



His Holiness:
Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City

Holy Father, Pope Francis,

Through this letter we salute Your Holiness as a group of people from different organizations and countries united by one concern: to protect and defend the rights and lives of the poorest, as well as Mother Nature, and all what she offers us. First of all, we will want to thank the commitment that Your Holiness has taken with the publication of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* on the Care of Our Common House. This letter not only helps us to reaffirm the urgent challenge of protecting our common home but also it encourages us to unite in search of sustainable and comprehensive development which breaks with the current economic model and restores the relationship between people and nature.

Holy Father, today we write to you with a sense of optimism and sadness. Optimism, because increasingly we see signs of a movement that moves to protect the home we share. We have seen this at the most local level, for example, with the struggle of fishing communities in the Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo against the threats of oil to nature and their livelihoods. In Nigeria, oil insurgency against the state has resumed with bombings of oil facilities by militants. We see at community level with the defense of forests against the advance of illegal mining in the region of Madre de Dios (Peru). In the Philippines, everyday environment and community rights advocates continue to fight against different forms of development aggression—large-scale mining, land conversion, mono-crop plantations, dams, and so on. We also see it today transnationally with the signing of a treaty between the First Nations of Canada and Aboriginal communities in the United States to combat the exploitation and distribution of oil from tar sands in Alberta. At the institutional level, we welcome the change in approach of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to handle cases of environmental destruction, overexploitation of natural resources and illegal dispossession of communities from their land, which too often affects the poorest.

We however also write with a sense of sadness, because each of these movements which are advocating for a new model which takes into account the environment and local cultural values and knowledge and one where joint and respectful solutions for the planet that meet the needs of today's and future generations, are met with increasing violence. Worldwide, every week, at least three environmental defenders are killed¹ and this violence is increasing. Every day, land rights defenders especially indigenous peoples, are in danger of being hurt or killed in the attempt to silence their voice against development projects which if they allow will also lead to their land and culture's destruction, a slow and painful sorrow for the country's poor and marginalized people. Regrettably, this is a reality in most parts of the world where land and natural resources are being plundered. In Latin America, Asia and Africa, we are losing the leaders who lead this new course, asking for a reversal of the unsustainable current economic system that does not meet the needs of the poor and destroys Mother Earth. The few who have the courage to stand up and put limits on this unsustainable development, calling for the protection of

¹> In studies of 2014 and 2015, the organization Global Witness shows how dramatically the number of killings environmental and land defenders has increased, due to the increasing pressure on the planet's resources. They request measures to combat the impunity of perpetrators, protect citizens and address the root causes of the environmental crisis. More at: <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/deadly-environment/> and <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/reports/dangerous-ground/>



ecosystems, park rangers who give their lives for the defense of the earth², the defenders fighting for fair distribution of natural resources increasingly fall victim to threats and intimidation. We pray to end this.

With this letter, Holy Father, and on the day of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, we ask you to be a patron for all environmental defenders who risk their lives by intimately caring about, and fighting for the preservation of our common home.

Every year dozens of homicides go unpunished and this leaves hundreds of families destroyed. As it was the case with the murder of the Honduran activist Berta Cáceres. We fear that these killings and violations, if they are not highly condemned at the highest level of international politics, will only increase and will give a blank check for other environmental defenders to be silenced. As the shortage of raw materials is increasing worldwide, the struggle for natural resources is becoming increasingly grim and violent. Therefore, it is necessary to take urgent and global measures to protect the environment and strengthen this movement of resistance and renovation.

Today more and more people are standing up and risking their lives for our future and the future of our common home, announcing the necessary change that your Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* foretold; it is about to happen. Yes, we are optimistic because every day leaders in all areas of the world show us the way to go and ask to be part of a fair and transparent dialogue. If we want to reach concrete solutions to combat this cultural and ecological crisis we must unite, show solidarity and ensure that the voice and concerns of these leaders are heard and that this new ecological awareness is protected for the good of humanity and our common home.

With humility and our deepest respect, we salute Your Holiness,

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| 5. | <i>Digna de Bruin</i> | <i>Law in Balance</i> | <i>The Netherlands</i> |
| 6. | <i>J. Kim Wright</i> | <i>Integrative Law Movement</i> | <i>USA</i> |
| 7. | <i>Lenin Valencia</i> | <i>Sociedad Peruana de Derecho Ambiental (SPDA)</i> | <i>Peru</i> |
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| 9. | <i>Gerard Moorman</i> | <i>Missionary Commission of the Conference of Dutch Religious</i> | <i>The Netherlands</i> |

² In Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo more than 150 rangers have died defending the integrity of the park and its wildlife.



Institutes

10. Jan van de Venis	<i>Stand Up for Your Rights & JustLaw</i>	<i>The Netherlands</i>
11. Katy Olivia Tergouw	<i>Stop Ecocide</i>	<i>The Netherlands</i>
12. Valerie Cabanes	<i>End Ecocide on Earth</i>	<i>France</i>
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55. <i>Coordination</i>	<i>Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)</i>	<i>Philippines</i>
56. <i>Coordination</i>	<i>Visayas State University- Institute for Strategic Research and Development</i>	<i>Philippines</i>



Studies (VSU-ISRDS)

57. <i>Coordination</i>	<i>Travesia, Inc.</i>	<i>Philippines</i>
58. <i>Coordination</i>	<i>Non-Timber Forest Products-Exchange Program (NTFP-EP)</i>	<i>Philippines</i>
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67. <i>Coordination</i>	<i>Ancestral Lands and Domains Watch (ALDAW)</i>	<i>Philippines</i>
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*Environmental
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| 73. <i>Beatrice Olivastri, Chief Executive Officer</i> | <i>Friends of the Earth Canada</i> | <i>Canada</i> |
| 74. <i>Mathieu Bonnet and Gert-Peter Bruch</i> | <i>Planète Amazone</i> | <i>France</i> |
| 75. <i>Vance Martin, President</i> | <i>WILD Foundation</i> | <i>USA</i> |
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