Highlighting the risks that environmental defenders face around the world and commending their role in defending human rights, combating climate chaos, and supporting a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. Merkley (for himself, Mr. Kaine, Mr. Booker, Mr. Whitehouse, and Mr. Padilla) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on 

RESOLUTION

Highlighting the risks that environmental defenders face around the world and commending their role in defending human rights, combating climate chaos, and supporting a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

Whereas, around the world, environmental defenders—individuals exercising their human rights to try to peacefully protect an area or the natural resources of such area from negative environmental impact by an ongoing or proposed activity—face persecution from government, private sector, and criminal actors, including restrictions on free speech and assembly, criminalization, civil lawsuits, surveillance, harassment, verbal, cyber, and physical intimidation, sexual assault, and targeted murder;
Whereas at least 1,733 environmental defenders have been reported killed since 2012, with at least 200 killed in 2021;

Whereas at least 1,179 environmental defenders have been reported killed in Latin America and the Caribbean since 2012, making it the region with the highest number of environmental defender deaths and persecution overall, exemplified by the cases of—

(1) Homero Gómez González, who was forcibly disappeared and found dead in Mexico with reported signs of torture after fighting to protect the wintering grounds of the monarch butterfly from illegal logging;

(2) Bruno Pereira, an advocate for the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil’s Amazon, who received threats and was murdered for standing up to illegal logging, mining, and drug trafficking;

(3) Berta Cáceres, a Lencas Indigenous woman, whose murder was ordered by the Honduran company, Desarrollos Energéticos SA, for organizing protests that led to the cancellation of the proposed Agua Zarca Dam; and

(4) the Q’eqchi Mayan Indigenous community, which faces defamation, violent evictions, harassment, and assault by the Guatemalan National Civil Police Force for peacefully protesting the operations of the Fénix mine and growth of palm plantations on their territory;

Whereas at least 427 environmental defenders have been reported killed in Asia since 2012, and governments in the region have also targeted environmental defenders in other manners, including—
(1) the Government of Vietnam, which has sought to silence environmental activist Dang Dinh Bach through imprisonment;

(2) the Government of the Philippines, which has enacted red-tagging campaigns to turn public sentiment against organizations like the Kalikasan People’s Network for the Environment; and

(3) the Government of the People’s Republic of China, which has falsely charged environmental activists Li Genshan, Zhang Baoqi, and Niu Haibo for illegally hunting or killing wildlife;

Whereas the Government of Egypt hosted the 27th Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, while government security forces held environmental activists Ahmed Amasha and Seif Fateen in extended, arbitrary pretrial detention for joining a terrorist group after forcibly disappearing and torturing them for exercising their rights to free expression;

Whereas Ali Ulvi Büyüknohotçu and Aysin Büyüknohotçu of Türkiye won lawsuits against mining companies who illegally operated pollution-creating quarries, but were shot and killed by gunmen with alleged ties to those companies;

Whereas fossil fuel companies, mining operations, agribusiness plantations, and mega dams are major causes of environmental destruction and are also being used to drive communities from their homes and their lands;

Whereas rampant corruption and weak rule of law enables those targeting environmental defenders to operate with impunity; and
Whereas civil society is, and should be, a powerful voice for individuals experiencing and at risk from the effects of worsening climate chaos, including Indigenous Peoples whose ancestral rights, lives, traditional lands, and cultural practices are disproportionately threatened by climate chaos: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) commends and expresses solidarity with environmental defenders as crucial members of civil society who defend both human rights and the environment and play a crucial role in tackling climate chaos;

(2) strongly condemns the targeting, harassment, and unlawful detention of any individual or group for exercising their rights of free association and expression, including advocacy on environmental matters, reporting and seeking information on environmental violations and abuses, or cooperation with local, regional, national, or international mechanisms;

(4) welcomes the relevant principles of United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/76/300 (2022) as advancing the global conversation towards the importance of a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as an international human right;

(5) welcomes the United States Government’s assertion during its time as Summit Chair of the Ninth Summit of the Americas that environmental defenders should not be denied access to basic environmental information, public participation in proposed projects that would affect their communities, or justice as they seek legal redress from government authorities;

(6) urges the United States Government to consult and cooperate in good faith with Indigenous Peoples who are concerned with the environment in order to obtain the free, prior, and informed consent of such Indigenous Peoples, without coercion, prior to the approval of any project affecting the lands, territories, religious practices, or other natural and cultural resources of such Indigenous Peoples;

(7) welcomes the work of the Department of State-led Interagency Working Group, which invites more than 1000 officials across more than 20 Federal agencies, to reduce violence against environ-
mental defenders and to properly monitor and address the expanding nature and cases of persecution against environmental defenders;

(8) calls for the President to prioritize the global leadership of the United States in tackling reprisals against environmental defenders through a whole-of-government approach in collaboration with foreign governments, multilateral organizations, and civil society organizations;

(9) urges the Department of State to integrate concerns about environmental defenders in all appropriate engagements to exert diplomatic pressure and speak out publicly in countries where environmental defenders are at risk;

(10) requests that the Department of State establish a position focused on environmental defenders within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor;

(11) requests that the United States Agency for International Development prioritize the finalization of an independent accountability mechanism and the establishment of a position to integrate protection of environmental defenders across broader environmental, economic growth, and human rights and democracy programming in order to better achieve its
2022-2030 Climate Strategy, which seeks to promote a safe and secure political environment at all levels of governance for Indigenous Peoples, human rights and environmental defenders, and local communities to participate in climate actions and the protection of civil society and environmental defenders, including land and resource rights for effective climate outcomes;

(12) encourages the United States International Development Finance Corporation to improve transparency through its independent accountability mechanism, conduct due diligence with partners, and engage in local consultation processes based on free, prior, and informed consent;

(13) encourages the United States Government to use its voice and vote within international financial institutions to ensure that United States taxpayer dollars do not support individuals, foreign governments, or private sector entities that adversely affect the environment or target or expose to harm persons who speak out against such individuals and entities;

(14) encourages the United States to use its leadership in the United Nations Human Rights Council to ensure that the intergovernmental work-
ing group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights that was adopted by United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/26/9 (2014), creates an internationally legally binding instrument that supports and protects human rights defenders, including environmental defenders;

(15) calls for responsible conduct of United States companies, financial institutions, and investors in relation to the freedoms and rights of Indigenous communities and other environmental defenders, particularly in the agribusiness, fossil fuel, mining, and hydroelectricity sectors; and

(16) calls for the United States to use its influence as a member of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to push for the Conference of Parties to only take place in countries that have and actively encourage a thriving civil society and have taken concrete actions to tackle climate chaos, which stands in contrast to the selection of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates who were selected as hosts in 2022 and 2023, respectively.