



## **Declaration of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Colombia**

In Bogotá, on 19, 20 and 21 November 2018, spiritual and religious leaders of diverse faith communities and members of the Interreligious Council of Colombia met along with leaders of indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombian communities, and other tropical forest inhabitants to confront the sacred task of stopping the tropical deforestation that is driving climate change. This concern unites us in a commitment that transcends the borders of our religions and spiritualities.

We believe that one of the most urgent issues in our country is the protection of tropical forests and all those who have been born and grown up in them and continue to be part of their ecosystem balance. For the various religions and spiritualities that have gathered in favor of this common cause, the care for Creation, its flora, its fauna, its natural wealth, has become a shared mission and destiny. This prophetic task that we are presenting today is part of a global effort that is developed with the support of UN Environment and the international cooperation of the Norwegian government.

The message of the encyclical *Laudato si'* by Pope Francis, that has shaken the whole world, including all people of faiths, requires us to adopt a greater awareness of the protection of the environment and summons us to action in response to change climate. The human root of the ecological crisis is destroying nature and generating pollution, malnutrition, diseases, deserts and deaths. Until a few years ago we thought that human beings were called to dominate nature, mistakenly interpreting the messages of Creation. Instead, today we understand that the voice of the sacred summons us to take care of nature and preserve it for the enjoyment of future generations.

Our mission to teach the sacred word also includes the condemnation of everything that affects a healthy metabolism between nature and society, that is expressed, for example, in an accelerated and irrational extraction of the natural wealth of the land, converted into commodities (raw materials) to become part of the speculative game of the world's financial markets.

Today, Colombia is one of the most unequal countries on the planet, where resorting to violence to resolve conflicts has been a central part of our history. We are the heritage of a colonization in which the compassionate voices of religions did not prevail. Thus, our faiths ask forgiveness from the current generations of the original and enslaved peoples, whom we accompany with the commitment of non-repetition and reparative action that protects human life and nature with their tropical forests.

Today the curse of El Dorado, of the gold the colonizers dreamed about, extends to mining and energy resources. In 2017, 219,000 hectares of our forests were deforested and higher figures are announced for this year. Dry forests are practically finished, becoming deserts, and humid forests are following the same apocalyptic trajectory. All of this exacerbates climate change, generating effects on the entire water cycle and the productive agricultural projects of families and communities, increasing child malnutrition.

We need to incorporate a moral, ethical and spiritual dimension in the defense of tropical forests, summoning the whole society, and particularly the members of our religions and spiritualities. Just as we are supporting the reconciliation of the Colombian people for the construction of a country that must overcome violence, we also need to promote a **collective reconciliation with nature, with its rivers and tropical forests**, which in two decisions of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Justice of our country have been declared subjects of rights.

This statement is a concrete expression of our willingness to work together, based on the recognition of diverse spiritualities, the law of origin and ancestral mandates, and also of our different scientific and academic knowledge. We aspire to strengthen our understanding of the ancestral cultures that in Colombia have been a part of and the guarantor of the existence of tropical forests, including those who inhabit them since the time of enslavement, and those who have survived on their lands as a consequence of the forced displacement generated by the armed conflict. Based on our spiritualities and ethics, we assume that nature and specifically tropical forests are sacred, not a commodity.

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Colombia will be the concrete expression of our fellowship, accompanied by the understanding that there are already multiple projects, institutions and activities that are making important advances on that objective, with which we will generate fraternal ties of collaboration.

As signatories of this Declaration, we commit to:

- Contribute to an economy that goes beyond extractivism and destructive industrialization and links with the indigenous vision of *buen vivir* to guarantee the common good.
- Denounce all violations of nature and human rights and to demand the full fulfillment of justice. No more spraying
- Strengthen the capacities of organizations of indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombian communities and other inhabitants of tropical forests for environmental protective action.
- Respect and promote the autonomy and self-determination of indigenous peoples in the governance of their ancestral territories.
- Mediate in transformation of conflicts through dialogue.
- Motivate officials to align in the promotion of public policies based on human development.
- Support all mechanisms of community and social participation and highlight the role of women in the care of life in all its forms.
- Call on faith communities throughout the world to support this inter-religious, multi-ethnic and multicultural initiative.
- Promote the voices born in tropical forests at local, national and international levels.

For all this, **we appeal**

- *To the Government of the Republic:* The commitment to respect, support and protect this Initiative, guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant and peasant communities in its implementation, and to develop actions for the prevention and effective protection of the lives of their leaders.
- *To parliamentarians, governors, mayors, political leaders and officials:* The understanding that your function is to establish - in a participatory and articulated manner - public policies that guarantee the conservation of tropical forests and their inhabitants.
- *To the leaders of the faith communities in the tropical forests:* Driving the work of unification in the territories, deepening dialogue to enrich our commitments with the care of Creation.

We convene the joint cooperative action of all our religions and spiritualities to address the conservation challenges of our tropical forests!

We appeal to the strength of our messages of faith to create awareness, generate mobilization and convey hope!

**We will continue to be united in the commitment to protect tropical forests and their inhabitants, an essential part of our common home.**

*—Accepted by acclamation by the participants*