INTRODUCTION

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on Dec 10, 1948. Considered a milestone document that proclaimed the inalienable rights that everyone is inherently entitled to as a human being, the Declaration has set standards to meet equality, justice, and human dignity. The reality, however, is that the even the basic human rights of the people continue to face serious challenges and setbacks, especially for the most vulnerable and poorest sectors such as those in the rural areas. For one, the recent wave of authoritarian populism is creating a more unfavorable and grimmer environment for small and landless farmers, indigenous peoples, and advocates of the people’s right to land and resources.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s recent violent rhetoric perhaps best depicts the worsened state of human rights that rural communities in the region had to endure this year. In an October speech, the controversial chief executive was quoted in the media as saying, “My orders to the police and the soldiers, shoot them. If they resist violently, shoot them. If they die, I do not care.” Duterte was warning the landless farmers who were occupying undistributed and idle farmlands in the country. By now, it is clear that dismissing this as empty tough talk is unwise. A week before his speech, nine farm workers who were part of an organized land occupation campaign were massacred in a sugar plantation in central Philippines. Their lawyer was assassinated days later. For 2018, the Philippines is once again the deadliest country for farmers, indigenous people, and their supporters.

Duterte is part of a global phenomenon that saw authoritarian and far right populist leaders make big strides in gaining public support, with some actually capturing political power. This is a trend that is not hinting signs of slowing down anytime soon. In October, a known far right politician in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, for instance, became that country’s President. Many in the media have been drawing comparisons between Bolsonaro and Duterte not just for their aggressive rants and penchant for disturbing statements but for their supposed actual encouragement of violence and repression — including against farmers and indigenous people. In October, alleged Bolsonaro supporters attacked and burned one of the huts in a camp of landless farmers in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.
The rise of authoritarian populism...

For advocates of the people’s right to land and resources, it is essential to understand the conditions behind the ascent of authoritarian populism as much as it is important to study and expose its impact on the rural people and on their issues and struggles, including on access to, ownership, and/or effective control over land and resources.

What paved the way to the rise of authoritarian populism not just in developing countries but also in wealthy nations (most notably, of course, the US with Pres. Donald Trump) is the complete failure of neoliberalism of the past four decades to deliver on its promises of prosperity for everyone. The policies of liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and denationalization destroyed more jobs and livelihoods than they ever created; reduced state spending for social services and welfare even as greater public burden is imposed through more taxes; and pushed up overall costs of living amid depressed workers’ wages and household incomes.

Meanwhile, the deteriorating condition of ordinary people sharply contrasted with the lot of the rich and powerful who have continued accumulating unprecedented and ever more concentrated wealth and power.

The 2018 World Inequality Report gives an illustrative description: since 1980, the richest 1% of the world’s population has captured twice as much of the growth in global income as the 50% poorest people. Not accidentally, this trend coincided with decades of very large transfers of public to private wealth in rich and poor countries alike, which in turn limited governments’ ability to regulate the economy, redistribute income, and mitigate rising inequality. 5

Right wing populist leaders claim to correct this injustice and to become the voice (usually with virulent tones) of public sentiment on the social costs of neoliberal globalization and the ordinary people’s overall exclusion under the status quo. In underdeveloped countries where due to colonialism and neocolonialism, the lack of economic opportunities and social welfare has been persistent even prior to the advent of neoliberalism (although neoliberalism certainly further worsened such chronic crisis in these backward countries), populist leaders focus on bureaucratic corruption, abuses of the local oligarchy and the elite, as well as criminality as issues where they could rally and consolidate public support. The paradox, however, is that these populist leaders often represent or come from the same political and economic elite that push for and benefit from neoliberal globalization, engage in systemic corruption, and are the beneficiaries of the status quo at the expense of the people that they claim to stand up for.

