social and environmental damage, said the Green Desert report released this week by affected locals and activists. The report highlights the accelerating pace of land grabs in Myanmar’s Tenasserim Division since the country opened up under the semi-civilian government of then president Thein Sein in 2011. One striking example is that of the Myanmar Stark Prestige Plantation, a joint venture mainly owned by a Malaysian firm. The 38,900 acres of the plantation established in 2011 belonged to four Karen villages and destroyed the livelihoods and agricultural activities of 4,500 people. After half a century of military rule and ethnic conflict, locals did not enjoy too much respite before their land, previously seized by the military, was taken over for new agribusiness projects.



#### READ MORE

<http://www.atimes.com/article/oil-palm-plantations-produce-landless-people/>

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#### Myanmar (ex-Burma): Arbitrary detention of environmental rights defender Mr. Khaing Myo Htun

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a partnership of FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in **Burma**. The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about the arbitrary detention of environmental rights defender Mr. **Khaing Myo Htun**, co-founder of the NGO Natural Resources for the People<sup>[1]</sup>, board member of the Arakan Natural Resources and Environmental Network, member of the advocacy group Arakan Oil Watch, and Deputy Spokesperson for the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), in Rakhine State. According to the information received, on January 13, 2017, the Sittwe Township Court in Rakhine State denied bail for the second time to Mr. Khaing Myo Htun, despite his poor health condition. Mr. Khaing Myo Htun is said to have collapsed three times in prison since his arrest. His lawyer indicated that they would appeal the decision.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/urgent-interventions/myanmar/2017/01/d24173/brazil>

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## VIETNAM

The state authority of the Travin province in the Mekong Delta claims that holy land belonging to the Muniransi temple was sold to a Vietnamese resident. This is another assault on freedom of religion and indigenous rights for the Khmer Krom population in Vietnam. In a troubling trend of renewed rights violation and state control over religious and culture institution, on December 30th, 2016 the local authority in Vietnam's Travin province took over portions of the Muniransi temple's land and forced the temple to sign over the tract to a Vietnamese resident who had allegedly bought the temple's land. The Muniransi temple denies ever selling holy ground to Vietnamese residents and decries the move as a violation of religious and indigenous rights. A video post on Facebook by a religious figure associated with the temple shows several local authority in official uniform handing over paper to be signed by the temple. The narrated video explains that the government had come to force the sign over of the temple's land by the head monk of the temple. A frustrated senior monk can be also be seen and heard decrying the unfair violation.

#### READ MORE

<http://unpo.org/article/19780>

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## BANGLADESH

### 23 ethnic people killed last year

At least 23 people, including six women and girls of indigenous communities, were killed in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and elsewhere in the country last year, according to Human Rights Report 2016 on the ethnic people. In 2015, seven indigenous people were killed in the CHT and three others elsewhere. Last year, the most atrocious incident was the killing of three Santals allegedly by police in Gobindaganj of Gaibandha following a dispute regarding land, mentioned the report which was revealed at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday. 2016 was one of the critical years for the indigenous people of Bangladesh, especially for the Santals of Gobindaganj in Gaibandha," observed the report prepared by Kapaeeng Foundation, a human rights organisation for indigenous peoples of Bangladesh. Claiming the ownership of the land of Sahebganj-Bagda sugarcane farm of Rangpur Sugar Mills, the Santals started erecting houses on the disputed land in June last year. They had cultivated paddy on 100 acres of land. On November 6 last year, a tripartite clash broke out between the Santals, factory employees and police over eviction of indigenous people from the land. The forcible eviction drive led to the killing of the Santals whilst many others were left injured.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/23-ethnic-people-killed-last-year-1367746>

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### Indigenous peoples continue being marginalised: Kapaeeng report

Kapaeeng Foundation in collaboration with Oxfam Bangladesh, released the "Human Rights Report 2016 on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh" at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka, on Sunday. At the event, Executive Director of Kapaeeng Foundation Pallab Chakma said: "Compared to 2015, the number of houses burnt, persons assaulted and injured, families evicted, women molested and the number of persons killed has increased noticeably in 2016." It is a human rights organisation which promotes and protects of the rights of the indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. The editors of the report, Prof Mong Shano Chowdhury and Pallab Chakma, wrote that the report is "an annual account of violations of human rights against indigenous peoples who live in various parts of the country. Such a documentation of rights violation is necessary in any society to

#### READ MORE

<http://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/law-rights/2017/02/27/indigenous-people-continue-marginalised-kapaeeng-report/>

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### Save indigenous people's land

"What is the fault of the villagers for which the owner of Syed Tea and Land Company Ltd will harass us? His men torture and threaten us and tell us to leave the land," said a tearful day labourer Joltu Kanda. Joltu, 49, narrated the situation yesterday to leaders of the human rights, environment and indigenous organisations who visited Lakhai Datta Bosti village of Srimangal upazila of the district. The indigenous people also carried banners containing their demands. The villagers demanded



proper investigation and punishment of those who tortured the indigenous people and destroyed crops on their land. Atit Kanda, 54, head of a five-member family, said they have been living on the land for four generations, but never before faced such a situation. "The armed people destroyed my 4,000 to 5,000 pineapples. I don't know if I will be able to overcome this loss without assistance from the government and other benevolent people," he added.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.thedailystar.net/country/save-indigenous-peoples-land-1352455>

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#### Mechanized stone mining killing rivers, Bangladesh

