

A woman with dark hair, wearing a blue and white striped shirt, is shouting with her mouth wide open. In the background, there are yellow and blue banners with the text 'FIGHT THE S15'.

up front

autumn / winter 2019

waronwant.org

**CHILLING CLAMPDOWN ON
HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS**

**Fighting back against
SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

**COMMUNITIES
resisting mining**

**Corporate courts
in ARMENIA**

**WAR
ON
WANT**

FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY

WELCOME



At War on Want we believe that a just world is possible. As part of our fight against the root causes of poverty and human rights violations, we

work directly with inspirational communities, grassroots groups and social movements in the struggle for a better world.

In this edition of *Up Front* we call on you to stand with us in defending the defenders: the frontline communities struggling for justice. From the Palestinian peoples defending their rights against Trump's so-called 'Deal of the Century', to the Colombian communities battling UK coal giants, and the South African shack dwellers fighting for decent housing and services. Hear from the McDonald's workers fighting sexual harassment on page 6, and meet the frontline Armenian communities resisting mining and the threat of corporate courts on page 9. It is essential that the world's poorest people do not pay the price of tackling the climate crisis – turn to page 4 for our take on a just transition.

Thank you as always for your membership of War on Want, it's your support that makes our work possible. In solidarity,

Asad Rehman
Executive Director



FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY

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DEFENDING THE DEFENDERS

Standing with frontline communities struggling for justice

At the end of August, US congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar were set to travel on an official delegation to Palestine. But days before their departure, the Government of Israel, goaded on by US President Donald Trump, banned them from entering. The congresswomen have spoken out consistently on social justice issues, including Palestinian rights (Tlaib is Palestinian herself), and it was clear that they were being punished for raising their voices.

Tlaib and Omar are not the first to be banned by Israel. As a matter of policy, Israel prevents millions of Palestinian refugees from accessing their internationally recognised right of return to the homes from which they were expelled. Palestinian refugees are denied their return as a group. But Israel has often prevented individuals of many backgrounds from entering the country if they are suspected to likely speak out about what they see. The UN appointed Special Rapporteurs reporting on Israel's occupation have been denied entry for years, forced instead to conduct their investigations from outside the country. Why? Because Israel's government doesn't like it that they call out its systematic violations of international law.

And now, emboldened by a new class of powerful far-right allies around the world, Israel is ramping up its assault on human rights defenders. Palestinian human rights activists, lawyers and journalists are routinely harassed, threatened, arbitrarily arrested or prevented from traveling. Widely respected Palestinian human rights organisations are targeted by the Israeli government, their work smeared and maligned with crude misinformation campaigns aimed at convincing donors and partners in North America and Europe to cut ties with them.

These threats extended to War on Want when we were blacklisted by Israel last year over our outspoken support for Palestinian rights and campaigns for accountability for Israel's violations.



What can we do to defend the defenders?

In the face of these shameless attacks, we will not be bullied into silence, and we will do everything we can to increase our support for our partners and their crucial work. Here are the key approaches guiding our response to this global shrinking space for civil society, and the attacks on human rights defenders:

- **Don't lose sight of the bigger picture.** Creating a distraction is part of the strategy of the attackers, so to defend our partners and allies, we must talk about the repression they face and the important work that they do. This helps keep the work going, and provides important context as to why they're being attacked in the first place.
- **Put energy into connecting, rather than retreating inward.** When governments impose travel bans, they aim to isolate social movements and cut off their international support networks. Our job in those moments is to provide as many opportunities as possible for our partners to speak, write and meet with others so that their network of support is expanded.
- **Keep asking 'how does oppression abroad relate to our systems here in the UK?'** War and repression, corporate plunder and extraction, often starts here, led by corporations with addresses right here in the UK that are profiting from land grabs, extractive mining, house demolitions or bombing civilian areas. While we support our partners in their work on the ground, we can also support them by pushing back against those here that are profiting from repression and exploitation abroad.

Israel's attempts to silence Palestinians and their allies are a part of a larger campaign to clamp down on human rights defenders, to make our work impossible and to isolate Palestinians from the powerful international solidarity movement that has formed in support of justice and equality.