Still, these politicians peddle the assertion that they and only they represent the true will of the people and those that do not support them or question their policies are conveniently branded as public enemies, as part of the corrupt elite (e.g., critical media), as insurgents (e.g., activist groups), etc. Under the pretext of protecting and advancing the people’s interests and aspirations but in reality, to perpetuate themselves in power, right wing populist leaders turn to authoritarianism and further undermine the already restricted space provided by liberal democracy. Authoritarian populists exercise a stranglehold on institutions such as the legislature, judiciary, and the armed forces and use them with impunity to attack individual and collective rights and freedoms, specifically targeting political opponents and their mass of supporters.

... is creating greater challenges for the assertion of people’s right to land...

The rise of authoritarian populism has a profound impact on the rural communities that are asserting their legitimate claim to land and resources as a matter of people’s rights and social justice. Faced with intensifying threats of physical, economic, and cultural displacement due to government and/or corporate takeover of their lands for mining operations, plantations, tourism,
These developments are creating conditions for an increasingly authoritarian streak of the populist incumbent, Pres. Duterte. There are now eight separate reported incidents of massacre of farmers and indigenous people elsewhere (36 victims). Some 3,688 Filipinos have also been displaced from their rural communities this year due to the government’s military campaign. All these events are interlinked with the repression of rural peoples in the Philippines. For instance, the highest number of victims were monitored in Southeast Asia’s Philippines (33) while there were also victims in Cambodia (3), Indonesia (1), and Myanmar (1). South American countries also figured prominently – Guatemala and Mexico with nine victims each; Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela with five victims each; and Honduras and Peru with two victims each. Eastern African countries Kenya (2 victims) and Tanzania (1) also registered victims of killings. (See Annex 1 for a detailed breakdown of the number of killings and other human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles per country)

The reported repression of rural peoples in the Philippines has been particularly alarming. This year, PANAP has monitored, as mentioned, 33 victims of killings that are related to land conflicts and struggles. Aside from extrajudicial killings, farmers, indigenous people, and advocates of the people’s rights to land and resources in the country are also subjected to arrests, detention and legal persecution (84 victims) as well as threats, harassment, and physical assault (36 victims). Some 3,688 Filipinos have also been displaced from their rural communities this year due to the government’s military campaign. All these are happening amid what many critics and observers (in the Philippines and elsewhere) say is an increasingly authoritarian streak of the populist incumbent, Pres. Duterte. There are now eight separate reported incidents of massacre of farmers and indigenous people under the less than three-year old regime. Marital law remains imposed (in place since May 2017 and most likely to be further extended) in the country’s southernmost region of Mindanao, where many of the killings and other atrocities against mostly indigenous communities (the lumad) are reportedly taking place.

A similar fate awaits rural communities in Brazil where another authoritarian populist with close ties to big agribusiness now reigns. Critics point out that Bolsonaro is being actively supported by the “Ruralista bancada” (the Parliamentary Front of Agriculture or PFA), the most influential agribusiness lobby group in Brazil. The new president has already appointed the head of the PFA as his agriculture chief. These developments are creating conditions for a new wave of land conflicts and struggles in the country, where the landless颜民s and indigenous peoples, and landlords and big business are engaged in escalating struggles over land and resources. On top of the five victims of killings related to land conflicts and struggles that PANAP has monitored in Brazil this year, there were also at least one victim of arrest/detention/legal persecution and three victims of threats/harassment/physical assault in the country.

Even some of the political leaders in the region long notorious for their strongman rule are also making populist pitches to stay in power. For example, Cambodia’s Prime Minister Hun Sen who has been ruling the country for more than three decades as the world’s longest-serving head of government, has made pledges to supposedly return land ownership to the communities for farming purposes. Hun Sen again won this year’s elections amid accusations of systematic crackdown on the political opposition and critical media. Meanwhile, displacement and repression of rural communities continue contrary to Hun Sen’s earlier promise. In a fact-finding mission that PANAP co-organized last September in nine villages in the province of Preah Vihear, reports were confirmed of lack of access to and control over some 13,000 hectares of land of the indigenous and farming communities due to the sugarcane operation of a Chinese state-owned company. Last November, a march of more than 1,000 farmers and indigenous people from five provinces in the country (including Preah Vihear) were prevented from submitting to various government agencies in Phnom Penh their petition to settle their land disputes with local landlords and Chinese investors. PANAP has monitored three victims of killings in the country that are related to land conflicts and struggles this year as well as seven victims of arrest, detention and legal persecution.

