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3 September 2018

**\*\*\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE \*\*\***

## **REPORT EXPOSES DRAMATIC RISE IN THE NUMBER OF ACTIVIST KILLINGS**

Front Line Defenders and the HRD Memorial Network have documented more 1000 targeted killings of peaceful human rights defenders (HRDs) since 2014, according to a new joint report, *Stop the Killings*, which analyses lethal attacks on activists in six countries. Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and the Philippines collectively account for more than 80 percent of all documented murders of HRDs. In Colombia alone, nearly 100 human rights defenders have been killed already this year.

The killings are not random. According to Front Line Defenders, the targeted elimination of peaceful activists defending human rights has become an epidemic. In its 2017 Annual Report, Front Line Defenders reported the killing of more than 300 HRDs in 27 countries. Two-thirds of those killed were defending the environment, land and indigenous peoples' rights, often in remote, rural areas with little access to protection, documentation, reporting, and justice. Based on available data, a mere 12 percent of murders resulted in the arrest of suspects.

“In each of the countries where death tolls are soaring, economic corruption and collusion between state and business have resulted in political system designed to keep elites on top and the disenfranchised silent,” said Jim Loughran, Head of the HRD Memorial Project at Front Line Defenders. “For decades, the governments of Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and the Philippines have been using the same tired and disingenuous excuses to justify their inaction – terrorism organised crime, drug gangs. They peddle the myth that with increased arms they will be able to fix the situation. This simplistic and dangerous analysis ignores corruption as the root cause of violence.”

*Stop the Killings* includes a chapter on each of the six countries written in collaboration with at-risk activists on the ground, who on a daily basis face severe threats for documenting and advocating against the rising violence. Despite social and political differences, each of the six countries suffer the violent repression of peaceful dissent and justice systems co-opted by corporate interest. The report also calls out the hypocrisy of Western governments who ostensibly support democracy and human rights, but continue to provide direct financial and security assistance to some of the most repressive regimes in the world.

“In all of the countries featured in this report there has been extensive funding, training and the provision of weaponry, surveillance equipment and technical support to the police, intelligence and military forces implicated in the killing of HRDs,” said Andrew Anderson,

Front Line Defenders Executive Director. “Corrupt dictators and populist authoritarians have been emboldened to attack not just HRDs but the very idea of universal human rights.”

Among the key drivers of killings and violence against HRDs detailed in the report are:

- smear and defamation campaigns against HRDs, who are accused of being “anti-state,” “anti-development,” and violent or destabilising forces;
- economic policies which prioritise the ruthless exploitation of natural resources over the protection of the environment and the land;
- refusal to recognise and protect rights of *campesino* communities and indigenous peoples;
- lack of effective systems to document and investigate attacks on HRDs and provide protection;
- collusion by the state and/or its agents in the killing of HRDs.

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#### EDITORIAL NOTE

The HRD Memorial ([www.hrdmemorial.org](http://www.hrdmemorial.org)), developed by a coalition of national and international human rights organisations, collects case data and commemorates human rights defenders (HRDs) who have been killed since 1998, the year the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted by consensus. For the first time ever, the HRD Memorial website and database begins to give a true picture of the scale of killings of HRDs. The HRD Memorial aims to be not just a memorial and database, but also a celebration of the life, work and achievements of the HRDs who have been killed because of their peaceful human rights work.

#### SELECTED REPORT DATA

**Brazil:** The Dom Tomás Balduino Documentation Centre – CPT, documented the killing of 66 HRDs in 2016. In 2017, there was an increase in the number of mass killings, such that of the 70 killings recorded that year, 28 HRDs, forty percent, were killed during a massacre.

**Colombia:** Although the peace agreement between the government and FARC rebels brought with it the lowest rate of killings among the general population in the last 30 years, the number of killings of HRDs increased dramatically. The situation in 2018 has not improved – nearly 100 HRDs were killed in the first half of 2018.

**Guatemala:** Defamation campaigns against HRDs, the absence of protection for HRDs and the failure to adequately investigate attacks has created a situation in which HRDs are killed with impunity. In its Annual Reports for 2014 to 2017, Front Line Defenders reported a combined total of 45 HRDs were killed in Guatemala. Nineteen HRDs have been killed so far this year; nine were members of the same human rights organisation, CODECA.

**Honduras:** From 2014 to 2017, Front Line Defenders documented a total of 64 HRDs killed in this four year period. In contrast to the figure for 2016, the number of HRDs killed in 2017 was significantly lower; however, this is linked to the international outcry over the killing of Berta Cáceres rather than a real improvement in the human rights situation.

**Mexico:** From June 2016 to May 2017, there were 1,442 attacks on HRDs in Mexico, which translates into 4 attacks per day. In the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca alone, two HRDs are attacked each day. In the period 2013-2018 there were 144 killings of HRDs, 31 in Oaxaca alone. In 2017, 48 HRDs were killed; 58% fell into 4 main categories: HRDs defending freedom of expression and journalism ; HRDs defending the rights of indigenous peoples; HRDs defending territorial/land rights; HRDs defending the right to a decent standard of living . Twenty-seven HRDs have been killed in the first 6 months of 2018.

**The Philippines:** Extrajudicial executions remain the gravest threat facing HRDs in the Philippines where HRDs have long been targeted: 474 HRDs were killed during the Arroyo presidency (2001-2010), and 139 during the Aquino presidency (2010-2016). This is continuing into the present. In its 2017 Annual Report , Front Line Defenders reported the killing of 60 HRDs in the Philippines, making it the country with the highest number of killings of HRDs outside of the Americas and nearly doubling the figure from the previous year.

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