

A new perspective to World Ranger Day: honouring and showing solidarity also with the defenders of the natural commons

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On the occasion of World Ranger Day, [The ICCA Consortium](#)— a Swiss based international association with members from over seventy countries around the world— joins in to the chorus paying respect to the rangers who dutifully protect nature as part of their daily jobs and obligations in protected areas. It stresses that the world owes a huge debt to the many of them who dedicate their lives – with loyalty and selfless courage– to preserve the water we drink, the fresh air we breathe, the landscape and species in which we find solace and delight.

Uncommonly, however, the ICCA Consortium is also drawing attention to the indigenous peoples and local communities who protect and defend comparable nature and biological diversity not only in official protected areas but in the land, water and natural resources held as “commons” all over the world.¹ “The natural commons are at enormous risk from the powerful forces of extractive industries, infrastructure development, monocultures, poaching, commercial overfishing, land and water grabbing, wars and armed conflicts, imposed cultural change, and the privatisation and monetisation of natural resources in general. These are some of the most powerful forces at play in the world today and the price of resisting them to conserve nature, cultural diversity and traditional lifestyles can be exceedingly high in terms of intimidation, violent abuse and injury... and unfortunately even death.” said Dr. Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend, Global Coordinator of the ICCA Consortium.

Indigenous peoples and traditional caretaker communities² are on the frontline in the struggle to preserve, protect, restore and defend the “natural commons” and, in particular, the territories and areas they collectively conserve on the basis of their traditional knowledge and customary practices, law and institutions (in short referred to as ICCAs). People such as Councillor Armin R. Marin— gunned down by a mine guard while leading a peaceful anti-mining protest in Sibuyan Island, The Philippines; ³ Ms. Karunamoi Sardar— killed by a bomb while she was leading a peaceful protest against the encroachment of industrial shrimp farms into local mangrove areas in the Khulna Delta of Bangladesh;⁴ and Guarani Indian leader Ambrósio Vilhalva— killed after decades of campaigning for his tribe’s right to live on its ancestral land in Brazil’s Mato Grosso do Sul state⁵ are some better known examples of— unfortunately— countless victims.

The ICCA Consortium is extremely concerned by the on-going violations of environmental customary law and human and indigenous peoples’ rights that include the killing or severe harming of leaders and members of indigenous peoples and local communities who resist land conversion, natural resource grabbing and imposed ‘development’ processes. “This is an unfortunately frequent occurrence in the global South, and particularly severe in places where local resistance and mobilisation to defend community commons and ICCAs has led to the militarisation of territories. In

¹ Kothari, A. et al., [Recognising and Supporting Territories and Areas Conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities](#), CBD Technical Study No. 64, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, ICCA Consortium, Kalpavriksh, and Natural Justice, Montreal, Canada, 2012.

² Hereafter referred to as “communities”.

³ Goodland, R. and C. Wicks, [Gold and Nickel Mining -Sibuyan Island](#), Case Study 6 for [Philippines: Mining or Food?](#), Working Group on Mining in the Philippines, London, 2008.

⁴ Environmental Justice Foundation, [Smash & Grab: Conflict, Corruption and Human Rights Abuses in the Shrimp Farming Industry](#), AJF and Wild Aid, London, UK, 2003.

⁵ Survival International, [Ambrósio Vilhalva, 1960-2013 – an obituary 11 December 2013](#), accessed July 2015.

too many cases, national armies and para-military security forces end up backing the interests of corporations and private investors at the expense of poor and vulnerable communities.” said Giovanni Reyes, a Kankana-ey Igorot, Secretary-General of the National Coalition of Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines and member of ICCA Consortium’s Steering Committee.