These are the same regions where PANAP has monitored a high incidence of human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles. In terms of killings, for instance, the highest number of victims were monitored in Southeast Asia’s Philippines (33) while there were also victims in Cambodia (3), Indonesia (1), and Myanmar (1). South American countries also figured prominently – Guatemala and Mexico with nine victims each; Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela with five victims each; and Honduras and Peru with two victims each. Eastern African countries Kenya (2 victims) and Tanzania (1) also registered victims of killings. (See Annex 1 for a detailed breakdown of the number of killings and other human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles per country)
... yet hope remains.

Regardless of what is obviously a far more difficult situation today confronting farmers, indigenous people, and their supporters, hope remains that the people’s collective right to land and resources and to development will be realized and respected. The hope lies in the fact that amid the increasingly repressive environment that the rural communities are forced to bear, their determined assertion of their rights and aspirations remains strong as ever.

Land occupation and collective cultivation campaigns in the Philippines persist despite the massacres, threat, and intimidation. In Brazil, campesinos occupying and cultivating a disputed land in the Quilombo Campo Grande resisted an agrarian court’s eviction order and clinched victory after the order was reversed last November. Across India, tens of thousands of farmers are participating in a series of historic marches to demand, among others, that the government recognize their right to land and to stop infrastructure projects that cause their dislocation. In Cambodia, communities continue their resistance against land grabbing by foreign firms including through the filing of landmark court cases and class-action lawsuits.

These are just some of the stories of resistance and to be sure many others are happening as rural communities around the world carry on their struggle for – as what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlined 70 years ago – equality, justice, and human dignity.

Notes


2 See the “By the numbers” section of this report for the details on the Sagay 9 massacre in the Philippines

3 Read, for instance, the NBC News’ opinion piece on Bolsonaro on Sep 28, 2018 (“Who is Jair Bolsonaro and why is he more dangerous than Trump?”; available here - https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/brazil-presidential-election-who-jair-bolsonaro-popular-candidate-more-dangerous-nca925011)

4 As reported by the Friends of the MST on Oct 28, 2018 (“MST encampment is attacked by Bolsonaro supporters in Mato Grosso do Sul”; available here - https://goo.gl/iSzQyS)

5 Launched on Dec 14, 2017, the 2018 World Inequality Report was produced by the World Inequality Lab composed of research fellows based at the Paris School of Economics. The full report and its individual sections are accessible at https://wir2018.wid.world.

6 See https://landmatrix.org/en/ (accessed on Dec 4, 2018). Land Matrix describes itself as “a global and independent land monitoring initiative”. It defines a land deal as entailing a transfer of rights to use, control or ownership of land (at least 200 hectares) through sale, lease or concession and as implying the potential conversion of land from smallholder production, local community use or important ecosystem service provision to commercial use.

7 See “In Brazil, the ‘ruralist’ lobby has a great influence in Brasilia” published on Archy Worldys, Nov 27, 2018 (available here - https://www.archyworldys.com/in-brazil-the-ruralist-lobby-has-a-great-influence-in-brasilia/)

IN NUMBERS:
MONITORED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS RELATED TO LAND STRUGGLES AND CONFLICTS IN 2018*

*January to November Only
From January 1 to November 30, 2018, PAN Asia Pacific (PANAP) has monitored a total of 128 cases of human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles in 21 countries. As shown in Figure 1, 57 of the cases were of killings with 91 victims; 37 of arrests and detention and legal persecution with 136 victims; 23 of threats, harassment, and physical assault with 49 victims; and 11 of displacement with 9,288 victims.
Of the 91 victims of killings, 15 were indigenous people; 43 were farmers and farm workers; 32 were land activists; and one was unspecified, as shown in Figure 2. Seventy-seven victims or 85% of the total were male, while 14 victims or 15% were female.