The conflicts are around (i) authorization for mechanized collection of stones from two rivers that are popular tourist spots, (ii) leasing out of part of the rivers as stone mahal (area that can be subjected to leasing), and (iii) employment both in manual extraction versus mechanized extraction. The division of Sylhet in the north-eastern part of the country has few crystal, transparent rivers including the *Piain* (55 km), *Dawki* (10.75 km), and *Dhala* rivers that flow through Companyganj and Goainghat Upazilas. These three rivers are popular tourist attractions of the country. Another significant economic contribution of these hilly rivers remain the supply of huge volume of stones that have resulted in declaration of Jajlong and Bholaganj stone quarries in the rivers. These stone quarries are two major sources of stones for the country. Traditionally stones were collected manually from the stone quarries of both Jajlong (within the rivers *Piain* and *Dawki*) and Bholaganj (within the river *Dhala*). It was in 1998 that the Mineral Resources Development Bureau permitted the use of hydrolic excavators in the stone quarry of Jajlong. This authorization came without any assessment of the environmental impact of the same although the area of Jajlong remains exposed to the risks of earthquake due to the presence of the Dawki fault. No environmental clearance was ever accorded in favour of the excavator machines (locally known as *Boma* (bomb) machines due to the extreme noise they create; basically locally manufactured engine driven heavy excavators) that were capable of extracting stones from 70-80 feet depth.

#### READ MORE

<https://ejatlas.org/conflict/stone-mining-killing-a-river>

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## INDIA

#### 6 hurt in clash over sand mining on India-Nepal border

Villagers on either side of the India-Nepal border clashed over sand mining at Oriya Khola in Sikta police station area of Bihar's West Champaran district on Friday. At least six persons were injured in the incident. Villagers of Gadiyani on the Indian side claimed that a mob from Piraiguthi in Parsa district of the neighbouring country also opened fire in no-man's land as the clash turned violent. As tensions ran high, officials from both sides intervened to hold peace, police said. "The incident happened when Nepal citizens stopped us from mining sand in the bed of Oriya river, which flows from the Himalayan nation," Indian villagers said. "The Nepal villagers attacked some 100 sand loaders and beat up drivers of trucks parked in the area. Many carried guns, which were used to



threaten us," they said. Parsa superintendent of police Gobind Sah told HT that the clash had left two Nepal citizens injured. He also confirmed that four rounds were fired during the clashes. Instances of clashes between people on either side of the border have been many and officials of India and Nepal have been hard pressed to contain sudden flare-ups at times.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/6-hurt-in-clash-over-sand-mining-on-india-nepal-border/story-Tx2bokFwPvD7dKlUYAw5TK.html>

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**70 villages in Maharashtra unite to oppose mining, save the Adivasi way of life**

December 5 was a significant day in Gadchiroli, a Maoist-affected district in eastern Maharashtra. That day, representatives of 70 gram sabhas, Adivasi leaders, student bodies, grassroots organisations and political leaders came together for the first time in years to call on the government to halt mining in the region and cancel all sanctioned and proposed mines. The gathering – which also included district-level leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Congress, and former Congress MLA Namdeo Usendi – passed a resolution that underscored the importance of the Forest Rights Act and the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act in securing the livelihood and culture of the indigenous people while also protecting forests and biodiversity. It asked the police and other government departments to stop harassing people who raise questions about their rights or demand justice. It also expressed concern over what it called an attack on Adivasi culture and way of life in the name of development and mainstreaming.

**READ MORE**

<https://scroll.in/article/825372/70-villages-in-maharashtra-unite-to-oppose-mining-save-the-ativasi-way-of-life>

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**Minorities forum demands land rights in southern Punjab**

The South Punjab Minorities Land Rights Forum on Thursday pointed out residential and agricultural land issues, saying the minorities were forced to vacate lands where they had memories of their childhood and origin despite being the indigenous people of the land. "We are not nomads but indigenous people and we should be treated as equal citizens, and the government must provide us basic rights as well as protection," former Punjab Assembly member Naveed Amir Jeeva, forum's representatives Farhad Masih, Pervaiz John and Pandit Kishori Lal said in a press statement after addressing a press conference at the Lahore Press Club. They said that they were even deprived of the land of their centuries old graveyards as well as religious places. They said that they had put forward their demands, including right to their residential and agricultural land, graveyards and religious places, to the relevant authorities as well as opinion makers. They said that the government had to play a responsible role to end discrimination and protect rights of the minorities.

**READ MORE**

<http://dailytimes.com.pk/punjab/27-Jan-17/minorities-forum-demands-land-rights-in-southern-punjab>



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## Buried under: Lalmatia mine collapse highlights the lack of safety culture in India

In another shocking mining accident, at least 50 miners were buried under tonnes of rubble when a mine collapsed at the Lalmatia open-cast coalfields owned by ECL in Jharkhand. As rescue workers continue to dig for survivors, over 17 fatalities have already been reported. According to eyewitnesses, the miners had been working 300 feet below ground when piles of rubble slid from one of the inner walls of the mine. Some miners have also accused officials of not stopping work when tell-tale signs of an impending collapse were detected earlier. Mining is one of the most dangerous professions in India, with a mining fatality every 10 days last year. In the coal sector, on an average 7 lives were lost for extracting every 100 million tonnes of coal in 2015. Plus, as highlighted by a 2014 National Human Rights Commission report, such mining-related accidents have increased in frequency in recent years. That report had also mentioned the need for the mining sector to learn from global best practices in terms of training and accident investigation. But little has been done in this regard.

