

UN rights experts urge Kenya to protect activists testifying in lead pollution case

Four United Nations human rights experts are calling for greater protection for Kenyan activists who have testified against a local lead-smelting plant accused of environmental pollution.

Cases of lead poisoning have been reported in the area near the factory, located in a poor area in the coastal city of Mombasa.

The environmental defenders have been harassed and intimidated since an initial court hearing against the company which took place on 17 May, and fear for their lives.

They are due back in court as part of a class action lawsuit against the Government and the company, on charges of violating the right to a healthy environment, as outlined in Kenya's constitution.

"These environmental defenders should not face threats, harassment, and intimidation when they are exercising their rights legitimately through a legal action," the UN rights experts charged in [a statement](#) issued on Wednesday.

"On the contrary, they should be championed for upholding the Constitution of Kenya."

The experts, who are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, reported that unknown people have visited the activists' homes at night, repeatedly banging on their doors and yelling for them to come out.

One was even attacked with an unknown substance that caused eye problems and swelling.

Many of the environmentalists have reported the threats to the police, "however investigations appear slow and inadequate," according to the UN experts, who said the activists are now asking to be relocated as they fear for their safety.

The UN experts said they had informed the Kenyan authorities of their concerns on two prior occasions but have received no response so far.