

**FAITHS FOR FORESTS
DECLARATION AND ACTION AGENDA**



INTERFAITH
RAINFOREST
INITIATIVE

RAINFORESTS: A MORAL CONCERN AND RELIGIOUS PRIORITY

The world's rainforests are a sacred trust, an irreplaceable gift and essential to life on Earth. They contain more than 50 percent of plant and animal species on the planet and provide hundreds of millions of people around the world with food, water, medicine and livelihoods. Rainforests are also critical to combat climate change. Forests are among the only safe, proven, natural solutions that exist to capture and store carbon, and tropical deforestation is a key source of the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. The protection, restoration and sustainable management of forests offers one third of the solution to climate change.

Tropical deforestation is a crisis of existential proportions – we either deal with it now, or leave future generations a planet in ecological collapse. Rainforests are rapidly being decimated: from the Amazon to the Congo Basin to Southeast Asia, rainforests are being cut down at an alarming rate, driven by land conversion for agriculture and extractive industries. Rainforest destruction is undermining international efforts on poverty, climate change, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Research shows that no more forests need to be cleared to feed the planet.

Importantly, rainforest protection is also a human rights issue. Indigenous peoples are the historical guardians of rainforests and where their rights are protected, so often are forests. However, indigenous peoples and forest communities lack legal rights to almost three quarters of their traditional lands and are facing grave threats as they defend their forests from incursion by industries like oil, mining, logging and agribusiness.

While there is a dedicated coalition of indigenous peoples, government, civil society and business partners working to protect tropical forests, more is needed. New leadership and momentum are required to achieve the speed and scale of change that is needed. Multi-religious cooperation is essential for halting and reversing tropical deforestation. It is time to make the protection of rainforests and the rights of indigenous peoples a shared moral concern and religious priority.

RELIGIONS FOR PEACE AND THE INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is an international, multi-faith alliance that brings moral urgency and faith-based leadership to global efforts to halt and reverse tropical deforestation. It is a platform for all religious leaders and faith communities to work shoulder-to-shoulder with indigenous peoples, governments, civil society and business on actions that protect tropical forests and safeguard those that serve as their guardians.

Religions for Peace is a founding partner of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative and a key implementing body both globally and in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru – five countries with more than 70 percent of the world's remaining tropical forests. With Religions for Peace, the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is launching the 'Faiths for Forests' declaration and action agenda to mobilize new leadership, commitment and momentum on this critical issue.

COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Deeply concerned about the state of the world's rainforests;

Understanding that tropical deforestation drives climate change, species loss, and poverty;

Standing in solidarity with indigenous peoples as rainforest guardians;

Recognizing that faiths can add unique value to government, civil society and business efforts to protect rainforests; and

Realizing that ending tropical deforestation is both a profound moral responsibility and highly

The Religions for Peace World Assembly endorses the Faiths for Forests Declaration and commits to work with the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative on an action agenda to:

1. Raise public awareness about the tropical deforestation crisis
2. Promote teaching about the spiritual, moral, scientific, humanitarian and human rights case for ending tropical deforestation
3. Assist our respective places of worship, communities and organizations to take action
4. Encourage deforestation-free lifestyles and business practices
5. Advocate for government policies that protect rainforests and the rights of indigenous peoples
6. Urge national governments and the international community to put forest protection at the center of efforts to reach the goals of the Paris climate agreement.



Bishop Gunnar J. Stålsett & Sonia Guajarara at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace

FAITHS FOR FORESTS DECLARATION

We begin from a place of profound concern for the state of the world's rainforests, which are a sacred trust, an irreplaceable gift and essential to life on Earth.

From the Amazon to the Congo Basin to the rainforests of Southeast Asia, deforestation is rampant and it is accelerating. This destruction is an affront to all faiths and spiritual traditions. It is driving species loss, deepening poverty, undermining sustainable development, creating conflict and insecurity, and robbing humanity of the best solution we have to climate change.

We recognize that outdated and unsustainable patterns of development, production and consumption are driving deforestation and that a major, fundamental shift in values, lifestyles and public policies is needed to protect rainforests. Agriculture is now the primary driver of deforestation – an unnecessary trade-off, as we can feed a growing population with the land we already have.

We recognize tropical deforestation as an existential threat that demands urgent and decisive action. We share a profound moral obligation to make care for tropical forests a top spiritual priority. From all regions of the planet, and from all of the world's religions and spiritual traditions, we commit to respond, together.