**FIGURE 2**
NUMBER OF VICTIMS OF KILLINGS RELATED TO LAND CONFLICTS AND STRUGGLES, BY GENDER AND SECTOR
JANUARY 1 TO NOVEMBER 30, 2018

- **43** farmers/farm workers
- **15** indigenous people
- **32** land activists (all male)
- **11** female
- **32** male
- **3** female
- **12** male

*Based on reports from PANAP partners and monitoring of online news*
The Philippines recorded the highest number of victims (33) and cases (21) of killings during the period, followed by Guatemala (9 victims, 8 cases), and Mexico (9 victims, 7 cases). Killings were also monitored in other countries (See Chart 1). In India, one case claimed the lives of 13 farmers. In Mexico, land activists from the organization CODEDI or Committee for the Defense of Indigenous Peoples are particularly hunted down: at least five of their members have been killed this year.

Chart 1.
Number of victims of killings related to land conflicts and struggles, by country
January 1 to November 30, 2018

Based on reports from PANAP partners and monitoring of online news
Recently, the Philippines has also become notorious for the string of massacres of indigenous people, farmers, and farm workers, the latest of which is the “Sagay 9” massacre, wherein nine farmers and farm workers were killed by more than 40 armed men on October 20. (See Box 1)

Box 1
Philippines: A country of peasant massacres

Negros Island, the country’s “hacienda capital” where sugar estates remain concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy landlords and where most of the undistributed lands under the 1988 Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) remain, is among the poorest regions in the Philippines. A substantial portion of its population is landless and toiling away in plantations receiving hunger wages. This makes the region a site of many land struggles and of killings and harassment of farmers and land activists.

In the hope of staving off hunger and poverty they regularly experience, 43 landless farmers and farm workers in Negros Occidental (about 782 kilometers south of Manila) who were members of the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW), participated in bungkalan* or cultivation of 75 hectares of idle lands in Hacienda Nene on October 20. Nine of them - Elicerio Villegas, Angelife Arsenal, Rene Laurencio, Morena Mendoza, Marcelina Dumaguit, Rannel Bantigue, and minors, Jomarie Ughayon Jr., and Marchtel Sumicad - however, will never get to see the fruits of their labor. At least 40 heavily armed men said to be members of a paramilitary group fired upon them while they were resting in a makeshift hut after the day’s hard work.

The ‘Sagay 9’ massacre came a few months after the killings of Flora Gamora, an elderly woman farmer and NFSW leader, on December 21, 2017, and of Ronald Manlanat, an NFSW member, on February 22, 2018. Barely three weeks after the ‘Sagay 9’ killings, Atty. Ben Ramos, a pro-bono lawyer of farmers and land and human rights activists who was helping the families of the victims and survivors of the massacre, was also gunned down by a still unknown assailant.

The ‘Sagay 9’ massacre was not the first massacre of farmers under the current government. The first, which occurred hardly two weeks after the current president assumed office, claimed the first victims of extrajudicial killings under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte. Raymar Mayantao, Rogen Sindangan and Cenon Nacaytona, who belong to the indigenous Higaonon in Sumilao, Bukidnon (about 857 kilometers south of Manila), were shot dead on July 12, 2016 by 13 armed security personnel of the ranch company Ramcar, Inc. The three, together with other members of their tribe, had set up camp inside the ranch in an attempt to reclaim 2,400 hectares of their ancestral domain occupied by the company, when confronted by the security personnel.

Two months later, on September 3, farmers Baby Mercado, Violeta Mercado, Eligio Barbado, and Gaudencio Bagalay were killed in Palayan, Nueva Ecija, (110 kilometers north of Manila) after members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) opened fire at them and other members of Alyansa ng mga Magbubukid na Nagkakaisa 3100 (Alliance of Farmers United or ALAMANA 3100) after members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) opened fire at them and other members of Alyansa ng mga Magbubukid na Nagkakaisa 3100 (Alliance of Farmers United or ALAMANA 3100). They were participating in bungkalan inside the 3,100-hectare Fort Magsaysay military reservation, declared in the 1990s by the government as part of its land reform program to which all the ALAMANA 3100 members were beneficiaries. The land, however, is eyed as the relocation site for the New Bilibid Prison (NBP), the country’s national penitentiary.

