

# [***Major Global NGOs Launch 226;128;156;Protect the Protest226;128;157; Task Force***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5T6H-2YF1-DXCW-D299-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Chiang Mai: EarthRights International has issued the following press release: NEW YORK, NY — A new task force of organizations across different sectors, including the ACLU, Greenpeace, Freedom of the Press Foundation, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, EarthRights International, Rainforest Action Network, and the International Corporate Accountability Roundtable, launches today taking aim against corporations and people in positions of power that use ‘strategic lawsuits against public participation’ (SLAPPs) to limit free speech and silence critics. For the first time, the “Protect the Protest” campaign combines the legal and mobilization power of a broad range of organizations to fight back against this courtroom tactic. The goal is to expose courtroom bullying, defeat and stop SLAPP suits, and defend the pillars of democracy by protecting everyone’s right to protest and free speech. NATIONWIDE CAMPAIGN LAUNCH ACTIVITIES The Protect the Protest campaign is launching with a week of action to put on notice any corporations that are considering using shameless courtroom tactics to silence advocates or journalists. New York, NY: The task force will today convene a rally from 2:00-3:00pm EST, featuring speakers who have prevailed against SLAPP suits, in front of the law firm of Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP, a frequent abuser of SLAPP lawsuits and representative of large corporations that consistently use SLAPP to silence critics.

