



For Immediate Release: November 17, 2025

Media Contact: Shayna Samuels, shayna@ripplestrategies.com, WhatsApp +1-718-541-4785

70+ Organizations at COP 30 Call on Governments Worldwide to Establish Fossil-Free Zones to Protect Forests and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

New Maps Reveal Oil and Gas Blocks Overlap With 183 Million Hectares of Tropical Forests Across Amazon, Congo Basin, and Southeast Asia

(Belém, COP 30) -- More than 70 international organizations attending COP 30 today released an [open letter](#) urging governments worldwide to establish fossil-free exclusion zones to protect high-integrity forests and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The call comes as [newly released maps](#) reveal the overlap of oil and gas blocks across more than 183 million hectares of tropical forests in the [Amazon](#), [Congo Region](#), and [Southeast Asia](#)—a threat that demands immediate action at this "forest COP." (Maps are available for download [here](#).)

A diverse range of groups signed the letter that together focus on climate, nature, human rights, Indigenous Peoples and local communities including: Amazon Watch, Amnesty International, Center for International and Environmental Law (CIEL), Clima Info, Earth Insight, Fossil Fuel Treaty, Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC), Global Witness, Greenpeace, LINGO, Parliamentarians for a Fossil Free Future, Oil Change International, and Stand.Earth. See the full letter and list of signatories [here](#).

COP 30, taking place in the heart of the Amazon in Belém, represents a critical moment for forest protection. As President Lula noted in opening the conference, the "eyes of the world turn to Belém with immense expectation." The organizations' letter responds to [Lula's call to adopt roadmaps to reverse deforestation and overcome our dependence on fossil fuels](#), offering a concrete first step: stopping fossil fuel expansion into the world's most critical forest ecosystems. More organizations are continuing to sign the open letter [here](#).

"There is an obvious first step to implementing this call: we must stop the expansion of fossil fuels into high-integrity forests to avoid the roads, pipelines, and infrastructure that inevitably

come with drilling, leading to deforestation and the violation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities that have stewarded these ecosystems for generations," the letter states.

The urgency is clear. Tropical forests absorb about [a quarter of all carbon dioxide emitted each year](#), storing vast amounts in trees and soils as natural climate regulators. Yet oil and gas development threatens 21% of high-integrity tropical forests across three of the world's most critical tropical forest regions (high-integrity forests refer to undisturbed forests as defined by [Vancutsem et al. \(2021\)](#). This definition was developed for tropical forests, but could be adapted to temperate and boreal forests). Declaring proven oil, gas, and coal reserves under tropical and sub-tropical forests off-limits could avoid burning nearly [317 billion tons of CO₂](#), 1.3 times larger than the remaining [1.5°C carbon budget](#).

"We must put a definitive end to the encroachment of the fossil fuel industry upon high-integrity forests that act as safeguards against a runaway climate crisis, and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities whose ancestral knowledge is the most effective means of conservation," the organizations write.

What's at Stake Across the Three Largest Tropical Forest Regions

Today's analysis found that oil and gas blocks overlap with high-integrity forests across three critical regions, putting the world's most important carbon sinks at risk. Fossil fuel expansion can be a gateway to deforestation, as oil and gas roads built in intact forests are often the ['first cut'](#) that spreads as far as [10km](#) away. Oil and gas development also harms the health of Indigenous Peoples and local communities by polluting rivers with spills and the air with gas flaring.

Key Findings from New Maps Analyses by Region:

- **Amazon Region** - The Amazon is approaching a [tipping point](#) driven by industrial expansion. Currently, 74 million hectares (14%) of high-integrity forests and 31 million hectares (12%) of Indigenous Peoples and local communities' lands overlap with oil and gas blocks. The expansion of oil and gas and other extractive industries is particularly concerning for the most vulnerable Indigenous Peoples: those living in voluntary isolation and initial contact, otherwise known as PIACI, in the Amazon region. In Peru, as mapping shows in another [threat report](#), oil and gas blocks overlap with 21% of existing and proposed PIACI reserves.
- **Congo Region** - Africa's Congo Basin, which is losing 3.9 million hectares of forest each year, faces similarly grave risks. A [recent IUCN motion](#) urges governments to maintain at least 74% forest intactness and prohibit extractive industries in the most pristine areas. Yet, 72.5 million hectares (40%) of high-integrity forests and 38% of community forests are already overlapped by oil and gas blocks.
- **Southeast Asia** - In Southeast Asia, deforestation from extractive expansion continues to erode biodiversity. About 14% of Key Biodiversity Areas and 36.8 million hectares (37%) of high-integrity forests are currently overlapped by oil and gas concessions.

Growing Momentum for Fossil-Free Forests

The letter builds on growing global momentum. [Indigenous Peoples'-led platforms](#) have already called for the exclusion of fossil fuels from their territories, and civil society organisations are

pushing to defend the [Caribbean](#), the [Coral Triangle](#), and [Protected Areas](#) from fossil fuels. Just some weeks ago, countries participating in the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress extended their endorsement of a fossil-free [Amazon](#) to the [Congo Basin](#) and [requested the World Commission on Environmental Law](#) to assess a [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty](#).

In the Amazon region specifically, coordinated bills have been introduced in [Brazil](#), [Colombia](#), [Peru](#), [Ecuador](#), and [Bolivia](#) by Parliamentarians for a Fossil Free Future to ban fossil fuel expansion. Colombia has also declared the Amazon a [Renewable Natural Resources Zone](#), which would [ban new oil and mineral extraction](#) – an example other countries can follow to establish fossil-free zones. **The growing momentum for fossil-free forests is vital as are [broader efforts](#) to address additional extractive pressures and deforestation drivers.**

A Just Transition Requires Action

The organizations' letter emphasizes that establishing fossil-free zones is essential to achieving a just transition, and calls on developed countries to mobilize the resources needed to compensate developing nations and support putting fossil-free zones into practice.

"President Lula opened COP 30, reminding us all that the 'eyes of the world turn to Belém with immense expectation' as a COP takes place in the heart of the Amazon," the letter concludes. "But there can be no forest protection and no just transition without stopping the encroachment of the fossil fuel industry upon forests and their stewards. Stopping its expansion and guaranteeing the means of implementation would be a bold first step. The world is watching. Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and future generations are counting on all of us."

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