We pledge to mobilize our religious communities, from the grassroots to the most senior leadership, to join up with the coalition of indigenous, government, civil society, business and United Nations partners already working to protect forests. We will bring our spiritual resources to bear on this issue.

We commit to raise awareness about the deforestation crisis within our communities, places of worship and congregations as an expression of our care for the Earth and to advance religious teaching and education that reflects a moral commitment to protect rainforests. We will make ending deforestation a high spiritual calling.

We commit to advocating for governments to adopt, fulfill and expand upon commitments to protect forests and the rights of indigenous peoples. We will cast our ballots for those that stand for rainforests and environmental defenders.

We pledge to exert influence on the private sector and extractive industries that are converting tropical forests for agricultural land, commodities like beef, soy, palm oil and pulp and paper, and for mining, logging and oil and gas. We will change our consumption patterns and divest from businesses that profit from the destruction of tropical forests.

We commit to standing in solidarity with indigenous peoples and forest communities, to offer sanctuary and protection from threats of intimidation, violence, and incursion into their lands. We see that protecting rainforests is part of a larger moral fabric that includes social and economic justice, respect for human rights and human dignity, and achieving peace and equality.

Where we began with concern, we conclude with hope. We acknowledge that tropical deforestation can be stopped. We are guided by a shared reverence for nature and a resolve that, together as people of faith and part of one human family, we can end tropical deforestation.

ANNEX I. THE INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE

The moral authority of religious voices can spur global leaders and wide networks of communities and individuals to action in this critical area.

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is an international, multi-faith alliance that is bringing moral urgency and faith-based leadership to global efforts to end tropical deforestation. It serves as a platform for religious leaders and faith communities to work hand-in-hand with indigenous peoples, governments, civil society and business on actions that protect tropical forests and safeguard those that serve as their guardians.

The initiative was launched at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo, Norway, on 19 June 2017. The launch was hosted by Norway's Minister of Climate and Environment, and presided over by His Majesty King Harald V of Norway.

In a first-of-its-kind summit, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Taoist religious leaders joined forces with indigenous peoples from Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Meso-America and Peru to make the protection of rainforests an ethical priority for the world's faith communities.

Partners to the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative include Religions for Peace, GreenFaith, Parliament of the World's Religions, the World Council of Churches, the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology as well as Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative, Rainforest Foundation Norway, and UN Environment Programme.

The initiative works globally to bring a moral voice on forest protection to international policymaking forums on environment, climate change, indigenous peoples' issues and sustainable development. The initiative is working through country programs in Brazil, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Peru – five countries that contain more than 70 percent of the world's remaining rainforests. Each IRI country program is working on education and awareness raising around the deforestation crisis, expanding the network to areas of each country where forests face the greatest threats, influencing laws and public policies from the local to national levels on protecting tropical forests and the rights of indigenous peoples, and influencing the policies and practices of the private sector to take deforestation out of their supply chains.

Globally and in program countries, the goal is to link the commitment, influence and mobilizing power of the world's religions and faith communities with the coalition of indigenous, NGO, government, business and science partners already working to protect forests. The initiative has launched a library of country fact sheets, issue primers, resource guides and faith toolkits for religious leaders on the protection of tropical forests.

The initiative has three primary goals: (i) educate and raise awareness about the deforestation crisis and equip religious leaders with the science, educational tools, and training needed to serve as effective advocates for rainforest protection; (ii) mobilize faith-based action by connecting religious leaders with allies from across sectors to multiply their collective impact; and (iii) influence policy and advocate for governments and companies to adopt, fulfill and expand upon their commitments to protect rainforests and the rights of the indigenous peoples that serve as their guardians.

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is an open partnership that welcomes the engagement of all organizations, institutions and individuals of good faith and conscience that are committed to the protection, restoration and sustainable management of rainforests.

ANNEX II. TROPICAL DEFORESTATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reveals that limiting global warming to 1.5° C will require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society. The report shows that the planet is already seeing the consequences of 1° C global warming through more extreme weather, rising sea levels, diminishing Arctic sea ice and other changes.

The IPCC report also reveals that we have less time than initially thought – only 11 years – to limit global warming to 1.5° C, beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risk of droughts, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) released its latest Global Assessment in May of 2019. The report shows an alarming decline in nature and ecosystem services. The assessment reveals that up to 1 million species currently face extinction, more than at any other time in human history. More than 50 percent of plant and animal species on the planet are contained in tropical forests.

Forests play a critical role in regulating the Earth's climate. They are one of the only safe, proven, natural solutions that exist for carbon capture and storage. Tropical deforestation is a key source of the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. When forests are cleared and trees are burned or decay, the carbon stored in them is released into the atmosphere.

