

## LEGAL DEFENSE AND SANCTUARY FUND

Quarterly Report - Q1 2026 (January - March 2026)

Asia, Africa & Latin America

### Executive summary

During the first quarter of 2026, the Legal Defense and Sanctuary Fund (LDSF), IPRI's protection mechanism to provide legal defense and sanctuary support to Indigenous leaders, human rights defenders, and communities facing criminalization and violence, received 46 applications across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Of these, 16 cases were approved: 10 through the LDSF mechanism and 6 through humanitarian support, reaching 13,363 people directly, benefitting 7,265 women and 6,098 men, from 14 Indigenous Peoples across 8 countries: Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malaysia, Cambodia, the Philippines, and Colombia. The approved cases reflect the fund's commitment to providing timely and integrated protection to Indigenous defenders facing criminalization, armed violence, and forced displacement in defense of Indigenous peoples' land, territories, and natural resources.



Geographic coverage of LDSF support in Q1 2026

Below is a breakdown of applications received and approved by region, including the type of support provided and the countries reached:

Region	Received <sup>1</sup>	Approved	LDSF	Humanitarian	Countries
Asia	19	5	3	2	Malasya, Cambodia, Philippines
Africa	18	7	4	3	Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, DRC
Latin America	9	4	3	1	Colombia
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8 countries</b>

From January to March 2026, Africa and Asia generated the highest volume of LDSF applications this quarter with 18 and 19 respectively, followed by Latin America with 9. Africa recorded the highest number of approved cases with 7, followed by Asia with 5 and Latin America with 4. Across all regions, LDSF support was the primary mechanism, covering 10 of the 16 approved cases, while humanitarian support addressed the remaining 6 in response to acute collective crises involving armed conflict, natural disasters, and forced displacement.

The cases approved this quarter span three regions and reflect a range of situations: from systematic criminalization of Indigenous defenders and strategic use of legal mechanisms to silence Indigenous resistance and leadership, to urgent humanitarian crises driven by armed conflict, forced displacement, and natural disasters. The following sections present the cases supported, organized by region, including the contexts of risk, the support provided, and the Indigenous communities and defenders directly reached. This is followed by an overview of the cases across IPRI's priority sectors of concern: Conservation, Energy Transition, Extractives, and Climate Action, and concludes with the key findings of the quarter.

## ASIA

LDSF received **19 applications from Asia and approved 5 cases across Malaysia, Cambodia, and the Philippines**, 3 through the LDSF mechanism and 2 through humanitarian support, reaching 535 Indigenous people directly, 303 women and 230 men from 4 Indigenous Peoples: Kadazan and Dusun; Kui, Por, and Chong; Molbog; and Maporac Aeta. The cases reveal a regional pattern in which legal systems are systematically mobilized against Indigenous peoples defending their territories through strategic lawsuits, conservation legislation that criminalizes ancestral land use, and infrastructure projects that override

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the cases received, this includes those that did not meet the LDSF criteria and were not corrected, as well as those that were formally denied.

indigenous FPIC in the name of the Energy Transition. In Malaysia and Cambodia, two additional cases required urgent humanitarian response following a natural disaster and the escalation of armed conflict along the Thailand-Cambodia border. Through its support, the fund enabled Indigenous communities to sustain their legal defense and ensured access to emergency relief for those left entirely without support by displacement and disaster. Below is a breakdown of cases by country, type of risk, and sector of concern, followed by a brief summary of each approved case and the support provided.

Country	#Cases	Type of Risk	Sector of concern
Philippines	2	Strategic lawsuits and judicial harassment / State seizure of ancestral territory without FPIC	Conservation/Energy transition
Cambodia	2	Structural legal exclusion criminalizing ancestral land use / Armed conflict and mass displacement	Conservation/ Territorial conflict and displacement
Malaysia	1	Natural disaster	Climate Action

### LDSF cases

- **Molbog community of Marihangin Island, Philippines.** San Miguel Corporation filed three simultaneous strategic lawsuits (grave coercion, cyberlibel, and civil dispossession against 282 members) while private security guards fired shots at residents including children. The fund financed court hearing logistics and legal documentation for community members traveling to mainland courts.
- **Suy community of Chambak and Trang villages, Cambodia.** A structural gap in conservation legislation renders the community's 25-year occupation of their ancestral land illegal, enabling state actors to destroy homes, a sacred site, and crops and file criminal complaints against community members. The fund financed land demarcation, a multi-stakeholder consultation, and legal representation before the courts.
- **Maporac Aeta community, Zambales, Philippines.** The National Grid Corporation invoked eminent domain over their legally recognized ancestral domain without FPIC, issuing a notice to vacate before any court ruling. The fund financed legal representation across all hearings in a case with precedent-setting implications for energy transition projects and indigenous land rights across the country.