### READ MORE

<http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/toi-editorials/buried-under-lalmatia-mine-collapse-highlights-the-lack-of-safety-culture-in-india/>

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## India Opens Coal-Mining Market for First Time in Four Decades

India plans to allow non-state mining companies to mine and sell coal for the first time in more than four decades, federal coal secretary Susheel Kumar said. The nation's coal ministry will auction four mines to both state-run and private companies during the year starting April 1, Kumar told reporters in New Delhi. The winning bidders will have the freedom to sell the coal, a privilege currently limited to a handful of state-run companies. The step may allow miners an opportunity to benefit from one of the world's biggest coal markets, yet the offer has to be good enough to compensate for regulatory challenges, according to analysts. A broader implementation of the plan could threaten the monopoly of Coal India Ltd., which controls more than 80 percent of the nation's production. "India remains a large market for coal," said Debasish Mishra, a partner at Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu LLP in Mumbai. "Still, challenges, such as regulatory hurdles, difficulties in acquiring land, delays in getting environmental and other clearances and lack of transportation infrastructure, remain. There have to be adequate incentives to offset these."

### READ MORE

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-02/india-opens-coal-mining-market-for-first-time-in-four-decades>

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## Death toll at India coal mine cave-in climbs to 18

NDTV reports that two more bodies were recovered on Sunday from the Lalmatia open-pit mine located in the impoverished but coal-rich state of Jharkhand. Rescue efforts have been hampered by poor weather including dense fog, along with unstable debris piles. Around 23 miners and dozens of



vehicles were buried when about 250 metres of the Lalmatia open-pit mine collapsed as the workers were heading towards the exit, Thursday evening. The mine is owned by Eastern Coalfields Limited – a subsidiary of Coal India, the world's largest coal miner – and operated by Mahalakshi Infracontract Pvt Ltd. Meanwhile one media outlet is reporting that the disaster could have been prevented and that the government was alerted to the dangers a year earlier. According to The Hindu, safety concerns raised by activists were dismissed as incorrect, including one complaint that was sent to the Prime Minister's Office and forwarded to the state's Director General of Mines Safety (DGMS): "After detailed inquiry on your complaint, the allegations made by you against the management of Rajmahal OCP (open cast mine) were found incorrect/false, which comes under the purview of Mines Act, 1952," states the reply from the Director General of Mines Safety, sent on December 1, 2015.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.mining.com/death-toll-at-indian-coal-mine-cave-in-climbs-to-18/>

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#### **Kejriwal promises rehab fund for mining affected in Goa**

AAP national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday assured rehabilitation fund of Rs 400 crore for the "victims" of iron ore mining ban in place till 2014 in Goa. "Those who became the victims of the mining ban, for them we would create Rs 400 crore separate funds for rehabilitation," Kejriwal told a public meeting at Sakhalim constituency located in the ore rich mining belt. Goa is going to polls on February 4. During his speech, he accused both the Congress and the BJP of causing miseries to people living in mining belt. "Between 2007-2012, Congress did so much corruption in the mining sector that Centre had to bring in (Justice M B) Shah Commission. The commission said there is Rs 36,000 crore scam in the mining sector," the CM said.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/goa/kejriwal-promises-rehab-fund-for-mining-affected-in-go/>

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## **AUSTRALIA**

#### **Indigenous land rights could halt Australia's largest coal mining project**

Wangan and Jangalingou Traditional Owners this week took a step closer to filing federal court papers challenging a document Adani "is trying to pass off as an Indigenous Land Use Agreement with our people" but which is "illegitimate" according to W&J Traditional Owner Council, Mr. Adrian Burragubba. The claim is over access to land near the mining town of Clermont in Central Queensland, 600 miles north of Brisbane. The move follows the landmark 'McGlade' court ruling in Western Australia, earlier this month. The "McGlade" ruling states that, unless all peoples named on any native title claim - a *Registered Native Title Claimants (RNTC) document* - agree to lease the land, then no mining can go ahead. In the W & J case, 40 percent (five out of 12) of those named on the RNTC refuse to support the Indigenous Land Use Agreement over fears for the ecosystem and the loss of cultural heritage. Environmental concerns over this project stem from the threat to the survival of sacred springs and to the tradition of maintaining songlines - ancestral lines connecting across the land to protect the Earth.



## READ MORE

[http://www.theecologist.org/News/news\\_analysis/2988650/indigenous\\_land\\_rights\\_could\\_halt\\_australias\\_largest\\_coal\\_mining\\_project.html](http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/2988650/indigenous_land_rights_could_halt_australias_largest_coal_mining_project.html)

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## Australia puts coal mining ahead of Aboriginal rights

Australia's government is changing the law in order to get a mining project over the line. Carmichael coal mine is already controversial for environmental reasons.

## SEE VIDEO

<http://video.aljazeera.com/channels/eng/videos/australia-puts-coal-mining-ahead-of-aboriginal-rights/5328103970001;jsessionid=B8FFE1E09434D3A5765BD05E8259C1AD>

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## Victories for Indigenous people are always short-lived. That's why we need a treaty – now

Nine years ago I happened to be on the lawns at Parliament House in Canberra for the National Apology. It was an accidental showing on my part. I'd flown down to the ACT from Alice Springs to cover an event the day before called the Converge on Canberra rally, which was protesting the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), otherwise known as the "intervention". As a reporter for CAAMA Radio, I rode along in the bus with other members of the central Australian community, people from remote desert areas who had converged to voice their angst at the paternalistic and draconian policies that had been imposed upon them by the federal government barely six months earlier. The gathering sought to end "welfare quarantining", compulsory land acquisition and "mission manager" powers that were part of the NTER. There were also calls for an immediate review of the intervention, and for reinstating the Racial Discrimination Act, implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Aboriginal People and for Aboriginal control of Aboriginal affairs.