(More event info here.) Dallas, TX: From September 4-6, a roving billboard will circle Dallas and park in front of the headquarters of Energy Transfer Partners, a company using SLAPPs to try to silence nonprofits and advocates. (More event info here.) San Francisco, CA: The task force will assemble on Greenpeace International’s ship – the Arctic Sunrise – for a panel discussion by SLAPP suit survivors on why these legal intimidation practices remain a threat to good corporate governance and free speech. (More event info here.) Trainings: The task force will be hosting SLAPP trainings for nonprofit organizations and members of the media to learn more about how to avoid these types of lawsuits and what individuals and organizations can do to fight back against these tactics. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN AND PROBLEM For decades, some abusive corporations and individuals (including President Trump) have filed shameless lawsuits they know they can’t win but which they hope will intimidate advocates and journalists into silence. This risk is rising worldwide alongside activists being jailed, anti-protest laws being passed, and free press being attacked. Although these baseless corporate lawsuits are a threat to individuals and all organizations, the greater risk is to our principles of democracy. A 2017 Info Note issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on Assembly and Association Rights outlined the many ways that SLAPP lawsuits violate the right of free expression. Protect the Protest will ensure that advocates and organizations will be more prepared and supported to keep doing important work without the fear of being wrongfully sued for speaking truth to power and holding corporations and individuals accountable. Notable cases involving SLAPP include: Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) sued NGOs BankTrack and Greenpeace, as well as the EarthFirst! Movement in August 2017, alleging that their campaigns against the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline amounted to racketeering under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. (Ongoing). Resolute Forest Products filed a SLAPP suit against Greenpeace and others under RICO laws used to prosecute the mafia, and raises serious concerns about freedom of expression. Previously, the same logging company had filed another SLAPP for defamation against Greenpeace Canada in Ontario. (Both ongoing). Before becoming president, Donald Trump sued then-New York Times business reporter Timothy O’Brien for claiming that Trump was “worth substantially less than what Trump publicly claimed.” As a candidate and as president, Trump has said that he wants to “open up” libel laws to make it easier to sue the media, a dangerous threat to our constitutional right of a free press. Last Week Tonight host John Oliver was sued by Robert Murray, founder of Murray Energy Corporation, for calling Murray a “geriatric Dr. Evil” during a segment in which Oliver called out Murray’s business, safety standards, and the coal industry. Judge Jeffrey Cramer ultimately tossed the defamation case. In the wake of the MeToo movement, both Geoffrey Rush and Bill O’Reilly filed defamation suits against those who made public the news of their inappropriate behavior; Rush sued Australia’s Daily Telegraph and journalist Jonathan Moran for reporting the news, while O’Reilly sued former New Jersey politician Michael Panter for “making defamatory and false” statements about O’Reilly in a #MeToo Facebook post. STATEMENTS FROM PROTECT THE PROTEST TASK FORCE ORGANIZATIONS: May Boeve, Executive Director, 350.org: “We’ve seen the fossil fuel industry increasingly turning to SLAPP suits to try and stop opposition to major coal, oil and gas projects. The industry knows that once the public understands the impacts of a new tar sands pipeline or fracking well, they’ll oppose it, so corporate lawyers do their best to silence critics from the outset. We’re proud to be joining with our allies today to say that we won’t back down in the face of these attacks on free speech. There is no such thing as progress without protest. Our climate and communities depend upon people making their voices heard.” Shayana Kadidal, Senior Managing Attorney, Center for Constitutional Rights: “The Center for Constitutional Rights is proud to represent people who have been targeted by SLAPP lawsuits for organizing around issues from pipelines to Palestinian rights. Though powerful interests have tried to weaponize baseless lawsuits to litigate away the voices of these activists, that hasn’t worked. The formation of this coalition is another demonstration that SLAPPs spark the opposite of what those who concoct them hope – more support for vital, collective activism.” Katie Redford, Co-Founder and Director, EarthRights International: “Companies have always tried to use their money and power to scare their critics into silence. Nobody likes a bully, and these legal bullying tactics will not prevail. Now, more than ever, we are committed to defending the free speech rights of individuals and organizations and so many others that our democracy, and our planet, depend upon.” Annie Leonard, Executive Director, Greenpeace USA: “Bogus lawsuits like the ones filed by Energy Transfer Partners and Resolute Forest Products against Greenpeace and others have brought different movements together to defend basic human rights like freedom of speech and freedom of association. Protect the Protest is the result of our shared determination to work together to provide legal, communications and strategic support to people and groups across the country who are sued for political dissent, criticizing egregious corporate practices or simply speaking up for the good of our communities and planet. Today we are turning the volume up.” David Greene, Civil Liberties Director, Electronic Frontier Foundation: “The ability to speak freely and associate with one another is a hallmark of the Internet, giving people of all sizes and resource levels a voice in local, national, and international debates. As our Constitutionally protected right to free speech carries through both online and off, EFF has joined Protect the Protest to complement our years-long work in defending the First Amendment.” James Wheaton, Founder and Senior Counsel, First Amendment Project: “The First Amendment Project has been at the forefront of defending against SLAPPs in the courts, in the legislature, and in the trenches. Bullies who try to silence and intimidate their opponents by misusing the courts are an unfortunate feature of the legal landscape, but this Task Force has the experience, resources and determination to stop them cold.” Marcos Orellana, Director, ***Environment*** and Human Rights Division, Human Rights Watch: “SLAPP lawsuits must be exposed for what they are: a direct assault on democracy and free speech. In the face of serious threats to our ***environment***, it is critical for environmental activists and groups to be able to organize and freely express themselves without the threat of baseless lawsuits.” Jana Morgan, Director of Advocacy and Campaigns, International Corporate Accountability Roundtable: “The use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) is nothing less than an attempt by powerful corporations to capture the US courts in order to intimidate, harass, and silence activists. The Protect the Protest taskforce has formed to show that we will not be cowed by bullies, and that we are united in our opposition to these abusive tactics. An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us.” Lindsey Allen, Executive Director, Rainforest Action Network: “People coming together to speak out for human rights, for civil rights, for the protection of the planet — this is how positive change happens and how we move forward as a society. At RAN, we know that corporate bad actors are frequently the prime movers behind some of the biggest threats to people and planet. So when corporations try to shut down activists through these SLAPP lawsuits — lawsuits designed solely to silence their critics and protect their profits — we need to stand together and fight back.” Todd Paglia, Executive Director, Stand.earth: “The right to free speech is a core pillar of our democracy. A federal court’s looming decision whether to uphold that right — by dismissing the case brought against Stand.earth by Canadian logging giant Resolute — comes during a vital time in America’s history, when it has never been more important for citizens to advocate against companies sacrificing the public good for private gain.”

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