

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office  
First Floor, Avoca Court  
Temple Road, Blackrock  
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org  
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750  
fax +353 1 212 1001

**BRUSSELS**

Front Line Defenders – EU Office  
Square Marie-Louise 72  
1000 Brussels  
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org  
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383  
fax +32 2 230 0028

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### **Mongolia: Woman Human Rights Defender Sukhgerel Dugersuren Facing Imminent Arrest**

On 2 August 2022, Mongolian woman human rights defender and Executive Director of Oyu Tolgoi Watch (OT Watch) **Sukhgerel Dugersuren** was informed by the General Intelligence Agency of Mongolia (GIA) that she is being investigated for committing crimes under the Criminal Code Article 19.4 “Illegal cooperation with foreign intelligence agency, agent”. She has also simultaneously been targeted by a smear campaign on social media. There is serious concern for her safety and the risk of imminent arrest.

[Sukhgerel Dugersuren](#) is a Mongolian woman human rights defender who works closely with communities impacted by large scale development projects. She has a long history of exposing human rights abuses and environmental degradation linked to large scale mining, energy and infrastructure projects. She is the Executive Director of Oyu Tolgoi Watch (OT Watch) – a Mongolian NGO monitoring the environmental and human rights impacts of Rio Tinto’s gold and copper mine Oyu Tolgoi – and Director of the Rivers without Boundaries Coalition in Mongolia which helps local communities to protect river ecosystems they depend on. OT Watch is part of the international Coalition for Human Rights in Development and Sukhgerel Dugersuren is a member of the advisory body for the Defenders in Development campaign.

On 3 August 2022, during a government briefing, the Minister of Justice and Internal Affairs of Mongolia, H. Nyambaatar, stated that the construction of the power plant had been suspended for two years. On 3 June 2022, an article written by Sukhgerel Dugersuren criticising the Erdeneburen hydroelectric power plant which is planned to be built on the Khovd River in Western Mongolia was published by The Third Pole.<sup>1</sup> The article raised concerns about the project, including about the safety of the construction, potential environmental impact given its location in an ecologically sensitive area of Tsambagarav Uul National Park, and the potential displacement of 112 pastoralist households. The article also raised concerns about the lack of transparency and public participation in decision making regarding the project. Construction on the power plant – funded by China’s EximBank – was due to be carried out by state-owned Chinese engineering company PowerChina.

During the government briefing, H. Nyambaatar also stated that a task force has been established to investigate cases where development projects are interrupted by civil society. These cases will be investigated as 'Sabotage' under the Criminal Code Article 19.6 and there will be a mechanism for reclaiming costs incurred due to the 'lost opportunity'. The statement, which coincided with the visit of China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Ulan Baatar who was visiting to discuss the power plant and other similar projects, is a direct threat of reprisal and punishment against human rights defenders such as Sukhgerel Dugersuren who have been vocal advocates for the rights of persons impacted by such projects.

Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned about the safety of Sukhgerel Dugersuren in Mongolia. The statements by the Minister of Justice, treatment of Sukhgerel Dugersuren and especially the serious charges being raised against her are extremely worrying. Mongolia is a country that has made public commitments towards the protection of human rights defenders. This protection includes ensuring an environment in which human rights defenders are not persecuted for their work. Laws meant to protect citizens should never be abused to punish human rights work, on spurious charges. Front Line Defenders condemns the attempt to criminalise Sukhgerel

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/energy/opinion-still-time-to-rethink-mongolias-erdeneburen-hydropower-plant/>

Dugersuren and other human rights defenders in Mongolia. Opposing the negative human rights and environmental impacts of infrastructure, energy and mining projects is not a crime and should not be punished.

**Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in Mongolia to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally cease all attempts to target and criminalise Sukhgerel Dugersuren, as these measures are not only related to her legitimate human rights activities but furthermore, constitute a violation of her rights;
2. Cease all attempts to target and criminalise individuals expressing concerns about development projects;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Mongolia are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with Mongolia's international human rights obligations and commitments;
4. Publicly recognise the importance of freedom of expression and human rights defenders to help ensure development projects and other business activities are sustainable for Mongolia.

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