Netanyahu's government is not alone in its effort to shut down dissent and crush social movements. The toxic discourse and policies of far-right leaders around the world – Modi, Bolsonaro, Trump, Mohammad bin Salman, Orban and others – seek to fuel hatred and roll back universal human rights. From India's military lockdown of Kashmir, to engineered disasters to make way for land grabs in Brazil, the newest wave of far-right leaders and movements brazenly share notes with each other on how to best plunder, destroy and exploit. **And all of them are increasing attacks on human rights defenders, including War on Want's international partners: across the Global South activists contesting the harmful effects of extractivism now constitute the majority of victims of assassination and forced 'disappearances'.**

© Christian McLaughlin



Jakeline Romero Epiayu is an indigenous human rights defender with **Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuu** – Wayuu Women's Strength. Along with many other community leaders, she has recently been targeted with death threats that directly link her to her activism defending indigenous rights in the face of the colossal Cerrejón mine. These threats tend to appear at the very same time defenders from La Guajira travel to the UK to denounce the company's impacts.

War on Want stands in solidarity with frontline human rights defenders across the world in their struggle for justice. Thank you for standing with us.

A justice transition

The poorest **must not** pay the price of tackling the climate crisis



© Tom Lebert

In every corner of the world the poorest and most vulnerable are dealing with the devastating impacts of killer floods, droughts and famines. From the near destruction of Bermuda by one of the most powerful hurricanes ever recorded, the burning of the Amazon in Brazil, to Mozambique, where a single storm left a million people facing starvation, to the Indian subcontinent where a heat wave of 53.5°C has left millions without access to fresh water and is impacting food production for billions.

The inequality in this crisis is stark. The poorest 50% of the world's population are only responsible for 10% of global emissions, but they are on the frontline losing their lives, homes and livelihoods. The wealthiest, who are most responsible for global emissions, are impacted the least.

The climate crisis is fanning the existing flames of economic inequality and poverty, resulting in an ever deepening crisis of hunger, increased conflict and deepening existing racial and gender inequalities.

The new wave of climate protests, both in the UK and across the Global North has led to the climate emergency hurtling up the political agenda, with calls for a Green New Deal to tackle the climate crisis as well as to address the failed policies of austerity that have driven record levels of inequality and poverty in rich countries.

But action in rich countries can't be done at the expense of the poorest in the world. Whilst climate change is fundamentally an issue of the global commons, and needs a global response, it must also address at its core the crisis of global inequality.

The poorest half of the world are being denied the right to a dignified life, forced to survive on less than \$5 a day, with the majority denied the right to energy, and many facing issues of hunger. The starting point for any climate emergency is the recognition that the bloody legacy of colonialism and neoliberalism with its structural adjustment programmes, unfair trade agreements and the unfettered power of corporations has both amassed huge wealth for the richest and fuelled the climate crisis.

Business as usual, tinkering around the edges, is simply not an option. We need a bold new vision, a global green deal for people that:

- guarantees everyone the right to a dignified life
- makes energy a public good with the extraction, production and delivery of energy no longer the preserve of private profit-making companies
- guarantees people the right to food and ends destructive industrial agri-business
- ensures companies are made legally responsible for all parts of their supply chains, including all their environmental and social impacts
- delivers a Living Wage for all the world's citizens alongside universal public services.

Seven decades after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we must finally realise those rights and make housing, education, health and public services a reality for the many and not just the few.

Colombian communities are **battling** **UK coal giants** to save La Guajira

Mining company Carbones del Cerrejón began diverting the Bruno River in La Guajira in 2016 with the aim of extracting approximately 35 million tonnes of coal from the riverbed – coal destined for Europe, North America and Asia.

© Leyli Horra

When local Wayuu indigenous communities and their allies took legal action against the expansion of the mine and the diversion of this vital water source the court ruled in their favour. However this ruling was not published in its entirety until earlier this year when the works were already nearly finished.

This is the latest in a long list of incidents that point to the systematic violation of the human rights of communities in La Guajira, as well as the degradation of the environment, as a result of coal extraction by Cerrejón. The mine puts both the fragile tropical dry forest ecosystem and the communities who depend on the river at high risk, as the Constitutional Court highlighted in its ruling.

Rather than consult with mining-affected communities as the court ordered, Carbones del Cerrejón and Colombian government bodies allowed the diversion to continue, preventing the water from being returned to its natural course.

We visited El Rocio, a small community bordering the Bruno River, where school teacher Carmen Sierra told us about her community's struggle:



Carmen Sierra

“Cerrejón decided to divert the Bruno stream without consulting any of the surrounding communities, like ours, which is 30 metres away from the stream and which depends directly on its waters.”