## READ MORE

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/13/victories-for-indigenous-people-are-always-short-lived-thats-why-we-need-a-treaty-now>

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## National Native Title Council calls for Adam Bandt not to use Native Title Act in Adani debate

The National Native Title Council (NNTC) has said it did not want the native title act being used as a political football by the Greens.

- NNTC says legislation must be passed quickly to safeguard Aboriginal people's rights
- Perth Federal Court rules \$1.3bn agreement cannot be registered
- Adam Bandt wants to go back to communities and talk about what is in this bill

Greens MP Adam Bandt today accused the Government of rushing through changes to the act to benefit the Adani coal mine in Queensland. But the NNTC's Glen Kelly said the legislation must be



passed quickly to safeguard Aboriginal people's rights. "The judgement a couple of weeks ago in the Federal Court has invalidated almost 150 ILUAs [Indigenous Land Use Agreements]," he said.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-16/nntc-doesnt-want-bandt-to-use-them-in-adani-debate/8277840>

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## AFRICA

### Land grabbing in Africa 'is fueling conflicts'

New research released on Thursday by the Rights and Resources Institute shows that despite improvements in respect for communities' rights by global companies, land rights remain largely ignored. The study by Washington-based Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), a global network advocating for the land and forest rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, compares databases of conflicts in Africa and the world, focusing on three regions: West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa. It finds that in West Africa, plantation agriculture—especially palm oil projects—drives a majority of disputes. Community displacement is the primary driver of 70 percent of the tenure disputes examined, while issues related to compensation are the primary driver for the remaining 30 percent. Many investors view Africa as the last frontier for cheap land, and many African governments equate foreign direct investment with promoting economic growth. As a result, entire communities get kicked off their land to make way for hydropower plants, agro-industrial plantations, mining operations, and other large-scale projects.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.dw.com/en/land-grabbing-in-africa-is-fueling-conflicts/a-37468680>

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### Sand mining decimates African beaches

What do houses, streets, telephones and microchips have in common? They all contain processed sand. Now African countries are raising the alarm because of their disappearing beaches. The coasts of Ghana and Kenya, as well as those of Cape Verde and Zanzibar, are lined by picturesque beaches strewn with the finest sand making them perfect postcard idylls. But what if Africa's dream beaches suddenly lost their sand and only had dirt and gravel to offer? "Zanzibar has less and less sand," Zanzibar's Minister for Natural Resources Hamad Rashid Mohammed told DW. The reason for this, he said, is the excessive use of sand for construction projects in the semi-autonomous archipelago that forms part of Tanzania. Official statistics from the Department of Forestry and Non-Renewable Natural Resources show that almost three million tons of sand were mined on Zanzibar between 2005 and 2015. This amount equals around 120,000 full truckloads. "This is only the official mining. The unofficial numbers could possibly be twice this amount," Mohammed said.

**READ MORE**

<http://www.dw.com/en/sand-mining-decimates-african-beaches/a-37546330>

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## **African Environmentalists Agrees On Biodiversity At UN Conference**

Dominique Bikaba, from Democratic Republic of Congo speaking at the demonstration. Photo: Gloria Dickie Cancun, Mexico: Environmental activists from the African continent who are members of the Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) says governments on the continent need to engage with indigenous people on the basis of mutual agreement as far as the use of biodiversity is concerned, particularly, traditional lands and territories. Taking part in a demonstration at the ongoing UN Biodiversity Conference in Cancun, Mexico, the environmental activists, also indigenes in their respective countries, charged African governments to involve communities who are custodians of traditional lands and territories in decision making process on the uses of natural resources to achieve biodiversity and conservation.

### **READ MORE**

<https://www.newsghana.com.gh/african-environmentalists-agrees-on-biodiversity-at-un-conference/>

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## **EGYPT**

### **Nubians seek recognition and right of return in Egypt and Sudan**

My Irish flatmates have a hard time believing [my memories of celebrating Thanksgiving](#) in a United States elementary school. In my first grade classroom (November 1996) my teacher divided us into two groups of six-year-olds: One set of miniature pilgrims, the other "small Indians" (these were called "Native Americans" by the time my younger sister was in first grade, a decade later.) Parent volunteers help the pilgrim kids make paper buckles for their shoes; the "Indian team" cut and pasted together feathered headdresses. It is at this point in the story that my Dublin flatmates' disbelieving smirks shift into horrified gaping mouths. I'm a few decades out of elementary school now, but the realities of violence inflicted on Native American peoples is still largely absent from my country's collective memory, not to mention our history books. Earlier this month in Egypt I met with [Nubian human rights defenders](#) who say their country's text books are equally flawed. The Nubian people are a minority in Egypt, but have lived in what is now Sudan and southern Egypt for more than 4,000 years.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.albawaba.com/news/nubians-seek-recognition-and-right-return-egypt-and-sudan-938198>