The majority of cases of killing and severe harm perpetrated against the defenders of community commons and ICCAs remain unsolved, with both instigators and executors of such crimes rarely identified or brought to justice. The risk of losing one’s life in the attempt to protect community commons and ICCAs and even the likelihood that that sacrifice will remain unrecognized and unpunished represent a disincentive for people to engage in resisting undesired land conversions and “development” schemes and, in general, in equitably governing and sustainably managing their land, water and natural resources. “This is the effect intended and hoped for by the perpetrators of the crimes. Yet, despite this, and at times *because* of this, many defenders of the natural commons remain unhindered and some double their efforts and are singled out for reprisal.” affirmed Dr. M. Taghi Farvar, President of the ICCA Consortium. “Crucially, the families of the murdered and harmed defenders bear the long-term consequences of their loss, including loss of security and livelihoods, and the possibility of a lifetime of poverty and marginalisation. Unlike for rangers of official protected areas, there may not even be a token compensation or pension for the orphaned families. In addition, the communities of the murdered and harmed defenders remain deprived of some of their most aware, active and generous members.” said Dr. Dario Novellino, an activist-anthropologist and ICCA Consortium honorary member, who is spending his life in the service of vulnerable indigenous communities.

The threats to rangers and defenders of community commons and ICCAs were recognised at the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 in Sydney, Australia held in November 2014, where the ICCA Consortium co-led the Stream on Governance. This recognition was incorporated into [The Promise of Sydney Vision](#) released at the Congress. The Congress, which represented the largest ever gathering of conservationists from around the world, stated: “...we recognize that threats to nature, its biological diversity and protected areas are now at the highest level in human history, due to a convergence at immense scale of the impacts of human consumption patterns, population growth, and industrial activity. Many protected and conserved areas are at risk (...) and many rangers on the frontline have sacrificed everything for this cause. This reality must be faced directly, truthfully, and collaboratively. Bold vision and concerted action are required if we are to meet both conservation goals and human aspirations for current and future generations. There is no time to lose”.

The ICCA Consortium anticipated its celebration of World Ranger Day with a gathering at the [United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (EMRIP), which met this month in Geneva. On the occasion, it called for the development of a global **Solidarity Fund for Defenders of the Commons and ICCAs**. “This Fund will seek to provide some level of compensation to families and communities adversely affected by the killing or severe harming of activists involved in the protection of their collective rights to natural resources, often based on ancestral ownership unrecognized by states or private interests. It will show solidarity with the communities willing to continue the struggle.” said Dr. José Aylwin, a human rights lawyer with the Observatorio Ciudadano of Chile. “The establishment of this Fund is— simply put— a moral obligation for all of us environment and human rights activists.” added Sarah Selvy Fortuné, a Touareg member of the ICCA Consortium Steering Committee, from Niger. “While the ICCA Consortium is willing to spearhead the initiative, the shape, organisation and hosting institution of the Fund are entirely open” stressed Sarah Ryder, Programme Manager of the ICCA Consortium “...and a number of individuals of known commitment and integrity are ready to serve as members of the body that will administer the Fund.”

The Fund forms part of the wider strategy the ICCA Consortium is fostering to respond to human rights violations of the defenders of community commons and ICCAs, and to expose and bring to

justice the people and companies responsible for these crimes. Further work to plan and structure the Solidarity Fund is scheduled, notably as a follow up to the 4th UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, to be held in November 2015 in Geneva (Switzerland).

For more information on the Fund or about ICCAs and the work of the ICCA Consortium please contact info@iccaconsortium.org and consult www.iccaconsortium.org where specific accounts-- such as reports, videos and photostories— can be found about defenders of the commons and ICCAs.

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Councillor Armin R. Marin gunned down by a mine guard while leading a peaceful anti-mining protest in Sibuyan Island, The Philippines. He died a few instants after this picture was taken.



Karunamoi Sardar was killed by a bomb launched at her while she was leading a peaceful protest against the encroachment of industrial shrimp farms into local mangrove areas in the Khulna Delta of Bangladesh.



Guarani Indian leader Ambrósio Vilhalva was murdered after decades of campaigning for his tribe's right to live on its ancestral land in Brazil's Mato Grosso do Sul state.