In mineral and natural resources-rich Mindanao, the killings and human rights situation worsened when the island was placed under martial law on May 23, 2017 after an armed conflict sparked between the AFP and a reportedly Islamic State (IS)-affiliated group. The Stop Killing Farmers: An International Fact-Finding Mission to Defend Filipino Peasants’ Land and Human Rights against Militarism and Plunder in Mindanao on April 6–9, 2018 organized by the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Peasant Movement of the Philippines or KMP) and participated in by PANAP, saw a glaring increase in the number of human rights violations against farmers, indigenous peoples and rural peoples with the rise in the number of combat troops deployed in Mindanao. The first six months after the declaration saw 29 victims of killings, many of whom were affiliated with KMP; 58 victims of illegal arrests and detention; and 335,686 victims of indiscriminate firing and aerial bombing of civilian communities.

The Philippines is now the deadliest country in the world for people asserting their right to land and resources. Tanggol Magasaka (Peasant Network for Land, Justice and Human Rights) has recorded a total of 172 farmers and land activists killed in the last two and a half years, 109 of whom were victims of extrajudicial killings related to land disputes. Based on PANAP’s Land and Rights Watch, 33 of the 109 were killed this year. The killings are feared to increase after Duterte, days after the “Sagay 9” massacre, ordered the police and the military to arrest and, in case they resist, shoot landless farmers participating in bungkalan.

Sources:
Karapatan Alliance for the Advancement of Peoples’ Rights
Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas
National Federation of Sugar Workers
Tanggol Magasaka

*Bungkalan or land occupation and collective cultivation is a nationally-coordinated campaign of farmers, farm workers, and land rights advocates and activists to assert the people’s right to land and livelihood.

Atty. Ben Ramos, a pro-bono lawyer who had been assisting poor farmers involved in land disputes against prominent and wealthy landlords and companies, was gunned down by motorcycle-riding men in Kabankalan, Negros Occidental province in central Philippines on November 6, 2018. Photo credit: MASIPAG
As mentioned, PANAP has also monitored 37 cases and 136 victims of arrests, detention, and legal persecution. These are in the Philippines (23 cases and 84 victims); India (3 cases, 24 victims); Cambodia (2 cases, 7 victims); Guatemala (2 cases, 3 victims); China (1 case, 6 victims); Honduras (1 case, 5 victims); Kenya (1 case, 3 victims); Argentina (1 case, 1 victim); Brazil (1 case, 1 victim); Indonesia (1 case, 1 victim); and Pakistan (1 case, 1 victim).

Meanwhile, of the 23 cases and 49 victims of threats, harassment, and physical assault, 14 cases and 36 victims were monitored in the Philippines; Guatemala (2 cases, 4 victims); Peru (2 cases, 2 victims); Brazil (1 case, 3 victims); Bolivia (1 case, 1 victim); Ecuador (1 case, 1 victim); Kenya (1 case, 1 victim); and Mexico (1 case, 1 victim).

Lastly, there were 11 cases and 9,288 victims of displacement monitored in the Philippines (7 cases, 3,688 victims), India (1 case, 2,800 victims); China (1 case, 1,600 victims); Zambia (1 case, 800 victims); and Nigeria (1 case, 400 victims).

Annex 1 compiles the country breakdown of all the monitored human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles.

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Annex 1 compiles the country breakdown of all the monitored human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles.
As shown in Figure 3, 55% of the 128 cases of human rights violations in 2018 were according to reports perpetrated by the military, paramilitary and/or police (71 cases); 37% by unidentified assailants (47 cases); and 8% by private security and hired goons (10 cases).
Excluding the cases with unspecified industries involved, mining ranked as the top industry with the most number of victims of human rights violations (2,744 victims) related to land conflicts and struggles; followed by agriculture (1,200 victims); tourism (307 victims); real estate development (128 victims); plantation (40 victims); energy projects (24 victims); and others (14 victims). See Chart 2 for more details.

