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Fossil Free Zones Gain Momentum at Landmark Energy Transition Conference in Colombia

Statement from [Earth Insight](#) in Wake of [First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels](#)

At the First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels in Santa Marta, Colombia, governments, Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, academics, and parliamentarians highlighted Fossil Free Zones as an imperative for a just energy transition. “This Conference has sent a powerful message to the world on the need for protecting critical ecosystems and Indigenous territories and governance in the energy transition,” said Juan Pablo Osornio, Earth Insight’s Engagement and Policy Director, who co-authored an op-ed on Fossil Free Zones for [Climate Home News](#) (English) and [El Espectador](#) (Spanish).

Fossil Free Zones: Colombia Leading the Way

Fossil Free Zones are geographically defined areas of ecological, biodiversity, or cultural significance where fossil fuel exploration, extraction, and related infrastructure are permanently prohibited. They translate the global commitment to transitioning away from fossil fuels into specific, enforceable, place-based decisions. They also sit at the intersection of the climate, biodiversity, and human and Indigenous rights agendas, bridging two of the most urgent international processes of our time.

Colombia has emerged as the clearest example of what leadership on this agenda looks like. In November 2025, Colombia became the first country to declare a region-wide extractive-free zone by halting new fossil fuel and large-scale mining extraction across its entire Amazon region. That decision was celebrated by Indigenous and civil society movements and a true investment in the future, as [research](#) by Earth Insight, IISD, and OPIAC showed that developing untapped reserves in the Colombian Amazon would generate billions of dollars in stranded assets while threatening 20 percent of the intact Amazon forest and the territories of nearly 70 percent of Indigenous and local communities with overlapping fossil fuel concessions.

The announcement of Fossil Free Zones as an imperative for a just energy transition demonstrates that protecting critical ecosystems and honoring Indigenous peoples’ rights are not obstacles to development but the foundation of a just and viable future.

Earth Insight is particularly encouraged that Fossil Free Zones were explicitly uplifted by the governments of Colombia and Panama at the Conference.

Juan Carlos Monterrey, Panama’s climate envoy, called for a formal “registry of fossil-free zones”, highlighting how “the data exists. The decisions have already been taken by countries

and regional governments who chose courage when courage was costly.” He further said: “our job is simple: elevate them. Let their example become the standard.”

Now it is up to Ireland and particularly Tuvalu to maintain this momentum for Fossil Free Zones at the Second Conference on the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels next year. Tuvalu’s and other Pacific nations’ commitment to a [Fossil Free Pacific](#) is an encouraging sign of their will to protect critical ecosystems from fossil fuel extraction.

[Indigenous Peoples](#), [NGOs](#), [parliamentarians](#) and [academics](#) from around the world also uplifted Fossil Free Zones in their recommendations to governments. Colombia’s landmark decision to protect the Amazon and Sierra Nevada from extractive expansion is not an isolated gesture but part of a growing global movement that links the protection of sacred and ecologically vital places directly to the architecture of the energy transition.

Earth Insight considers Fossil Free Zones to be an effective first step for developing countries seeking to implement the commitment to transition away from fossil fuels. We urge governments that have gathered in Santa Marta to discuss them within the new workstream on roadmap architecture and supply-side policies and to cooperate in their implementation, and call upon the scientific community to create a new working group on Fossil Free Zones under the Science Panel on the Global Energy Transition to support these efforts.

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