



COP 30 Media Advisory: Centering Environmental Defenders in Climate Decision-Making

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Environmental defenders are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, yet across the world they face escalating threats—from violence and criminalisation to exclusion from decisions that shape their futures. In [launching a recent report](#) to the United Nations Human Rights Council, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders said: “In their struggle to keep control of the narrative around climate action, States are repressing the voices of the exact people they should be working alongside.”

Emblematic of these threats, in Vietnam, six high-profile climate leaders and energy experts have been arrested and imprisoned since 2021. The targeted arrests have taken place alongside high-level commitments on climate change by the government of Vietnam in international forums - including reaching net zero by 2050 and implementing a just energy transition. Yet as COP30 gets underway, environmental public interest lawyer [Dang Dinh Bach](#) languishes in prison serving a five-year sentence on wrongful charges following a campaign to shift the country away from reliance on coal. [More details are available here.](#)

The Vietnam Climate Defenders Coalition (VCDC) is a group of over thirty human rights and climate justice organisations advocating for the release of those wrongfully imprisoned in Vietnam and calling for full and free participation in decisions on the response to climate change and a just energy transition. We believe that human rights – and the voices of those most affected – are at the center of meaningful climate action. Protecting environmental defenders is critical to ensuring just, inclusive, and effective solutions to the climate crisis.

VCDC supports the [Leaders Network for Environmental Activists and Defenders](#) (LEAD), a direct response to the urgent reality faced by environmental defenders. As a platform co-created by and for defenders, LEAD brings together governments, environmental defenders, multilateral institutions, and civil society in a collaborative space designed to elevate defenders’ voices, experiences, and solutions. **LEAD will launch at COP30 through a series of events** aimed at securing high-level political commitments, bridging climate and human rights agendas, and advancing a rights-based approach to environmental governance. Information on the events on how to join is [available here.](#)

Tuesday, November 11

Environmental Defenders & Communities: A Cross-cutting Priority in Climate Negotiations & Decisions [Open Event]

Location: Blue Zone Side Event Room 8, **Time:** 11h30–13h00

Details: All negotiations should integrate discussions that recognize the rights of EHRDs, ensure their protection, and guarantee their active participation in shaping climate decisions. The event will facilitate a dialogue among member states, defenders, CSOs, and UN Special Procedures. **Organizer:** Global Witness (GW) and allied organizations.

Launching the LEAD Initiative - Grassroots Panels and Reception [Open Event]

Location: Grassroots Movement for Climate – Travessa Piedade, 426, Bairro Reduto, Belém

Time: 16h30–21h15

Details: A series of panels with defenders, civil society, and governments to discuss the launch of LEAD and plans for 2026 and beyond. Concludes with a networking reception.

Organizer: Global Witness (GW) and allied organizations, events@globalwitness.org.

Thursday November 13

Official High-Level Launch of LEAD [Invitation only]

Location: Ford Pavilion, Blue Zone

Time: 13h-14h30

Details: The formal launch moment of LEAD at COP30, with high-level representatives, governments, UN, donors, alongside defenders. Speakers include Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile; Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention; and others.

Organizer: European Center for Not-For-Profit Law Stichting and allied organizations.

Monday 17 November

Plan to Accelerate Solutions for Environmental Defenders [Open Event]

Location: Axis 5 Thematic Room, Blue Zone **Time:** 11:00-12:30

Details: The Brazilian Ministries of Indigenous Peoples (MPI) and Human Rights and Citizenship (MDHC) will present their Acceleration Plan for Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) within the Global Stocktake (GST) framework and express their collective commitment to implement actions aligned with LEAD.

Contacts

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