Infrastructure development is feared to result in more physical and economic displacement of farming, fishing and indigenous communities in the coming years, especially as China’s development projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) picks up speed. The fishing communities in western Sri Lanka, for instance, already suffer the socio-economic impact of the development of the International Financial City (better known as the Colombo Port City) project by the Chinese state-owned company China Communications Construction Co. Ltd. (CCCC), as discussed in Box 2.

**Box 2**

**Building Sri Lanka’s “world class city: at what cost?”**

With the vision of “Building a World Class City for South Asia”, the Colombo Port City project is the largest infrastructure undertaking in Sri Lanka. It is being developed by the China Harbor Engineering Co. Ltd. (CHEC), a subsidiary of China Communications Construction Co. Ltd. (CCCC), Fortune 500’s 91st biggest company in 2017, to the tune of at least US$1.4 billion, so far the single largest foreign investment in the country.

The project spans 269 hectares of land in the capital where luxury hotels, high-end shopping centers, restaurants, yacht marina, golf course, race track and exhibition center, among others, will be erected. The government estimates the project to create 83,000 jobs and earn up to US$20 billion in investments.

But at what cost?

The first stage of the project includes land reclamation and construction of breakwaters. The total area to be reclaimed is reported to be around 181 to 233 hectares, which experts estimate to need around 200 million cubic meters of sand and 3.45 million cubic meters of granite. The Sri Lankan authorities have identified 11 excavation sites, many of which are in populated areas.

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Based on reports from PANAP partners and monitoring of online news.
Just like in 2017, majority or 60% of the cases (not including displacement) involving women indigenous people, farmers and farm workers, and land activists as victims were arrests, detention, and legal persecution (31 victims), as shown in Chart 3. Twenty seven percent were killings (14 victims); and 13% were threats, harassment, and physical assault (7 victims).

**Chart 3**

**Women victims of human rights violations related to land conflicts and struggles, by type of violation***

January 1 to November 30, 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Violation</th>
<th>Victims</th>
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<tr>
<td>Killings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arrests/detention/legal persecution</td>
<td>31</td>
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</table>

*Minus displacement (all monitored cases of displacement do not segregate victims in terms of gender)

Based on reports from PANAP partners and monitoring of online news.

Aside from the violations of their civil and political rights that women involved in land struggles and disputes experience directly, there are also social impacts women suffer from in cases of large-scale land acquisitions. **Box 3** exemplifies the case of Cambodia, where the Chinese have acquired vast tracks of land as economic land concessions (ELCs) from the Cambodian government.

**Box 3**

**The hidden face of Chinese land acquisitions in Cambodia**

In Cambodia, the Chinese are the top foreign holders of economic land concessions (ELCs) in terms of land area (373,344 hectares out of the total 2,132,956 hectares) and second in terms of number (43 of the 275). In the past years since the passage of the Land Law in 2001 and the Subdegree on ELC in 2005, land areas. Sand dredging and dumping on the coastline can cause the irreversible erosion of soil. In Negombo, for instance, there were reports of some houses along the beach that have been washed away by strong waves.

Dredging can also cause the destruction of coral reefs which are important spawning areas and nursery ground for fish, the staple food and main source of income among Sri Lankans. The substantial decline in the number of fish has reportedly resulted in the loss of income opportunities for countless families in a number of fishing communities.

Moreover, the government of Sri Lanka has declared a 10-kilometer no-fishing zone around the excavation sites, some of which are high-yield fishing areas. In Negombo alone, around 30,000 fisherfolks and 600,000 others engaged in fishing-related activities are expected to suffer economically.

An international fact-finding mission participated in by PANAP on November 27-30 found that the marked decrease in fish catch and resulting drop in income of families in the fishing communities of Basiyawatta, Kudapaduwa, Kuttiduwa and Munnakkaraya, have resulted in malnutrition, deficiencies and health problems especially among children and women and dropouts among school children. Families are also being torn apart due to the increase in labor migration among women and men who work in the cities or in other countries usually as domestic and construction workers. Communities are being ripped apart by disagreements on how to deal with the project.

