

Conservation meet mulls plan to protect 80% of Amazon

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Research has warned that massive destruction of tropical forests combined with climate change are pushing the Amazon towards a 'tipping point' which would see tropical forests give way to savannah-like landscapes.

Should 80 percent of the Amazon be declared a protected area by 2025?

The world's top conservation body is on Sunday poised to decide whether its 1,400 members can vote on this controversial proposal, put forward by [indigenous groups](#).

Submitted under an emergency provision to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the measure calls for a "global action plan" to halt rampant deforestation and the destructive extraction of precious minerals and oil.

Over the last two decades, the Amazon has lost roughly 10,000 square kilometres every year, according to assessments based on [satellite data](#).

"That's the emergency, not just for us but for humanity," Jose Gregorio Diaz Mirabal, a leader of the Curripaco people in Venezuela, told AFP at the Congress venue in Marseille.

For the first time in the IUCN's 70-year history, indigenous groups have a separate status alongside government agencies and national or international NGOs.

Diaz Mirabal submitted the Amazon proposal for the newly admitted organisation COICA, which represents more than two million [indigenous people](#) in nine Amazon nations.

"We have been neglected, and now we have a voice and will exercise that voting right," he said.

'Territory of humanity'

Recent research has warned that massive destruction of [tropical forests](#) combined with [climate change](#) are pushing the Amazon towards a disastrous "tipping point" which would see tropical forests give way to savannah-like landscapes.

This would not only drastically change the region's climate, but have an impact on global climate systems as well, scientists say.

Rates of tree loss drop sharply in the forests where [native peoples](#) live, especially if they hold some degree of title—legal or customary—over land, other research has shown.

IUCN officials are reviewing the COICA measure, along with 20 others proposals submitted after the deadline last year, "to make sure they are both 'new' and 'urgent'," said Enrique Lahmann, a senior administrator.

"Both criteria are required."

A decision will be announced late Sunday or Monday, his office said.

While the vote, which would be held in the coming week, would not have legal weight, it demonstrates the strength of feeling among indigenous groups.

In an emotional press conference, Diaz Mirabal—flanked by indigenous leaders from French Guiana and Ecuador—implored world leaders to take heed of his message.

"We are asking governments to help us protect our territory, which is also the territory of humanity," he said. "Because if the Amazon rainforest disappears, people will die everywhere, it's that simple."

"It is crucial to stop extracting the oil, the gold, the uranium," he added. "This is wealth for Europe, the United States, Russia, and China, but is poverty for us."

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