

PRESS RELEASE

[embargoed until June 28, 3 pm CEST time]

Wearing Blinders: new report exposes how public banks are ignoring reprisal risks and contributing to attacks against defenders

In Uganda, the World Bank is funding the Uganda Wildlife Authority, whose park rangers are systematically and brutally [attacking](#) indigenous peoples. In Armenia, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development funded a [gold mine](#), after being repeatedly warned about its harmful impacts, and ended up in a joint venture with a known human rights violator. In Guatemala, IDB Invest financed two [hydro-dams](#), disregarding the concerns of the indigenous communities impacted by the project. The area was heavily militarized, with former military personnel hired as security guards, and three activists were [killed](#).

These cases are just some examples of a widespread trend: development banks' projects are often imposed without meaningful consultations and people who oppose them end up facing brutal attacks, despite public commitments to participation and civic engagement.

The report "[Wearing Blinders: How development banks are ignoring reprisal risks](#)", published by the Coalition for Human Rights in Development in June 2022, exposes how development banks are frequently failing to identify, assess, and mitigate reprisal risks. Through five case studies, analyzing projects in Armenia, Guatemala, the Philippines, Turkmenistan and Uganda, the report analyses some worrying trends, including how banks tend to shirk responsibility and only take action when it is already too late.

Human rights defenders and civil society groups who contributed to this research note how the lack of meaningful consultations is one of the key factors that leads to social tensions and protests. When red flags are ignored and critical voices are unheard or silenced, retaliations against human rights defenders and community members opposing the projects tend to escalate quickly.

"Before making decisions on whether to invest in a project or not, development banks should assess the local context and the relations between their clients and the local communities," says Gerald Kankya, human rights defender from Uganda and director of the [Twerwaneho Listeners' Club](#). "When banks make decisions disregarding communities' concerns, then conflicts escalate and those raising their voices end up being attacked. Due diligence is crucial to detect risks and prevent human rights abuses."

In some of the projects analyzed in the report, such as the gold mine in Armenia, development banks eventually withdrew. Yet, communities did not get compensation for the harm suffered, many activists are still facing criminalization and court trials, and new investors are showing interest in the project: "The people who have been resisting against the Amulsar gold mine are very resolute," says Anna Shahnazaryan, human rights defender and member of the Armenian Environmental Front. "They will keep resisting, despite all the reprisals they have faced, including being dragged into court on unfair charges by the mining company. A gold mine near the spa town of Jermuk is never going to happen, this has to be a lesson for the mining company Lydian and any new potential investor".

"Wearing Blinders" also provides a roadmap on how development banks can take actions to prevent reprisals. Conducting a retaliation risk assessment as part of the human rights due diligence process, while ensuring meaningful participation and reprisal-sensitive engagement of affected communities, can help banks identify risks and avoid contributing to reprisals.

“Proactively preventing reprisals should be paramount for the banks, especially when investing in contexts where human rights defenders and local people risk being harassed, attacked or even killed, simply for expressing their views,” says Dalile Antunez, collaborative researcher at the Coalition for Human Rights in Development. “If development banks are serious about their commitments to public participation and if they want their project to truly benefit people on the ground, they need to take immediate and concrete actions to stop reprisals before it is too late.”

About the Coalition for Human Rights in Development

The Coalition for Human Rights in Development is a global-south-led coalition of over 100 social movements, civil society organizations, and grassroots groups. We work together to advance community-led, rights-based development, and to hold development finance institutions, governments, corporations and other actors accountable for their impacts on peoples and the planet.

The report is a collective initiative of the [Defenders in Development Campaign](#), which engages in capacity building and collective action to ensure that communities and marginalized groups have the information, resources, protection and power to shape, participate in, or oppose development activities, and to hold development financiers accountable.

Media contact

To receive an embargoed copy of the report, further information, or to arrange interviews, please contact: Lorena Cotza (Communication Lead, Coalition for Human Rights in Development - Italy) lcotza@rightsindevelopment.org | +39 3285761056

Report launch

Date: Tuesday June 28th - 3 pm CEST time

Time: 1 pm UTC - check your local time [here](#).

Language: English, with interpretation in Spanish, French and Russian.

Platform: Zoom. Prior registration is required, fill this [form](#). The event will also be streamed on Facebook.

Speakers:

Anna Shahnazaryan | human rights defender and member of the Armenian Environmental Front (Armenia)

Gerald Kankya | human rights defender and director of the Twerwaneho Listeners' Club (Uganda)

Heidi Hautala | MEP, European Parliament Vice-President (Greens/EFA)

Anita Ramasastry | UN working group on Business and Human Rights

Dalile Antunez | collaborative researcher (Coalition for Human Rights in Development)