Communities, who were neither consulted nor properly informed on the project, are resisting the Chinese-funded and -developed Colombo Port City project. They, together with civil society organizations, including PANAP partner National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO), formed the People’s Movement against the Port City to oppose the destruction of their fishing grounds, their livelihood, and their homes. #

Source:

National Fisheries Solidarity Movement
dispossession and displacement resulting from Chinese investments have become a major concern among the Cambodian people, especially to those in the rural and largely underdeveloped parts of the country.

Dispossession and displacement have caught the attention of land and human rights advocates because of the scale and manner in which they are done - i.e. unlawful and violent - and their negative and irreversible impacts on families and communities, and, in particular, on vulnerable sectors of society, such as women.

In the province of Preah Vihear in northern Cambodia, for instance, where PANAP co-organized an international fact-finding mission with various international and local organizations in September, women bore the brunt of land dispossession and economic displacement resulting from the acquisition of Hengfu Sugar Group of more than 30,000 hectares of land in mainly indigenous Kuoy territory.

The encroachment of the Chinese company on the lives of the communities in the province, however, also has less perceptible impacts. The influx of workers from China, as well as, other parts of Cambodia to work in the plantation and factory is already posing challenges on the peace and order situation in Preah Vihear. Chinese workers have been involved in altercations, and some locals have expressed concerns regarding the proliferation of drug trafficking and sex trafficking which pose serious threats to the security and welfare of women and girls. They fear they might suffer the same fate as the province of Sihanoukville, a once sleepy resort town in southern Cambodia that is now a popular destination among the Chinese who are eagerly buying up and developing land into various businesses. The province has become a haven for drug traffickers and prostitution rings despite attempts by the Cambodian authorities to crackdown on such anti-social activities.

Chinese projects and investments in Cambodia and elsewhere usually come with migrant workers from China. There are currently more than 100,000 Chinese in Cambodia, and this number is expected to rise with the number of infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) the Chinese and Cambodian governments have lined up in the next years.

Sources:
Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights
People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty
Ponlok Khmer
Radio Free Asia

Note:

Land & Rights Watch (LR Watch) is an initiative of PANAP and our partners and networks under the No Land, No Life! Campaign to closely monitor and expose human rights abuses against communities opposing land and resource grabbing.

PANAP culls the data and information from online news and articles and reports from our partners and networks. Because of this limitation, the LR Watch does not claim to represent the true global extent of human rights violations that are related to land and resource grabbing and similar conflicts in the rural areas.

However, the compiled data through the LR Watch help provide a glimpse of the alarming state of human rights confronted by indigenous peoples, farmers, farmworkers and others in the rural communities around the world that are defending their right to land and resources.

If you have corrections and/or clarifications about our data, or if you want to share a case in your country that has not been reflected our monitoring, please contact us at nolandnolife@panap.net
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<th>Country</th>
<th>Killings</th>
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<th>Threats/harassment/physical assault</th>
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Based on reports from PANAP partners and monitoring of online news
ABOUT PANAP

PAN Asia Pacific (PANAP) is one of the five regional centres of PAN, a global network dedicated to eliminating the harm caused to humans and the environment by pesticides and promoting biodiversity-based ecological agriculture.

PANAP’s vision is a society that is truly democratic, equal, just, and culturally diverse; based on the principles of food sovereignty, gender justice and environmental sustainability. It has developed strong partnership with peasants, agricultural workers, and rural women movements in the Asia Pacific region and guided by the strong leadership of these grassroots groups, has grown into a reputable advocacy network with a firm Asian perspective.

PANAP’s mission lies in strengthening people’s movements to advance and assert food sovereignty, biodiversity-based ecological agriculture, and the empowerment of rural women; protect people and the environment from highly hazardous pesticides; defend the rice heritage of Asia; and resist the threats of corporate agriculture and neoliberal globalisation.

Currently, PANAP comprises 105 network partner organisations in the Asia Pacific region and links with about 400 other civil society organisations and grassroots organisations regionally and globally.

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#NoLandNoLife  #StopKillingFarmers