

Business & Human Rights | Two new briefings on how to safeguard defenders

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We are excited to share the launch of two new briefings that provide guidance for institutional investors and companies on how to respect the rights of human rights defenders.



In the shadow of hundreds of attacks and killings of human rights defenders and increased threats to workers and civic freedoms during the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of companies and their investors in safeguarding human rights is coming under increasing scrutiny.

A coalition of organisations has underlined today how the efforts of human rights defenders must be supported and their work protected. Companies and investors must play a greater role in safeguarding defenders rather than contributing to attacks against them.

We are excited to share the launch of two new briefings that provide guidance for institutional investors and companies on how to respect the rights of human rights defenders - [**Safeguarding Human Rights Defenders: Practical Guidance for Investors**](#), published by the Investor Alliance for Human Rights, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, and International Service for Human Rights and [**Responsible Sourcing: The Business Case For Protecting Land And Environmental Defenders And Indigenous Communities' Rights To Land And Resources**](#), published by Global Witness.

These new briefings make clear that it is in business' and investors' interests to act to safeguard human rights defenders. Human rights defenders include trade union leaders, indigenous communities and their leaders, land and environment defenders standing up for land rights and the environment, and ordinary people standing up for human rights.

By ensuring respect for the work of defenders, companies contribute to advancing their human rights performance and managing operational, legal, and reputational risks. For example, a lack of meaningful consultation around the Dakota Access Pipeline not only resulted in hundreds of injuries within the local indigenous community but an additional \$4.4 billion in costs to the banks financing the project in the form of account closures.

Yet since 2015, there have been [**more than 2,200**](#) killings, threats, abusive lawsuits, and other types of attacks intended to silence or intimidate defenders focused on business-related activities.

There is growing awareness in the investment community of the importance of managing human rights risks. Last month, a coalition of 176 investors led by the Investor Alliance for Human Rights, including asset managers, public pension funds, and faith-based institutions representing US\$4.5 trillion, sent a [**letter**](#) to 95 major multinational companies calling for improved performance and disclosure on human rights due diligence.

Ali Hines of Global Witness said, ***"For those investing in companies with agricultural, timber and mineral supply chains, there is a strategic and moral imperative to act to protect the human rights of all people defending communities' rights to land and resources. Through comprehensive due diligence practices, businesses can convert their environmental and human rights risks into opportunities, and improve supply chain resilience. Such action is mutually beneficial to businesses, investors and defenders."***

Paloma Muñoz Quick, of the Investor Alliance for Human Rights said, ***"By activating their leverage to promote respect for defenders and civic freedoms, investors and their portfolio companies can play a transformational role in creating enabling environments for responsible business conduct. In doing so, investors will address significant material risks to business, as the features of a safe and enabling environment for defenders overlaps with those of a stable operating environment for***

business.”

The briefings’ key recommendations are that:

- Businesses engage with defenders to develop and adopt a policy of zero-tolerance towards acts of violence, threats or intimidation committed against defenders, and make this public.
- Businesses assess the situation for civic freedoms and defenders in the countries in which they operate, identify if the company’s operations and business relationships undermine defenders’ rights, and act to address any risks identified.
- Businesses ensure that defenders have access to remedy.
- Institutional investors, including asset owners and managers, should assess investment portfolios for defenders-related risks and take steps to address them, with the Business Human Rights Resource Centre, ISHR & the Investor Alliance's briefing suggesting practical steps on how to do so.
- Businesses and investors proactively use their leverage to promote respect for defenders and civic freedoms, even when they are not causing, contributing to, or linked to the harm.

Please help us spread the word by sharing these companion briefings within your networks: [Click here and tweet about them!](#)

Photo: Energy East Pipeline Protest, Nina Grossman, 2015, Flickr

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