

**PRESS RELEASE**

## **NEW RESEARCH: AT LEAST 2 700 PEOPLE IN 84 COUNTRIES WERE VICTIMS OF CONTRACT KILLINGS IN 2019–2020**

**A groundbreaking new database, the Global Assassination Monitor, highlights how assassinations are often intertwined with organized crime. No data on contract killings on a global scale has previously been collected or presented in this way.**

**Geneva, Switzerland – 3 November 2021:** The first data set monitoring targeted killings on a global scale indicates that at least 2 700 people in 84 countries were victims of contract killings (attempted or successful) linked to organized crime in 2019 and 2020. Cases were monitored in all continents, but the highest numbers were recorded in the Americas and Asia, according to The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)'s new report, 'Killing in silence: Monitoring the role of organized crime in contract killings'.

The report's findings are supported by a data visualization tool, the Global Assassination Monitor, a new data set built by the GI-TOC to track assassinations worldwide between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2020. Based on extensive data collection from cases reported in media sources, the Monitor is a first attempt at measuring contract killings and highlighting underlying patterns and trends relating to assassinations at global, regional and national levels.

As organized crime has become increasingly transnational, so have contract killings. Analysis of this new data set reveals that assassinations occur everywhere, from developed to developing countries. Most of the contract killings were recorded in the Americas and Asia (70% of all recorded cases), followed by Africa (24%) and Europe (6%).

Before the development of the Monitor, there was no real sense of the extent of the problem, and it is likely to be even more pervasive than what the numbers show. In fact, cases reported in international and regional media sources amounted to less than 800, indicating that only the most high-profile cases – politically or socially – are reported in international media. To allow for more nuanced analysis of contract killings at the country level, the Monitor included additional cases reported in national media sources pertaining to 10 selected countries. As a result, around 1 900 cases were additionally included in the database.

**'We have developed and will maintain a global database of assassinations to ensure there is a reliable and regular means to monitor what is regrettably becoming a global phenomenon. This database, which will sit in the public domain, allows estimates of the scale of the problem, and allows trends to be analyzed. The global monitor creates an irrefutable evidence basis upon which action can be demanded from states and multilateral bodies to respond.'**

*– Mark Shaw, director of the GI-TOC*

Criminal groups target competitors in the fight for control over territory or illicit supply chains. They use assassinations to eliminate those who work against them or oppose them, often activists, journalists, politicians, members of the legal profession and law enforcement. Understanding the magnitude of contract killings is a way to measure the power of organized crime and its capacity to commit violence, often targeted at members of civil society.

**'In many parts of the world, assassinations have become a daily occurrence. Assassinations – or their threat – are instrumentalized to create an environment of fear, allowing criminal groups to exert "mafia-style" control over societies, the economy and democratic institutions. They serve to silence not only individuals but entire communities.'**

*- Ana Paula Oliveira, analyst at the GI-TOC*

The research's findings highlight that particular groups of people are often assassination targets. The largest target group, making up 28% of all cases, were community leaders. This includes religious leaders, scholars, activists and cultural workers. This category is specifically vulnerable in the Americas, where they accounted for 32% of assassination cases. A great proportion of the cases referred to issues of land and exploitation of natural resources.

The Assassination Monitor marks a new phase in the GI-TOC's Assassination Witness campaign, which launched in June 2020 to bear witness to the victims of targeted killings and contribute to the global effort to make the work of anti-corruption activists, lawyers, journalists and human rights defenders around the world safer. The Monitor's open database is free to search and will continue to be updated to enable more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of assassinations and expand its coverage to more countries.

**'Despite their severe negative impact on society, economies and democratic processes, assassinations remain an understudied topic and government responses are limited. We hope this initiative will highlight ways in which disaggregated data on assassinations can help inform some of the underlying dynamics of the phenomenon.'**

*- Nina Kaysser, senior analyst at the GI-TOC*

The tool will be available at [assassination.globalinitiative.net](https://assassination.globalinitiative.net) on the day of the launch (17 November 2021, 3PM CET).

For further questions or to interview the report's authors, please contact Claudio Landi ([Claudio.landi@globalinitiative.net](mailto:Claudio.landi@globalinitiative.net)).

### **About the Global Assassination Monitor**

*The Global Assassination Monitor is an event database, covering assassinations reported in the press between 2019 and 2020. Following a standardized data-collection methodology, it allows for comparisons across space and over time. The database draws on an extensive selection of global, regional and national news sources, available on LexisNexis. For each recorded assassination, data was collected according to several variables (where available), including the date, location, information about victims and perpetrators, and dynamics of the incidents, such as motive, method and price paid for the killing.*

### **About the Global Initiative**

*The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a network of professionals working on the frontlines of the fight against the illicit economy and criminal actors. Through a network of global civil society observatories on the illicit economy, we monitor evolving trends and work to build the evidence basis for policy action, disseminate the expertise of our Network and catalyze multisectoral and holistic responses across a range of crime types. With the Global Initiative's*



*Resilience Fund, we support community activists and local NGOs working in areas where crime governance is critically undermining people's safety, security and life chances.*