

Stop the Criminalisation and Repression of Climate and Environmental Protests around the World

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Criminalisation and repression of climate and environmental activists has received increasing attention and is taking place across the world in both more and less democratic countries. It focuses state policy on punishing dissent against inaction on climate and environmental change instead of taking adequate action on these issues. In criminalising and repressing climate and environmental activists, states depoliticise them. These are authoritarian moves that are not consistent with the ideals of vibrant civil societies in liberal democracies.



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Policy recommendations

- State actors should operate with a **presumption against criminalising climate and environmental protest**, as protest should be regarded as a reasonable response to the urgent and existential nature of the climate crisis.
- Mechanisms of **deliberative democracy** should be implemented to generate **legal and policy definitions** of the meaning of terms like "serious disruption" or "organised crime", used in protest cases.
- Public authorities must conduct regular evaluations and publish data on the extent to which **safeguarding the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression** has been the rule and any restrictions to those rights only strict exceptions.
- The use of **anti-terror and anti-organised crime legislation** against climate and environmental activists **must stop**.
- States must ensure that the Right to Life (Article 3, UN Human Rights Declaration) is protected and that **environmental activists are not killed** for their work
- A **participatory approach** to the governance of extractivist projects should be implemented. To reduce conflict, criminalisation, and repression, such projects ought to be contingent on buy-in from both **local stakeholders** and appropriate bodies that take the **climate and environmental risks** into consideration.

About the research

This study explores patterns of criminalisation and repression of climate and environmental protest around the world and new laws and powers that criminalise and repress activists being introduced and/or used.

Concerning trends include:

- Over 2,000 Environmental Defenders have been killed since 2012
- Police violence and arrests are common
- There has been a flurry of new legislation criminalising climate and environmental activists that often undermine existing Human and Civil Rights legislation and conventions
- Legislation intended to be used against organised crime and terrorism are used against climate and environmental activists
- Protesters are sentenced to lengthy prison sentences designed to act as a deterrence to future activists



Key findings

We have identified four broad mechanisms through which climate and environmental protests are criminalised and repressed:

1. **Anti-Protest Laws** are introduced. These may criminalise groups, introduce new crimes, increase punishment for already existing crimes, increase police powers to restrict protest, and give police impunity when harming activists as part of policing protests.
2. Protest is criminalised through **prosecution and courts**. This involves using existing legislation, including anti-terror or anti-organised crime laws, for the new purpose of curbing climate and environmental protest. It involves prohibiting mentions of climate/environmental change in court proceedings, or changing court processes to decrease the possibility of activists being found not guilty.
3. Climate and environmental protests are criminalised through **policing**, carried out by state (police, military) and non-state actors (private security, organised crime). This includes preventing protests taking place, stop and search, arrests, physical violence, infiltration of movements, and threats and intimidation.
4. **Killings and disappearances** of activists are common in some countries. These are a continuation of policing, since they are carried out (or permitted) by the same actors and often follow death threats and other forms of intimidation.

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Further information

The [full report](#), based on data from Armed Conflict Location & Event Data ([ACLED](#)) and [Global Witness](#) can be found [here](#).

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