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## **SUDAN**

### **Gold mining permit withdrawn after protests in Sudan**

The Northern state government withdrew the permit of a mining company, for establishing a factory that would extract gold with toxic chemicals, following popular protests. In South Kordofan's mining area, more mining companies emerge, to the discontent of residents. The mining company had plans for a factory in Sebu in Dalgo locality in northern Sudan, using mercury and cyanide to separate gold



and silver particles from ore. The toxins can cause various serious and possibly fatal health problems. A series of protests against the permit lasted four days before the Governor of Northern state, Awad Ali, decided to categorically withdraw all the company's machineries from the site yesterday. The Popular Committee for Environmental Protection has welcomed the Governor's decision. Ali had proposed holding an investigation into the health and environmental effects of the chemicals' use on Friday, when members of the Committee toured the area with loudspeakers. Elsewhere in Sudan more mining activities have popped up despite rejections by local committees and activists. Companies which allegedly also use cyanide in the gold extraction process have increased their activities in several parts of South Kordofan, according to the committee for environmental advocacy.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/gold-mining-permit-withdrawn-after-protests-in-sudan>

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## **KENYA**

### **UN rights expert urges Kenya to protect four environmental defenders whose lives are under threat**

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment,\* John H. Knox, is urging the Government of Kenya to take all necessary measures immediately to protect four environmental human rights defenders who have been assaulted, subjected to death threats, and forced into hiding since they filed a law suit against a lead smelter earlier this month. Two of their homes have been burned. All have been threatened with death. The twelve-year-old son of one of them was kidnapped earlier this week and held for three days before being released on the side of a road. All four are now living in hiding. "Phyllis Omido and the other members of the Center for Justice Governance and Environmental Action (CJGEA) are facing a life-or-death situation," said Mr Knox. "These human rights abuses undermine the ability of ordinary Kenyans to seek environmental protection without fear. It is vital that the Kenyan Government takes effective actions immediately to protect these environmental defenders from violence and harassment, that it investigates the actions and threats against them, and punishes those responsible," Mr Knox stressed. In 2015, Phyllis Omido, the recipient of the prestigious Goldman Prize, also called the "environmental Nobel prize," founded CJGEA to promote and protect human rights and environmental justice. Her three colleagues who are also in danger are Wilfred Kamencu, Anastacia Nambo, and Alfred Ogola.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.satprnews.com/2017/02/24/un-rights-expert-urges-kenya-to-protect-four-environmental-defenders-whose-lives-are-under-threat/>

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## **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

### **In the Democratic Republic of Congo, one of Africa's oldest indigenous peoples is facing a land crisis**

The pygmies, widely known as Bambuti, are being pushed out of their native land to which they could assert no legal title. On Idjwi, the largest island in Democratic Republic of Congo, a way of life is



dying. Congo's Pygmies are among central Africa's oldest indigenous peoples. For millennia, they have lived as hunter-gatherers, surviving off the forest's bounty of plants, birds and monkeys. Idjwi, in the middle of Lake Kivu, has been spared the ravages of wars in eastern Congo that have killed millions of people since 1996, mostly from hunger and disease. But for its indigenous inhabitants, the advance of another culture has proved nearly as devastating. Like their ethnic kin across central Africa, Idjwi's Pygmies, widely known as Bambuti, have been pushed out of a native land to which they could assert no legal title – in this case, to make way for an exploding ethnic Bantu population who now make up more than 95 per cent of Idjwi's 280,000 inhabitants.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/congo-pygmies-land-rights-africa-indigenous-peoples-a7524326.html>

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## GABON

### **Gabon: The battle over palm oil**

The campaign against palm oil could have profound implications for the sector's development in Africa. Palm oil cultivation has become controversial because ecologically diverse areas of rainforest are often cut down to allow cultivation to take place. Huge areas of forest have been felled in Indonesia and Malaysia, affecting flora and fauna, and producing air pollution caused by forest fires when land is being cleared for palm oil plantation. Indonesia and Malaysia. However, African countries have also been targeted for cultivation more recently. The concessions in question cover 300,000 hectares, of which palm oil is being planted on 58,000 hectares covering four parcels of land: three of these are in the southwest of the country and the other in the northwest. Under a separate agreement, concluded last year, Olam has also taken a 49% stake in managing 70,000 hectares of smallholder plantations in Gabon. The two ventures involve total investment of \$1.7bn. For its part, Olam argues that it promotes sustainable development, denies the allegations and states that its Gabonese plantations have created 5,400 jobs. It argues that it avoids primary rainforest and claims that 59% of the planted area comprises degraded secondary forests and the remainder savannah.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.straitstimes.com/business/companies-markets/olam-will-suspend-gabon-forest-clearing-for-a-year>

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## CAMEROON

### **180,000 people call on the President of Cameroon to end SGSOC palm oil plantation**

Yaounde, 21 December 2016 - Today, a petition was submitted to the President of Cameroon, asking him not to renew the palm oil plantation grant to Sithe Global Sustainable Oils Cameroon (SGSOC) in the South-West Region. This petition is accompanied by 180 281 signatures collected in Cameroon and internationally. SGSOC's three year probation grant expired on 25 November 2016. new grant was pending, Greenpeace Africa, Save Wildlife Conservation Fund, and Rettet den Regenwald EV (Rainforest Rescue) saw this as an opportunity and partnered to collect signatures to demonstrate



strong public opposition against the company. “We feel encouraged that so many Cameroonians have signed this petition against SGSOC’s grant. It is our sincere hope that the government now will listen to the cry of the people,” says Eric Ini, Greenpeace Africa’s forest campaigner. “SGSOC palm oil project not only destroys the livelihood of the local people in South-West Region, it also threatens primary rainforests, national parks and forest reserves which are home to a unique biodiversity hotspot,” says Reinhard Behrend, Director of Rainforest Rescue.

