

Indigenous groups warn Paris accord imperiled by deforestation

October 24 2017, by Joe Jackson



Members of a delegation of indigenous and rural community leaders from 14 countries in Latin America and Indonesia, The Guardians of the Forest campaign, demonstrate against deforestation in London on October 24, 2017

Indigenous leaders and forestry experts warned on Tuesday that without more funding and protection for forests and their peoples, the world will fail to meet the ambitious goals set by the Paris Agreement.

In "a declaration of the guardians of the forest," the coalition of [indigenous groups](#) called on countries to help stop the killing of its leaders, ensure legal recognition of their lands and designate environmental degradation a crime against humanity.

The indigenous leaders from 14 countries, including Brazil and Indonesia, came to London as part of a European tour to protest against [deforestation](#).

"The situation in our communities is really difficult," Mina Setra, an indigenous leader from Indonesia, told reporters at the Royal Society, ahead of a protest march to the British parliament.

"We are proven to be the protectors, the guardian of the forest. Governments are failing to protect forests; they destroy forests," she said.

Organisers of the campaign point to studies showing protecting and enhancing forests can provide as much as 30 percent of the [climate change](#) mitigation required to reach targets set by the Paris accord.

Research has also shown that deforestation rates are lowest, and carbon storage and biodiversity higher, when indigenous and community land rights are secure.

But new data compiled by the University of Maryland and released earlier this month by Global Forest Watch showed global tree cover loss reached a record 73.4 million acres (29.7 million hectares) in 2016.

"We need to save the forests to meet the Paris Agreement goals," Alain Frechette, of the Rights and Resources Initiative, told AFP on the sidelines of the London event.

"And to save the forests we need to save the people who are actually protecting the forests right now."

Ben Leather, an investigator for Global Witness, a London-based advocacy group which counts the number of "environment defenders" murdered annually, told those gathered that 153 such activists had been killed so far this year.

That is on pace to match the 200 killed in 2016, of which more than 40 percent were indigenous people.

"If governments are serious about tackling climate change they must commit both funds and political will to guaranteeing that indigenous peoples and local communities can manage their own forests, and that they are kept safe," he said.

A calculation of [forest](#) financing released this month found only two percent—\$3.6 billion (3.1 billion euro)—of the \$167 billion in international development aid committed since 2010 to reduce carbon emission had been directed at reducing deforestation.

The study, "Finance for Forests" by international advisory company Climate Focus, also noted that funding promoting land-intensive development and agriculture—the leading cause of deforestation—dwarfed deforestation funding by 39 times.

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