



INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE IN PERU
LAUNCH EVENT | 3-5 December 2018

DECLARATION

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Peru is an effort that unites religious communities and faith-based organizations, Indigenous Peoples, and institutions and people committed to the defense and protection of tropical forests, and the creatures and peoples that inhabit them.

From our diverse faiths, spiritualities and cultures, we have the deep conviction of the shared call of all human beings to care for Mother Earth and to live in harmony with her to fulfill our destiny. However, we notice that our Amazon is alarmingly being deforested and destroyed. This calls us to act urgently to take care of tropical forests hand-in-hand with the Indigenous Peoples who are their natural protectors.

This concern is heightened in Peru because 65% of its surface contains the Amazonian rainforest, essential for the reproduction of life on the planet. Indigenous Peoples have inhabited these forests throughout the ages, and have learned to live harmoniously with their environment.

Ignorance and ambition led to the understanding of the Amazon as the great pantry of the country, the "uninhabited" place that hoped to be exploited to extract wealth in an endless way. This idea is at the base of the "old and new colonialisms" that have historically translated into waves of invasion and destruction of forests by the State and various economic actors. Many times these processes saw, through the silence, the complicity of our faith communities, for which we ask forgiveness.

There were some prophetic voices that failed to prevent the indiscriminate concession of indigenous territories for intensive exploitation of natural resources, illegal logging, mining, hydrocarbon extraction, including fracking, monocultures, road infrastructure and dams that have damaged the Amazon, which have led to drug trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling.

The loss of forests, which in our country has reached almost eight thousand km² in the last year, has been causing droughts, floods and grave social and cultural impacts on Amazonian communities. This reality compels us to seek answers from our own sources of faith and worldviews.

We find that the Creator has been generous in creating tropical forests, because they house millions of unique species of plants and animals, provide food, livelihoods, medicines, water, and are an irreplaceable gift. The loss of tropical forests is the loss of our life itself, *"a crime*

against nature is a crime against ourselves and a sin against God" Pope Francis reminds us in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

From our experiences of faith we recognize the shared responsibility we have in the care of Creation, which leads us to denounce any violation of the rights of Mother Earth and the peoples that inhabit it.

Indigenous Peoples have a vital and spiritual relationship with forests, with their rivers, plants, animals and spiritual beings. This allows them to organize their life and give it meaning. And they have transmitted that wisdom through the ages. Western arrogance has not taken into account the wisdom of Indigenous Peoples and has viewed their way of life with contempt. This action offends nature and the Creator itself, the origin of everything.

The best protection of tropical forests is to guarantee the life and rights of the Indigenous Peoples that inhabit them. This is an obligation that involves us, people of faith, as well as the State, business and society.

Therefore, we commit to:

- a. Announce the life and beauty of the gift of Creation, and promote the *Buen Vivir* of the peoples and the harmonious coexistence with Mother Earth, of which we are part.
- b. Join efforts with Indigenous Peoples to defend Mother Earth and her rights.
- c. Value the cultures of the Amazonian peoples and continue to open our hearts to learn from their wisdom and spirituality, their respect and love of nature.
- d. Act in solidarity and support to the struggles of Indigenous Peoples and their defenders, often criminalized for the defense of their rights.
- e. Educate and mobilize our faith communities about the responsibility to care for the Amazon, environmental awareness and climate change, and respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- f. Confront the new and old colonialisms and denounce the model of civilization and development focused on the extraction of natural resources, which generates inequality, destruction of Mother Earth and violation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- g. Require the State to comply with the rights of Indigenous Peoples according to their worldview and international standards, which are essential for the care of tropical forests. The State must recognize the legal personality of Indigenous Peoples as such; guarantee the legal security of the property of its integral territory; respect indigenous self-government, autonomy and justice; guarantee the right to free, prior and informed consent on any measure that could affect them; and guarantee the remediation of water, soil and all environmental liabilities.
- h. Not to make or promote forced contact with Indigenous Peoples in Isolation. Require the State to guarantee the right of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact in full respect of their own ways of life, legal security and the intangibility of their territories.
- i. Require that, in all economic activities, State and business groups respect the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and nature, according to international standards and put an end to concessions that generate deforestation, water loss, use of mercury, and other chemicals that pollute the waters and soils.

We unite our hands, minds and hearts to renew hope, confident in achieving a tomorrow that will ensure the life of the planet and all living beings.

Lima, 5 December 2018