The region is going through a humanitarian crisis due to lack of access to water, leading to the deaths of many indigenous children. Meanwhile, Cerrejón continues to divert and affect the little sources of water we have left.”

This summer Cerrejón company president Guillermo Fonseca issued an open letter in which he accused communities and NGOs of halting the mine expansion plans – including affecting the jobs of workers – due to their backing of a lawsuit calling for the re-examination of the company's environmental licences.

Communities have been uncompromising in their response, accusing Mr Fonseca of deliberately pitting them against workers, when what they are calling for is respect and reparations for human rights violations suffered for decades.

Following the open letter, threats against leaders in La Guajira have increased exponentially, many of them from people self-identifying as mine workers who, following Mr. Fonseca's letter, perceive their jobs to be at risk. There have been several attacks against community leaders, including in August, when an assassination attempt was made against a leader in her home.

The burning of coal continues to be the one of the most polluting industries, emitting dangerous quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, exacerbating our planetary crisis and causing the loss of livelihoods for communities on the frontline.

Defending the land rights of indigenous communities is crucial in the fight to halt the breakdown of our planet's ecosystems. This should be the basis of any discussion about how to transition away from an economy dependent on fossil fuels.

Why I'm fighting back against sexual

My name is Christine Hayes, I have worked at McDonald's for over three years.

In May, I protested outside McDonald's HQ in Chicago and stood with other McDonald's workers to call for an end to the culture of sexual harassment in their stores.

I started to work at McDonald's when I'd just moved to London. Like everybody I needed a job to pay for the roof over my head, to put food in my mouth and have enough money to survive. If I knew then, what I know now, about what I was walking into, I would never have taken that job.

Whilst working there, I suffered sexual harassment. It makes you feel extremely uncomfortable. You feel degraded. I can't put into words how badly I was treated. Managers did not enforce proper boundaries. There was no training on sexual harassment and proper procedures were not followed. I was fobbed off.

Sexual harassment can make you feel really alone. It's really difficult to handle a situation like that. You want to go home and just ignore it. Pretend it didn't happen. But it doesn't go away. You still have to go to work every single day and face it. You don't know what to do or say.



harassment at McDonald's

Now, with the help of my union, I am standing up to say that what happened is not okay. It's not been the easiest thing in the world to do. It's really difficult. It feels hard, but once you do it and you realise the impact it has on other people, it makes you feel great. I've decided that I'm not going to be degraded any more.

There are thousands of people, thousands of men and women, out there suffering sexual harassment. They're trying to carry on as if it's normal. But it's not normal. It is not okay. It can cost you your mental health. So we need to stand up and start saying NO. We need to make sure no one ever has to feel like that anymore.

It has been empowering to meet with other McDonald's workers who have told me their stories, as I've explained my story to them. When we come together we are powerful. We can tell our stories out loud and together we can change the story of sexual harassment at McDonalds.

Supporting workers to speak out

War on Want stands in active solidarity with workers on the front lines of the struggle against corporate globalisation all around the world. In particular we support the empowerment of women as agents of change, striving to enable a new generation of women to break through the barriers of social and economic exploitation and take their place as the leaders in the struggle.

War on Want's Economic Justice campaigner Owen Espley has been supporting the McStrike to get media attention and mobilise public support for the workers striking against this powerful multinational. The workers are demanding a living wage, guaranteed hours and recognition of their union: the Bakers Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU). The McStrike has gained international media attention as low paid precarious workers go out on strike and speak out about the reality of life on poverty wages, never sure whether they will get the hours they need to survive.

We are coming together in a union. A union is the foundation we need to be able to change the environment we work in together. We shouldn't have to try and change this alone. Sexual harassment hurts people. No one should have to face it when they go into work to earn what they need to live.

McDonald's makes billions in profit from our hard work, but you can't put a price on our human rights. The time has come for McDonald's to stop ignoring this problem and start making the changes needed.

McDonald's must realise that us workers are not going to take this anymore. We are no longer facing this alone. All of us are going to stand together with our union and sort this problem out, once and for all.

Christine Hayes works at McDonald's in South London and is a member of the bakers union BFAWU



© Rainbow Collective

War on Want is running training for workers like Christine to prepare them to speak to the media. The training on handling media interviews emphasises setting their own boundaries and finding their own voice as they rise up and demand change. For too long the voices of low paid workers have been absent from the public debate about rights at work.

