

17 September 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this session. Crude Accountability is concerned about the shrinking space for civil society in many countries across the OSCE region. I would like to focus specifically on threats to environmental defenders in the region, who are increasingly under threat, and who are exposed to grave risks simply for defending citizens' rights to a clean and healthy environment, and the right to participate in environmentally significant decision-making.

According to the international watchdog group, Global Witness, 2017 was the deadliest year on record for environmental defenders globally, with 207 environmental and land defenders killed around the world.

Unfortunately, environmental protection is dangerous work in the OSCE region as well. On December 28, 2017, Andrey Rudomakha, the coordinator of Environmental Watch on the North Caucasus, was brutally beaten as he returned from an environmental monitoring expedition to his office in Krasnodar, Russia. His attackers viciously punched him in the face, knocking him to the ground, and then repeatedly kicked him in the face, head, and torso. As a result, Andrey was hospitalized for weeks with a broken nose, fractured skull, concussion, broken teeth, and other physical trauma. Although the attack was captured on video and the international environmental and human rights community sent numerous complaints and appeals to the Russian government, to date, his attackers have not been caught.

This is not the only attack on Environmental Watch members, merely the most severe, and environmental defenders from many regions of Russia have also suffered brutal attacks.

Physical attacks are not the only threats to environmental defenders in the region. They are also subject to imprisonment, such as in the case of Max Bokaev in Kazakhstan, who was imprisoned following the land protests in 2016. They are subject to frozen bank accounts, false legal accusations resulting in expensive and multi-year legal processes. And they are also accused of being foreign agents or working for foreign governments, as is the case, also in Kazakhstan, of environmental defenders who fought for 15 years for the relocation of the village of Berezovka away from the toxic Karachaganak oil and gas condensate field. It has been almost 4 years since 25 children of Berezovka were poisoned by toxic emissions from the Karachaganak Field. In spite of a diagnosis of toxic encephalopathy for those children who were able to be diagnosed abroad, the Kazakhstani government has done nothing to help these permanently damaged children.

Environmental defenders in the OSCE region are defending basic human rights, and they deserve the same protections as any other human rights defender. We call on the OSCE to work for the protection of environmentalists throughout the OSCE region. Thank you.