



GLOBAL ALLIANCE OF TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES

Statement from the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities, representing 35 million people living in forest territories from 24 countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, to the Global Climate Community Ahead of COP27 in Egypt

On the eve of a global climate conference in Sharm el Sheik, we are grateful that the United Nations and its member states have finally begun to reference the contributions of Indigenous peoples and local communities as fundamental to the survival of the natural world.

But the planet and its peoples are in crisis, and pretty words are far from enough. We are here to demand specific action to protect our rights as the only path to protect ecosystems that are urgently needed to combat climate change, biodiversity loss and the emergence of future pandemics.

We are here to open dialogue and collaboration routes with governments, multilateral organizations, and donors. Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities are sitting at the decision-making tables and standing on the territories, but we need people to listen and build with us.

In practice, COP26 negotiators failed to translate their words into concrete commitments that would ensure that we—as Indigenous peoples and local communities—are given the central role we deserve in deciding how best to conserve our tropical forests and other ecosystems we manage better than other landowners, public and private.

Despite growing [recognition](#) of our outsized role as guardians of nature, relevant national laws in our countries are either weak or non-existent, exposing us to dangers that continue unabated. We are murdered and jailed for defending our lands, and every two days one of our leaders is killed. While our governments negotiate at the COP in Sharm el Sheik, an estimated 14 Indigenous defenders will be murdered for protecting Mother Earth.

If that wasn't enough, some of the solutions countries are bringing to the table also threaten to harm our peoples and the biodiverse forests they protect across the globe. A [new study](#) released today by the University of Melbourne's Climate Futures calculates that countries collectively need a total of 1.2 billion hectares of land to fulfill the promises laid out in their official climate plans. Their dangerous overreliance on land-based methods to capture carbon would gobble up much of our ancestral lands, which we desperately need for food production and nature protection. Simply put, we cannot plant trees to escape climate disaster, there is not enough land. Instead, we need to protect and restore existing forests, and you can only do that with us.

An overwhelming [body of evidence](#) proves that ecosystems thrive and nature is in balance, where Indigenous peoples and local communities have secure tenure to their traditional lands. Scientists who warned the world in 2019 that one million species are at risk of extinction; now say that the sustainable use of wild species requires strengthening the land rights of Indigenous peoples and drawing on our wisdom.

Despite enormous efforts from allies to the cause of Indigenous peoples and local communities, little funding actually reaches our communities: [less than 1%](#) of all funds meant to protect the environment. Long established bureaucratic systems and beliefs about our capacities prevent us from accessing climate funds that we are capable of managing for the benefit of all. We are the guardians of humanity's future and require all available support to keep hope for tomorrow alive.

If you don't believe in our word and the ancestral connection we have with the earth, believe the scientist. Through this statement we seek to reveal the full weight of the evidence that supports our quest for land rights and for scaling up investments in our proposals and in our systems of governance. Many researchers are calling on world leaders to give us more rights and support, but we are not seeing decision makers and politicians galvanize around such promising findings. This is our call to action too.

The evidence suggests that the future of all humanity is at stake, every day we are closer to the tipping point. We stand on this precipice knowing that at least 30% of the global plan for addressing climate change depends on us preventing the destruction of ecosystems, and we need to see this reflected in every national plan.

In the words of the [IPCC](#), stated with “very high confidence” in a 2022 report and cited in the new global study released today: “Supporting Indigenous self-determination, recognizing Indigenous Peoples’ rights, and supporting Indigenous knowledge-based adaptation is critical to reducing climate change risks and effective adaptation.”

As of today, proposals for investing in climate solutions, including the plan for a global climate market, are putting at risk primary forests and the Indigenous peoples and local communities on the frontlines of a battle against powerful political and economic forces that endanger the planet and all its peoples. Remember, you cannot protect the forests without protecting our rights, it's our home. We live there every day and have the most privileged knowledge of it.

The research released today warns that national plans for advancing the Paris climate goals ignore the need to protect the primary forests that represent 30 percent of the solution for addressing the climate crisis. The authors also reinforce the conclusions of scientists who study the causes of pandemic risk, biodiversity loss, and the deforestation that fuels climate change,

Across all these fields of scientific inquiry, the contributions of Indigenous peoples and local communities, our traditional knowledge, and recognition of our land rights are cited as solutions. So, we call for politicians, funders, decision-makers, journalists, and advisors to listen to science. There is plenty of evidence and studies to show that working with indigenous peoples and local communities is the only path forward to keep hope alive for humanity's tomorrow.