### Humanitarian cases

- **Kadazan and Dusun communities, Sabah, Malaysia.** Severe flooding and landslides in September 2025 killed 14 people and left communities isolated without power, clean water, or medical access. The fund financed emergency food, shelter, and medical supplies for cut-off communities.

- **Kui, Por, and Chong communities, Cambodia.** The escalation of the Thailand-Cambodia border conflict in December 2025 forced Indigenous communities near the frontline into temporary camps without adequate facilities. The fund financed emergency food packages, tents, and delivery costs for 260 displaced Indigenous community members.

## AFRICA

LDSF received **18 applications from Africa and approved 7 cases across Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo**, with 4 supported through the LDSF mechanism and 3 through humanitarian support, reaching 12,811 people directly, including 6,958 women and 5,710 men belonging to the Ogiek, Maasai, Turkana, Mbororo, and Batwa Peoples. The cases document a pattern of criminalization and judicial harassment targeting Indigenous defenders engaged in land rights advocacy, alongside direct physical threats from state-linked actors. In Cameroon and the DRC, additional cases required urgent humanitarian response following armed attacks that resulted in the killing of community members, the destruction of homes, and the displacement of thousands. Through its support, the Fund enabled Indigenous defenders to continue their advocacy under conditions of heightened risk and judicial pressure, while providing emergency relief to communities affected by severe violence and the destruction of livelihoods linked to extractive and territorial conflicts. Below is a breakdown of cases by country, type of risk, and sector of concern, followed by a brief summary of each approved case and the support provided.

Country	#Cases	Type of Risk	Sector of concern
Kenya	3	Judicial harassment and surveillance / State-backed threats against land rights defenders / Forced eviction without compensation	Conservation / Extractives
Tanzania	2	Arbitrary detention and persecution of women defenders / Corporate livelihood destruction without FPIC	Indigenous rights and governance / Extractives
Cameroon	1	Armed attack and mass displacement	Territorial conflict and displacement
DRC	1	Armed attack and killing of Indigenous family members	Territorial conflict and displacement

## LDSF cases

- **Ogiek community of Tindiret Forest, Kenya.** Forcibly evicted in 2006 without compensation, 287 Ogiek people have lived in precarious conditions for nearly two decades while women defenders face harassment for leading land rights litigation. The fund financed humanitarian, health, and psychosocial support to enable defenders to continue their advocacy work.
- **Ariong Geoffry Lokol, Turkana Indigenous community, Kenya.** After KES 258 million in community compensation funds were diverted by the County Government, TIPD filed a case against the County Government, the National Land Commission, and Tullow Oil. Since filing, Lokol faces threats, surveillance, and judicial delays. The fund financed legal fees and safe private transportation to affected communities.
- **William Sipai, Maasai community of Kedong Ranch, Kenya.** Leading litigation on behalf of 30,000 Maasai since 2018, including before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, William has received threatening messages from a police officer since December 2025 as the community prepares to demarcate 75,000 remaining acres. The fund financed temporary relocation to a safer location.
- **Rose Njilo and team, Mimutie Women Organization, Tanzania.** After locating three Maasai girls held for ten years by a private individual with government complicity, the team was detained for one week, had equipment confiscated, and was forced into hiding for 35 days. The fund financed safe relocation, psychosocial care, and replacement of confiscated equipment.

## Humanitarian Cases

- **Maasai community of Kandasikira Village, Tanzania.** A Chinese-owned graphite mining company has operated on Maasai communal land since 2022 without Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, blocking pastoral routes and dismissing women workers who filed sexual harassment complaints. The fund financed emergency humanitarian assistance and gender-responsive support for affected households.
- **Mbororo community of Gidado village, Cameroon.** On January 14, 2026, armed groups attacked the community, killing 15 people, destroying 171 homes, and displacing over 2,500 people, part of a pattern since 2018 in which 114 Indigenous persons have been killed. The fund financed emergency resettlement for the most vulnerable families and advocacy with national and international authorities.
- **Batwa community of Kabare Territory, DRC.** On January 28, 2026, M23 armed elements killed six Batwa family members including four children, days after homes were burned and the camp was occupied by armed groups. The fund financed emergency non-food items, medical assistance, and psychosocial care for 13 survivors, nine of them children.

## LATIN AMERICA

During Q1 2026, the **LDSF received 9 applications from Latin America and approved 4 cases in Colombia**, with 3 supported through the LDSF mechanism and 1 through humanitarian assistance, reaching 17 people directly, including 10 women and 7 men, from Indigenous Peoples including the Sikuni, Wayuu, Inga, and Siona. The cases reflect the convergence of armed conflict, corporate violence, and internal governance pressures against Indigenous defenders in regions where state protection is systematically absent. Through its support, the Fund enabled Indigenous defenders facing assassination attempts and institutional persecution to continue their leadership and resistance, while providing emergency protection for Indigenous youth disengaging from an armed group. Below is a breakdown of cases by country, type of risk, and sector of concern, followed by a brief summary of each approved case and the support provided.