Several traditional rulers from the villages located around the concession area wrote a letter, on 25 October 2016, stating to the President of Cameroon that they would withdraw their support to the establishment of oil palm plantation by SGSOC. “It is very controversial in not respecting the best practices and rules for development. It has ignited many land disputes and inter-village boundary conflicts which never existed before SGSOC,” stated the letter.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/Press-Centre-Hub/More-than-180-000-people-send-a-petition-to-the-President-of-Cameroon--to-put-an-end-to-SGSOC-oil-palm-plantation/>

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#### **Cameroon: with the expertise of Malaysian Felda Ipco, billionaire Nana Bouba sets out to conquer the palm oil market**

The Nana Bouba Group, founded by the eponymous billionaire, launched in 2016 in the Littoral region of Cameroon, particularly Yabassi in the Nkam district, a gigantic project for the creation of oil palm plantations, we learned from reliable sources. The first 500 hectares were planted last year, under the banner of a new company labelled Greenfield SA. In 2017, we learned, this company which as part of this agri-industrial project (global investments estimated at FCfa 70 billion) is being coached by experts from the Malaysian public company Felda Ipco, is planning to plant 1,000 additional hectares of oil palm, to reach 30,000 hectares in the long term, with 1,000 hectares planted every year. In Greenfield SA’s mission statement, our source highlights, the construction of a base for approximately 3,500 workers who will operate in these farms is also scheduled, as well as support for the neighbouring populations in setting up oil palm village plantations covering approximately 1,500 hectares, and the installation of oil processing factories (production capacity of 10 to 15 tons per hour), of which the first should be operational in 2020.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.businessincameroon.com/agribusiness/1501-6814-cameroon-with-the-expertise-of-malaysian-felda-ipco-billionaire-nana-bouba-sets-out-to-conquer-the-palm-oil-market>

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#### **Cameroon's pygmies ensnared in charity giants' rainforest feud**

In the remote Central African rainforest, two major charities are battling over the future of some 50,000 pygmies, beset by poverty, hunger and alcoholism after they were evicted from their lands to save iconic elephants and gorillas. As wildlife populations shrink at an unprecedented rate, conservation groups are pouring millions of dollars into efforts to protect their habitats - which critics say often put animals before people. In Cameroon, Survival International, a group campaigning for the rights of tribal people, has accused the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) of funding anti-poaching guards who have beaten and killed Baka pygmies with impunity. The charity also says WWF



violated international guidelines by supporting the creation of three national parks on Baka land a decade ago without their consent - charges WWF denies. Since being moved off their ancestral land, most of the largely-illiterate Baka live in huts made of leaves, bamboo and mud-baked bricks alongside southeast Cameroon's roads, just outside the protected areas that they need permits to enter.

#### READ MORE

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-4203886/Cameroots-pygmies-ensnared-charity-giants-rainforest-feud.html#ixzz4cAd1TtUM>

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## GUINEA

### The African towns falling into decline and poverty after mining companies use resources then exit

The town of Fria in Guinea was built around bauxite mining in 1957. It used to have good facilities: water, electricity, schools, housing and hospitals. But since the last company mining there began to decrease activities in 2008 after the financial crisis and a fall in aluminium prices, the population has increasingly lived in poverty with high rates of unemployment. Families that used to provide for their extended families cannot today afford to care for the needs of their own children and immediate relatives. Many of the benefits the locals used to enjoy are being lost. While accommodation remains free, the children's nursery is closed, the swimming pool, athletics tracks and sports stadium have fallen into disrepair, water and electricity are now rationed. The Pechiney hospital, as the locals still call it, long recognised as the best in Guinea, is no longer regularly supplied with medicine. Russian parent company RUSAL finally closed the mine in 2012. The move left more than 1,000 permanent employees and 2,000 outsourced workers without pay. One resident spoke of a starving population who were "selling their property, their homes, and plots of land and even furniture to survive".

#### READ MORE

<http://theconversation.com/the-african-towns-falling-into-decline-and-poverty-after-mining-companies-use-resources-then-exit-69687>

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## NIGERIA

### Foundation Establishes N2bn Palm Plantation In Kwara To End Importation

Worried about 55 per cent importation of the total volume of palm oil consumed in Nigeria, the Mike Omotosho Foundation has established a N2 billion palm plantation in Kwara State.

Founder and initiator of the project, Dr. Mike Omotosho stated this weekend in Abuja while briefing journalists ahead of the forthcoming annual lecture of the foundation, themed; 'Increased Agricultural Productivity for Sustainable Economic Growth.' Omotosho revealed that the His Imperial Majesty, Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II would give the keynote address at the annual lecture which is coming up on Saturday, January 14, 2017. He noted that with the economic recession, dwindling in prices of oil, it was high time government start to look elsewhere. He added that while government is on the right track in terms of agricultural policies, he believed government has not done enough, hence, the reason while private individuals like himself are now taking interest



in agriculture. Omotosho stated that the foundation aside from organising annual lecture has a 15,000 hectares of farmland, out of which 300 hectares has been cultivated and presently being used as demonstration farm.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://leadership.ng/news/567049/foundation-establishes-n2bn-palm-plantation-in-kwara-to-end-importation>

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#### **Niger Ddelta Talks: Osinbajo leads FG delegation to Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers**