Read the latest about how you can support the McStrike at waronwant.org/McSolidarity

Palestinians defend their rights against 'Deal of the Century'

The so-called 'Deal of the Century' for peace in the Middle East peddled by the US administration is not a negotiation between equal parties. It is a plan to strip millions of Palestinian refugees of their rights and to make way for more land grabs.

Over the past two years, the US has begun attempts to erase the status of some five million Palestinian refugees and undermine their basic rights. From the defunding of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, to the US embassy move to Jerusalem, to President Trump's announcement that he will recognise Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights, the 'Deal' is already unashamedly being implemented despite not being officially announced until after the Israeli elections in September.

The devastating impacts of the US-Israel plan are painfully felt in occupied Jerusalem. Palestinians in Jerusalem were already facing hardship, but in the past year have been hit with record high incidents of home demolitions by Israeli security forces.



© Ryan Rodrick Beiler/Activestills

One morning in July, some 900 Israeli police and soldiers descended upon the Palestinian neighbourhood of Sur Baher, accompanying a large fleet of bulldozers brought in to demolish 70 flats. The large-scale operation began in the early hours of the morning while it was still dark, forcing families out of their homes.

Demolitions result from discriminatory city planning, under which it is nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits. Some 100,000 Palestinians in Jerusalem are at risk of having their homes demolished, while illegal Israeli settlements in the city increase at pace. Palestinians in Jerusalem also suffer from a lack of municipal services, and are subjected to a highly securitised environment, with checkpoints and a sophisticated surveillance system that keeps them 'under watch' at all times.

These demolitions come amid renewed momentum to further entrench and tighten Israeli control over key locations across East Jerusalem, and the increase in eviction cases forcibly transferring Palestinian communities out of the city. This brutality lies at the heart of Israel's **systematic violations of Palestinian rights**, now sanctioned and emboldened by the Trump administration through the 'Deal of the Century'.

It will take all of us working together to successfully defeat the Deal of the Century. Palestinians are pushing back against these attacks and need our solidarity.



© Ahmed Mezher/WAFA

Corporate courts in Armenia

In June War on Want visited Amulsar in the South of Armenia to interview communities at the centre of a protest against a gold mine. Set to open on their doorsteps, the communities fear that the mine will destroy their environment, landscape and livelihoods.

They're right to be worried. Amulsar is an area of outstanding beauty, and everywhere you go, families and communities are reliant on their relationship to the land. For an entire year, people from the towns and villages next to Amulsar Mountain have blockaded the entry roads to the mine, and have succeeded in completely shutting down construction.

But this amazing act of resistance is now being threatened by corporate courts, also known as Investor State Dispute Settlements, a lesser-known feature of modern trade deals that place an unbelievable amount of power and control into the hands of corporations.

Despite longstanding concerns from the local community, UK-registered mining company Lydian was given the go-ahead for the mine by the previous Armenian government, an authoritarian administration with a track record of police violence and repression of public protest.

With a new democratic government elected in 2018 communities in Amulsar felt they had a chance to make their voices heard, and started protesting, leading to the blockade.

The blockade is a community effort: adorned with colourful banners and flags, it is essentially a couple of caravans and huts placed on the road where those from surrounding towns and villages present a united front to stop construction vehicles from entering. They gather together, sing, cook and are supported by their families and communities. Shirak Buniatyan, who has spent months at the blockade, said: "I'm ready to give my life to defend it." Ani Khachatryan, an environmental activist who lived at the blockade, said: "our struggle is for our future, and for our future generations...they can't stop us...they can even kill us, we're going to the end."

However, in late August, despite the concerns of thousands of residents near the mine, the Armenian government caved to corporate pressure and gave the go-ahead to the mine. **Lydian was asking for a pay-out equivalent to two thirds of Armenia's annual budget.**

This is corporate courts in action – holding the government to ransom until it backs down. What is on the table is billions in compensation. It sounds like a Kafkaesque situation, and it is. The Armenian government is right to be worried – these corporate courts have been successfully used to strip billions from the public purse of governments that desperately need that money to spend on public services.

Find out more about our campaign to stop corporate courts at waronwant.org/stop-isds

Struggle for decent housing in South Africa

25 years after the end of apartheid South Africa is still one of the most unequal countries in the world.