Forest destruction not only generates carbon emissions, it diminishes nature's capacity to absorb them. If tropical deforestation were a country, its annual contribution to the emissions that cause climate change would be greater than those of the entire European Union. Research suggests that the protection, restoration and sustainable management of forests could offer up to one third of the emission reductions needed to meet our climate goals.

It simply won't be possible to meet the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement without decisive action to end tropical deforestation. The longer the world waits before reversing current deforestation trends, the more the capacity of the remaining forests to serve as a natural carbon capture and storage system is eroded. Among the many strategies available to reduce the emissions that cause climate change, protecting tropical forests is also among the most affordable.

Despite some significant progress, we are not on track to protect forests as a climate solution. Instead of forests **slowing** climate change, forest destruction is still **driving** climate change. Data shows a loss of tree cover equivalent to the area of France, Germany and the UK combined in the last decade. In Brazil alone, deforestation rose by more than 88 percent in June 2019, as compared to the same month one year ago.

A large and increasing proportion of deforestation across tropical countries is driven by forest clearing – much of it illegal – to cultivate global commodities such as beef, soy, palm oil and fast-growing timber to make pulp and paper. The commercial-scale clearing of forests for agriculture is now the primary driver of deforestation.

Half of all the Earth's vegetated land area has been developed, most of it for agriculture. Recent studies show, however, that it is not a matter of claiming more land but making better use of what we already have. We can feed a population reaching nearly 10 billion by 2050 without further compromising the environment and while leaving half the planet to nature. Tropical forests do not need to be a casualty of food production.

Global deforestation is a crisis of existential proportions. We either deal with it or leave future generations a planet in ecological collapse.

A strong coalition of influential, global actors and partners are already working hard around the world to halt and reverse tropical deforestation, composed of indigenous peoples, governments (north and south), NGOs, scientists, multilateral agencies and businesses. Billions of dollars have been invested in this effort. They are making progress, but not fast enough. This coalition of partners understands that the engagement of religious leaders and all people of faith and conscience can be the difference and help to turn the tide on tropical deforestation.

The good news is that the case for action is stronger than ever. Over the last 10 years, understanding of the science, economics and politics of reducing deforestation as a win-win opportunity to address both climate change and sustainable development have advanced dramatically. Major innovations in policy and technology have converged to demonstrate that slowing deforestation is both feasible and beneficial, and to show how international support can help.

Lowering deforestation rates offers many developing countries the single-most attractive option for contributing to reduced global emissions in a way that is compatible with their own development objectives, and one that is particularly aligned with the interests of their poorest citizens.

Nobody questions the benefits of halting and reversing tropical deforestation, nor the disastrous consequences of inaction. There is simply no way we can preserve biodiversity, the climate system, and our freshwater supplies without stopping forest loss. And the longer we wait, the fewer and less attractive our options.

Forest protection is also a human rights issue. For centuries, indigenous peoples and forest communities living in and near tropical forests have served as stewards and managers of tropical forests. Indigenous peoples and forest communities have official legal rights to at least 513 million hectares of forests or about one-eighth of the world's total forest area. Most of these forests are in countries where pressures to exploit forests are high.

Studies show that when indigenous peoples' land rights are legally recognized and protected by governments, deforestation rates and carbon dioxide emissions can significantly lower. Yet research also suggests that indigenous people and forest communities lack legal rights to almost three quarters of their traditional lands. In many parts of the world, indigenous peoples face grave threats as they defend their forests from incursion by industries like oil, mining, logging and agribusiness.

Given their cultural and spiritual connections to forests, their vast stores of traditional knowledge, and the fact that much of the world's remaining forest lies within their ancestral and customary lands, indigenous peoples are essential partners in any efforts to protect rainforests and wildlife. Research shows that while making up less than 5 percent of the global population, indigenous peoples manage more than 80 percent of global biodiversity.

Indigenous peoples and forest communities find themselves on the front lines of the deforestation crisis, their lives and livelihoods threatened by illegal logging and mining operators, poachers, drug traffickers, agribusiness and even certain governments. In 2018 alone, 164 environmental defenders were killed protecting their lands, territories and forests from destruction, a disproportionate number of them indigenous peoples.

THE PARTNERSHIP





INTERFAITH
RAINFOREST
INITIATIVE

INFO@INTERFAITHRAINFOREST.ORG
WWW.INTERFAITHRAINFOREST.ORG