The talks would see Vice President Yemi Osinbajo leading a high powered delegation of the Federal Government to visit some states in the Niger Delta. States to be visited are Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers. At last, the Federal Government talks with Niger Delta stakeholders, including militants, who have been bombing oil assets to draw attention to challenges in the oil region, begin tomorrow. Meanwhile, the leader of the Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), Chief Edwin Clark, said the visit was not a substitute for dialogue. A statement from the Office of the Vice President, yesterday, stated that government was committed to an effective dialogue with Niger Delta leaders. "In further demonstration of President Muhammadu Buhari's readiness and determination to comprehensively address the Niger Delta situation, Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, SAN, will be visiting a number of oil communities across some Niger Delta States starting on Monday, January 16, 2017, when he travels to Delta State", the statement said. "At a later date to be announced soon, the Vice President, Prof. Osinbajo would also be visiting Bayelsa and Rivers States. "At these visits, the Vice President will lead high-level delegations of the Federal Government that will interact with leaders and representatives of the oil-producing communities in continuation of ongoing outreach efforts of the Buhari administration towards a long lasting and permanent resolution of the Niger Delta crisis.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.nigeriatoday.ng/2017/01/niger-ddelta-talks-osinbajo-leads-fg-delegation-to-delta-bayelsa-rivers/>

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### **LIBERIA**

#### **Unlawful killings: ECOWAS court urged to compel Liberia Govt. to pay 500 families \$200m**

A Non-Governmental Organisation, the Concerned Youth of Ganta for Reconstruction and Development, and a Liberian citizen have sued the Republic of Liberia at the ECOWAS Court of Justice, praying it for an order directing Liberia government to pay \$200 million as compensation to over 500 families of Ganta community killed by the Liberian armed forces over land dispute. The Organisation and Mr. Mamadee F. Donzo also asked the ECOWAS Court in Abuja for "a declaration that the killing, violent attacks, Intimidation, arrest and incarceration of unarmed Indigenous People of Ganta by the Liberian Security Force was unlawful and a crime against humanity." The plaintiffs also urged the court to hold that the continued banishment of the heads of families of Indigenous People of Ganta from having access to their ancestral home/lands and building is in gross violation of the rights of the Indigenous People of Ganta to own property. They also prayed the court for an order



holding the Liberian Government responsible for these Human Rights Violations, and also an order directing the Liberian Government to fully implement the Recommendations of the Presidential Adhoc Committee set up in 2006 by the President of Liberia, Her Excellency Madam Allen Johnson Sirleaf, which recommendation has been partly implemented and abandoned half way by the Liberian Government.

**READ MORE**

<http://tribuneonline.ng.com/%E2%80%8Eunlawful-killings-ecowas-court-urged-compel-liberia-govt-pay-500-families-200m/>

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## MONZAMBIQUE

### **Mozambique: Children Abandoning School for Artisanal Mining**

In Nacaroa district, in the northern Mozambican province of Nampula, many children are dropping out of school in order to practice artisanal mining for gold. Their parents also prefer illicit, and often dangerous mining to working the fields, even though Nacaroa is highly fertile. The problem is particularly pronounced in the regions of Nacope and Mahepa, about 200 kilometres from Nacaroa town, where many schools are short of pupils, and farmland is abandoned. A team monitoring the 2016/2017 agricultural campaign recently visited Nacaroa and warned against the prioritising of artisanal mining at the expense of education and agriculture. It urged the local administration to raise the awareness of the Nacaroa population that children should not be used as mine labour, and that peasant producers should prioritise agriculture. AIM accompanied the team and found a belief that artisanal mining could somehow solve the problems faced by Nacaroa residents, despite the evident risks of hunger if crops are not planted, and of illiteracy if children do not attend school. The electronic newsheet “Wamphula Fax” also notes the damage done by mining to roads and rivers. Because of reckless digging, enormous craters have appeared in some roads, and watercourses have been poisoned. The Nacaroa district administrator, Joaquina Charles, confirmed that the “traditional” forms of mining involve schoolchildren and peasants, and has damaging effects.

**READ MORE**

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201701190769.html>

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## SOUTH AFRICA

### **Report: Human Rights Watch slams South Africa’s human rights record**

Not every country gets its own chapter in Human Rights Watch’s World Report 2017, released on Thursday afternoon. It’s not a good sign, then, that South Africa does – although, to be fair, a depressing number of the world’s countries are individually listed. “In South Africa, public confidence in the government’s willingness to tackle human rights violations, corruption, and respect for the rule of law has eroded,” the chapter begins. As the watchdog elaborates on a litany of government failures to uphold the basic rights of its citizens, it’s safe to assume that Human Rights Watch doesn’t have much confidence in the government either. Here’s the list:



- The government has failed to ensure that an estimated half-million children with disabilities have access to basic education
- There is no national strategy to combat the high rate of violence against women and the continued under-reporting of rape
- There has been no accountability for those responsible for xenophobic violence
- South African foreign policy no longer puts respect for human rights at its centre, as evidenced by the failure to condemn human rights violations in Zimbabwe; the repeated votes at the United Nations that run counter to human rights principles; and the failure to arrest Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir

“South Africa continued to face a number of human rights challenges,” the chapter concludes.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-01-12-report-human-rights-watch-slams-south-africas-human-rights-record/#.WLQNYRBS86h>

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#### **PICS: Amadiba community fights proposed mine**

Johannesburg - Despite scoring major victories this year in its fight against mining near Xolobeni, the Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) and its allies believe neither mining companies nor the government has given up. “No, that one is a strategy,” Nonhle Mbuthuma, ACC secretary, said of a proposed moratorium that could halt attempts to mine along the Wild Coast. She recently met the *Saturday Star* with a bodyguard at her side throughout the conversation. “The government, the mining company are working hand in hand to make sure the mining takes place.” A community coalition continues to fight the proposed mine in court, while residents in Eastern Pondoland brace for the next wave of fighting, which is expected to include both words as well as guns. The Amadiba community fought to keep mining off its land for nearly two decades before the murder of ACC chairman Sikhosphi “Bazooka” Radebe in March suddenly brought the national spotlight to this group of villages. In July, the Australian mining company attempting to mine sand to produce titanium announced it would fully divest from the project, noting the area’s violence. When the Department of Mineral Resources published its intentions to place a moratorium on mining the area only two months later, it looked as if those opposing the mine had won the day.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/eastern-cape/pics-amadiba-community-fights-proposed-mine-7312021>

