Latin America pledges to reforest 20 mn hectares by 2020

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Seven Latin American countries pledged Sunday to replant nearly 20 million hectares of forest by 2020 amid a UN climate conference in Lima.

The deal, dubbed "20x20," which private investors pledged to support with $365 million, aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions generated by deforestation and land-use changes. The area is equivalent to more than 49 million acres.

It came at a meeting held in parallel to the conference, with the agriculture and environment ministers from Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru.

"In Peru, we are losing forests an an impressive speed," said Agriculture Minister Juan Manuel Benites Ramos, citing illegal mining, overgrazing and coca planting as the driving factor behind the tree clearings.

The region needs to work on replanting the forests and moving toward "a carbon-neutral agriculture."

His Argentine counterpart, Roberto Delgado, also urged putting the brakes on deforestation.

"In addition to restoring soil, it is important to stop losing hectares," he said.

Mexico made the biggest pledge, promising to restore 8.5 million hectares, followed by Peru, which promised 3.2 million, Guatemala, 1.2 million, and Colombia, one million.

Ecuador promised 500,000 hectares, Chile another 100,000, and Costa Rica 50,000.

In addition, a plan to conserve the Patagonia region—which stretches across southern Argentina and Chile—would aim at restoring 4.1 million hectares of forest.

Experts say Latin America is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change.

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