

Press Release

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Human rights defenders: are mining companies playing their part?

For full Research Insight: <https://www.responsibleminingfoundation.org/research/defenders2020/>

The number of threats towards and killings of human rights and land defenders is growing, particularly in relation to mining operations and extractives projects. Joint efforts are needed from all stakeholders to address the issue, as governments, the private sector and society in general have a shared responsibility. But large-scale mining companies can play a more compelling part. The latest [RMI Report 2020](#) reveals that most companies fail to demonstrate even a commitment to respect the internationally accepted rights and protections accorded to human rights defenders

Human rights defenders play a vitally important role in standing up against human rights abuses that can be associated with the presence of mining operations. Since 2002, when Global Witness started tracking the killings of defenders, mining has always been the most dangerous sector for land and environmental defenders – 43 of the 168 killings documented for 2018. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the risks faced by defenders. All mining companies, whether or not their operations have been associated with attacks on defenders, suffer the reputational impacts they generate and can face years' long negative perceptions and prejudicial responses from local stakeholders, investors and financiers.

As a practical step to support the global effort to protect defenders, mining companies can at least formalise their commitment to respect the rights and protections accorded to human rights defenders. But while almost all companies assessed in the RMI Report 2020 refer to some extent to human rights in their corporate policies, 85% (32 companies) have not made any form of commitment to specifically respect the rights of human rights defenders. And of the six companies that have made some level of explicit commitment, only one company (Newmont) stands out as having made a formal commitment, endorsed by senior management, on this issue. The [RMI Report 2020](#) is an evidence-based assessment of the economic, environmental, social and governance (EESG) policies and practices of 38 large-scale mining companies.

As a proactive measure, mining companies can help tackle one of the root causes of risk, by guaranteeing that communities can make free and informed choices about whether and how their land and resources are used. Getting this right requires articulate corporate leadership and operational evidence of respect for internationally agreed precepts to ensure the realisation of human rights for all, and legitimacy for mining operations.

[Download the full Research Insight here \(pdf\)](#)

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About the Responsible Mining Foundation

The Responsible Mining Foundation (RMF) is an independent research organisation that encourages continuous improvement in responsible mining across the industry by developing tools and frameworks, sharing public-interest data and enabling informed and constructive engagement between mining companies and other stakeholders. The Foundation does not accept funding or other contributions from the mining industry.

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