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#### **South Africa: 25 Families Take Stand Against Mining Giant**

The streets in Dingleton are deserted, except for the occasional stray cat that emerges from the overgrown shrubbery, scuttling back into the bushes at the sight of a car. Homes lie empty - their doors ajar or ripped from their hinges, electrical wires protruding from the walls, the floors littered with shards of glass and household items discarded in the move to Siyathemba, 25km away. Enormous potholes mar the roads. The businesses that once served the community have long since closed, and residents must travel to Siyathemba to buy groceries. The clinic is still running, but no-



one knows for how long. The school, the community hall, and the hostel have all been abandoned - their replacements already built in Siyathemba. Until 13 January, a school bus collected the remaining Dingleton children and took them to their new school in Siyathemba. But the transport contract expired at the end of 2016, when the last residents of Dingleton were supposed to have moved out. Siyathemba, meaning "We Trust" in isiXhosa, is the "new Dingleton", built by Kumba Iron Ore on the outskirts of the little town of Kathu. This is where the residents of Dingleton are to be moved, so that Kumba can extend the Sishen iron mine.

#### **READ MORE**

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201701290013.html>

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### **Makhado mine: flashpoint for tensions over South Africa's pro-coal policies**

In the horizon are the mountains, verdant rainforest on their well-watered, shaded southern slopes and arid scrub on the dry reverse slopes. Then there is the plain, studded with baobab trees and outcrops. Finally there is the river Limpopo. Beyond is another country: troubled, restive Zimbabwe. But here in the far north-east of South Africa, there is tension, too. In the Soutpansberg range and on the flat lands beyond, an improbable coalition of local farmers, villagers, big agricultural businessmen and activists are fighting to halt the development of a large opencast mine which, they say, would cause massive harm to the region. The mine lies 30km north of the small town of Makhado. A South African company hopes it can extract some 5.5m tonnes of coking and heating coal for use locally and for export from a narrow and remote valley. Government officials broadly back the project, which developers argue will bring wealth to both the developing nation and to local people. But campaigners fear the Makhado mine will wreak much damage, and that if it goes ahead much larger projects will follow, leading to the loss of irreplaceable cultural and biological resources.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jan/26/south-africa-makhado-coal-mining-conflict-locals-energy-policy>

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### **South African Activists Want Public Tax Disclosure In Mining**

Activists are gunning for the mining sector because they consider that the disclosure process in the country-by-country reporting for multinational companies doesn't take into account the broader public interest issue of disclosure of tax information. "We want to put pressure on the government to put in place a process to allow mandatory reporting for disclosure in the mining sector by 2020 because there are documents available relating to commitments made, when they received permission to mine in the country, that they should be held accountable to," said Theminkosi Dlamini, chairman of the Publish What You Pay South Africa Coalition.

#### **READ MORE**

<https://www.bna.com/south-african-activists-n57982084212/>

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## **Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill needs tweaking**

The Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill currently before Parliament gives sudden prominence to a new concept of “partnership” on communal land, but it makes no provision for the people living on this land to influence the shape of the deals made on their behalf. The bill is set to replace the 2003 Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act. One of the significant assertions made in submissions at these hearings is that the bill entrenches tribal boundaries that were initially drawn as part of the apartheid homeland strategy. At stake are the rights of 18 million rural South Africans who are at risk of becoming subjects - without their consent - of traditional leaders and their councils. Under the bill, traditional leaders are slated to win substantial new powers over the ultimate owners of land in the so-called “traditional territories”. It therefore undermines the right to own property for individuals, families, kin groups, as well as communal property associations that have regained land rights under the land restitution programme.

### **READ MORE**

<http://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/traditional-and-khoi-san-leadership-bill-needs-tweaking-7620807>

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## **Activists prepare for their own mining indaba**

As the Africa Mining Indaba gets under way in Cape Town on Monday, activists and mining-affected communities will be staging their own alternative mining indaba in the city, as has been a tradition for the past eight years. The organizers for the alternative indaba said it would serve as a forum to raise concerns about challenges in mining-affected communities. They described the Africa Mining Indaba as a "gathering of the rich and unaffected, which will deliberate strategies on how to consolidate their mining profits and sweet-talk government officials into submission". "All this will be, and has been, happening without the communities affected by mining activities of the same executive who will be at Africa Mining Indaba. "It is for this reason that for the past eight years, communities and people affected by mining have been organizing themselves and convened the Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) to articulate the suffering of ordinary people at the same time corporations and governments are meeting at CTICC (Cape Town International Convention Centre) to form partnerships and design strategies to consolidate their profits," the organizers said.

### **READ MORE**

<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/business-and-economy/2017-02-05-activists-prepare-for-their-own-mining-indaba/>

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**NOTE:** Previous issues of this monthly bulletin can be requested to CALG (Coalition against Land Grabbing), email: [calgpalawan@gmail.com](mailto:calgpalawan@gmail.com) - Visit us on FB: <https://www.facebook.com/Coalition-Against-Land-Grabbing-CALG-411975619002144/>