

## [African States must do more to recognise, consult and protect activists working on corporate accountability](#)

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States across Africa must take concrete steps to consult and protect human rights defenders working on issues of corporate accountability, ISHR said in a statement to the ACHPR today.



Cet article peut être trouvé en français [ici](#).

(Banjul, the Gambia) States across Africa must take concrete steps to consult and protect human rights defenders working on issues of corporate accountability, ISHR said today.



The call came in a [statement](#) delivered at the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the African Commission on Peoples' and Human Rights (ACHPR), in response to a report presented by Pacifique Manirakiza, Chair of its [Working Group on Extractive Industries and the Environment](#).

ISHR's Advocacy and Communications Manager Ben Leather told Commissioners that ISHR's research backs up the claims of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, that these activists are some of the world's most vulnerable, facing 'heightened and specific risks and exclusion from debate on the issue'.

'These activists face exceptional levels of stigmatisation, which increased the risk of their criminalisation and

attacks against them', said Mr Leather, 'the labelling by [Rwandan](#) authorities of community activists as "anti-development" is emblematic of a wider trend'.

Mr Leather also used the case of Angolan Journalist [Rafael Marques](#), imprisoned for speaking out against corruption in the diamond mining industry, to demonstrate the risk of arbitrary detention this group of defenders face. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders has also shown them to face exceptional risk of murder.

'The precariousness of their situation is exacerbated by the array of vested interests they oppose and the breadth of State and non-State actors who attack them, including private security forces, members of their own community, organised crime and businesses', Mr Leather told the Commission.

However, he acknowledged that it was necessary for the ACHPR and member States to have a clearer analysis of the threats to these defenders and detailed proposals from the Commission itself. In that respect, ISHR called upon the Working Group to carry out a study on the risks patterns of threats facing African defenders and communities working on corporate accountability.

'These defenders are crying out for support and - as more concessions for natural resource exploitation are granted and more communities resist and denounce - that cry is only going to get louder', Mr Leather argued.

'The root cause of the elevated risks facing these defenders, lies in the closed spaces for their participation. Testimonies across the continent suggest that, quite simply, States and business are often not consulting communities affected by business projects, nor the defenders which support them. Much less so in a truly free, prior and informed manner. Proper consultation at the outset would prevent a raft of abuses'.

ISHR made a series of recommendations which member States ought to already implement in order to protect this group of vulnerable activists, as detailed below:

- Make public statements of recognition of these defenders' legitimacy.
- Guarantee due process to detained human rights defenders and reform those laws which are used arbitrarily against them.
- Work together with defenders to develop laws, policies and measures which can respond effectively to the specific protection needs of vulnerable activists.
- Work with businesses and Third States to consult and protect defenders.
- Develop National Action Plans for the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- Tackle the root cause of these violations by legislating for clear and inclusive processes of consultation prior to the development of business projects. Civil society should be involved in the development of these laws.

Commissioner Manirakiza responded by saying he and the Working Group stood ready to further analyse the situation facing defenders working on these issues, and to work with all partners to ensure that human rights defenders can engage on business and human rights issues without risk.

This week, ISHR launched a [French](#) version of its Business and Human Rights Monitor, which also exists in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

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