© Abahlali

Successive governments have failed to deliver on the promise of new homes and thousands of people are forced to live in crowded, informal settlements without decent housing, electricity, running water or sanitation services.

War on Want is proud of our long-standing partnership with Abahlali base Mjondolo ('people who live in shacks') in their struggle for decent housing and services for all. The movement began in 2005 when residents in Kennedy Road settlement protested at the sale of a nearby land, land that had been promised for new public housing but was instead sold to a private developer.

Today Abahlali is one of South Africa's largest and most radical social movements of shack dwellers with 64 community branches and over 66,000 members. The South African government is failing impoverished people who are waiting for public houses that haven't been built or have been allocated through corrupt processes. Abahlali seeks reform from the government 'above' and also supports shack dwellers own 'land reform from below'.

New City community in Durban exemplifies the struggle and successes of Abahlali. The community began when shack dwellers decided to build their own homes on unoccupied government land. Durban city Government refused to engage with the community and instead launched a series of brutal evictions. Each time homes were destroyed but each time the community came back to re-build as Abahlali supported them to take legal action. In 2017 Abahlali won a significant court case that finally prevented any more evictions.

Since 2017 Abahlali has continued to lobby Durban city government departments to recognise and provide basic services such as sanitation, water and electricity. In July this year a breakthrough occurred when the city government agreed to connect New City to municipal services, and for the first time Abahlali's role in the community was positively supported by the elected Councillor. This is significant as Abahlali has previously been denounced and threatened by powerful political leaders in the ANC controlled city Government for its actions in challenging evictions and political corruption.

However, other settlements in Durban continue to experience illegal and intensely violent demolition of their homes in their struggle for decent housing. Recently in Azania & Ridgeview 100 homes were illegally demolished. There was no court order and extreme violence was used with rubber bullets fired on residents and tear gas thrown into shacks.



© Abahlali

Abahlali continues their fight to see the successes of New City brought to more shack dwellers and War on Want is proud to stand alongside them.

Shutting down the world's largest arms fair

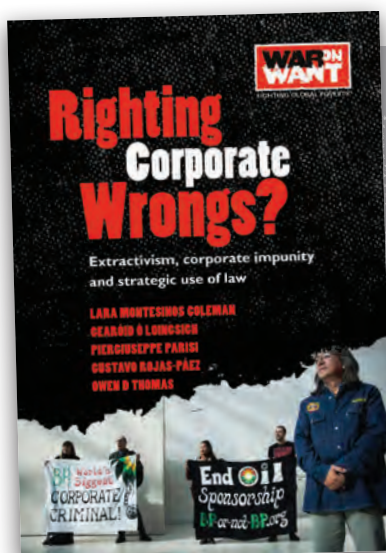
War and repression start here. Every two years, the global arms trade sets-up shop at ExCeL London for the DSEI (Defence and Security Equipment International) arms fair, to make deadly deals right here on our doorstep. Arms companies from repressive regimes show up to sell tools of death and destruction – including Israeli arms companies like Elbit Systems, which markets weapons as “combat proven” i.e. used on Palestinian civilians.

On 2 September, we co-hosted a day of creative action against the largest arms fair in the world, under the banner of Stop Arming Israel.

People of conscience performed street theatre, spoken word and dabke dancing in a festival of resistance, and took direct action to stop the arms fair!



© Darren Johnson



Righting corporate wrongs

In September we published *Righting Corporate Wrongs? Extractivism, corporate impunity and strategic use of law* which considers the strategic use of law in bringing trans-national corporations (TNCs) to justice from a social movement perspective. Assessing the approach of extra-territorial litigation (using the courts of rich countries), and exploring new avenues of legal innovation this book examines case studies from Latin America involving TNC giants such as BP, Ford and Coca-Cola.

Demanding trade justice

Our campaigning for trade justice and for an end to investor-state dispute settlements (ISDS or so-called ‘corporate courts’) in trade deals, received a boost when parliament’s International Trade Committee described the investment provisions as “hugely controversial”. The Committee issued a report in July that denounced the government’s failure to set out ‘even basic lines of policy’ over international investment agreements including its position on investor-state dispute settlements. In a time of political turmoil over Brexit, it is even more important that we keep up the pressure to make sure trade policies put the interests of people rather than the profits of corporations first.



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