Country	Cases	Type of Risk	Sector of concern
Colombia	3	Armed violence and assassination attempts / Criminalization and threats linked to anti-corruption activism and gender-based violence defense / Forced recruitment by armed groups	Extractives / Indigenous rights and governance / Territorial conflict and displacement
	1	Armed violence/ Forced recruitment by armed groups	Territorial conflict and displacement

### LDSF Cases

- **Reinaldo Rincón, Sikuni community of Aliwa Cupepe, Vichada, Colombia.** Sikuni governor leading territorial restitution against colonists and allegedly ELN-linked armed groups, who in October 2025 opened fire on his vehicle in a direct assassination attempt. Despite formal complaints, no state protection has been assigned. The fund financed safe transportation, temporary shelter, basic subsistence, and traditional Sikuni healing sessions.
- **Luis Misael Socarras, Wayuu community, La Guajira, Colombia.** Wayuu water and territory defender with over three decades of resistance against Cerrejón (Glencore), who survived his fifth assassination attempt on December 12, 2025, with over 25 shots fired in the presence of his minor son. The fund financed the family's temporary exit from the territory for 25 days.

- **Herminda Mutumbajoy, Inga community, AMAWAKI, Putumayo, Colombia.** After filing a corruption complaint against a former Indigenous governor in December 2025, Herminda faces telephone threats and social ostracism while simultaneously accompanying two gender-based violence cases before the Prosecutor's Office in a region with armed group presence. The fund financed temporary refuge, intercultural legal assistance, psychosocial support, and safe transportation for judicial proceedings.

### Humanitarian Case

- **Eduardo and Yeimy Rivadeneira, Siona community, Putumayo, Colombia.** Two Siona siblings forcibly recruited by the Comandos de la Frontera armed group, the brother in 2018 and the sister in 2020, managed to disengage in February 2026 and were relocated to Bogotá to avoid reprisals, where they live in hiding without income or support. The fund financed three months of temporary shelter, food, and transportation to enable their stabilization.

### IPRI's Priority Sector of Concern

Of the 16 cases supported this quarter, 9 are directly linked to the four priority sectors of concern identified by IPRI as the main drivers of criminalization and violence against Indigenous peoples nowadays. The following table presents those cases by sector, reflecting the structural contexts in which defenders and communities face persecution.

Sector	Countries	# Cases	Description
Conservation	Philippines, Cambodia, Kenya	3	Three cases involving communities criminalized for occupying their own ancestral lands under conservation legislation that fails to recognize indigenous land rights. Defenders face strategic lawsuits, destruction of homes and sacred sites, and ongoing harassment and intimidation, while decades of land title applications remain unresolved and state actors act with full impunity.
Extractives	Kenya, Tanzania, Colombia	4	Four cases linked to oil, graphite, and coal mining operations on Indigenous territories without Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. Defenders face assassination attempts, judicial harassment, surveillance, and corporate retaliation, including the dismissal of women workers who reported sexual

			harassment, while compensation funds meant for affected communities were diverted by state authorities.
Energy transition	Philippines	1	One case in which a state-franchised corporation filed to seize part of a legally recognized ancestral domain for national grid infrastructure without community consent, issuing a notice to vacate before any court ruling. The outcome will set a precedent for how energy transition projects engage with indigenous land rights across the country.
Climate action	Malaysia	1	One case in which flooding and landslides killed 14 community members, destroyed homes and farmlands, and cut communities off from power, clean water, and medical care, leaving Indigenous rights defenders unable to reach those most affected.

## Key Findings

- **Recurring patterns of criminalization:** In all regions, Indigenous defenders face similar legal pressures, including lawsuits, charges, and legal frameworks that undermine their leadership and land rights.
- **Violence and legal pressure often happen at the same time:** Some defenders faced threats or attacks while also dealing with ongoing legal or institutional pressure, making their situation more difficult to navigate.
- **Many cases are linked to IPRI's priority sectors of concern.** 9 out of the 16 cases approved are connected to criminalization driven by Climate Action, Energy Transition, Conservation and Extractive Industries.
- **Women defenders face additional challenges:** Women are dealing with multiple forms of risk at once, including sexual harassment, legal pressure, and gender-based violence.
- **There is more demand than LDSF can cover:** A significant number of cases were not approved, showing that many situations of risk remain without support. Only 36% of the applications received were funded.