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Ministers Call for Safeguarding Protected Areas from Looming Industrial Pressures at UN Biodiversity Conference (COP17)

Ministers and Representatives Concerned That Protected and Key Biodiversity Areas Overlap With a Large Amount of Oil and Gas Blocks, Mining Concessions, and Other Pressures

(Yerevan, Armenia) At COP 17, government ministers and high level delegation representatives joined together at a press conference and shared a collective call for ensuring that protected and conserved areas are safeguarded from industrial pressures. This call for action follows a high-level roundtable of ministers and representatives on this topic and is relevant given that there is still time for countries to ensure that these extractive and industrial threats to Protected and Conserved Areas and Indigenous and Traditional Territories are addressed by countries as a solutions pathway for high-integrity implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

This call for action follows a new report released by Earth Insight, the World Commission on Protected Areas, and partners revealing an alarming overlap between large-scale extractive and industrial pressures and areas critical for biodiversity across more than 30 countries.

View the UN press conference recording and pictures for use here

This took place at the Seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17), where Parties have been assessing whether the world is on track to meet a range of targets - including the flagship 30x30 target, which commits countries to effectively conserve and manage at least 30 percent of the world's land, inland waters, and coastal and marine areas by 2030.

Statements from Ministers, Delegation Representatives, and Others:

Juan Carlos Navarro, Minister of Environment, Republic of Panama: "A park open to drilling and mining is just paper, not protection on the ground. A marine park open to trawling is likewise vulnerable and open to overfishing and environmental degradation. Leaders at COP17 must be bold and back their commitments with enforcement and resources, so that when the world gathers in Panama next September 2027 for the IUCN World Protected and Conserved Areas Congress, we can agree on effective, immediate and concrete conservation actions. Panama has shown that protecting nature effectively and growing an economy go hand in hand. The message is simple: protect nature now."

Maria J. Rodriguez de Sancho, Director General for Biodiversity, Forest and Desertification, Spain Achieving the 30x30 target requires more than increasing the percentage of protected areas. It requires ensuring that protection is effective, ecologically connected, socially supported, and capable of delivering tangible benefits for biodiversity, climate resilience, protection against natural disasters and our economies and health. Spain's experience in nature conservation illustrates this evolution. Protected areas in our country currently cover 36% of Spain's land territory, and while, in 2008, less than 1% of our marine waters were protected, today, marine protected areas cover 22.45% of Spanish waters. This expansion in the marine environment has been firmly grounded in science and meaningful public participation."

Boipuso Wynter Mmolotsi, Minister of Environment and Tourism, Republic of Botswana "Botswana has demonstrated that conservation works when it combines protected areas, community stewardship, sound evidence, and sustainable financing. Today, approximately 40 percent of Botswana's land area is under conservation through National Parks, Game Reserves and Forest Reserves. As we implement Target 3, success should not be measured only by the number of hectares conserved. It should also be measured through ecological integrity, connectivity, effective management, equitable governance, and sustainable financing. Botswana's priorities are to strengthen protected-area effectiveness, enhance monitoring and ecosystem valuation, expand sustainable financing mechanisms, and ensure communities continue to benefit from conservation."

Dr. Gemma Harper OBE, Chief Executive, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, UK: As countries work towards Target 3 and the 30X30 ambition, we can learn a great deal from one another about how to deliver conservation that is effective, equitable and supported by local communities. By strengthening partnerships between governments, communities and conservation organisations, we can accelerate progress while ensuring that biodiversity recovery also delivers benefits for people, livelihoods and local economies. Many countries and territories have made progress towards Target 3, showing that ambition can be translated into action (this is highlighted in the UK's 30x30 report published this week: From commitment to conservation: Delivering 30by30 for nature and people (accessible webpage) - GOV.UK). The next phase is about quality as well as scale: protecting the places that matter most for biodiversity, improving connectivity, strengthening management, and ensuring that conservation delivers lasting outcomes for nature and people."

Tyson Miller, Earth Insight Executive Director: "Almost no country is free from industrial pressures overlapping Protected and Conserved Areas and Indigenous and Traditional Territories at present. However, as countries move to implement their 30x30 commitments to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, addressing these pressures and removing these threats now will prevent these critical areas from being compromised in the future."

Dr Madhu Rao, Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA): "Target 3 calls for the effective, equitable and durable protection of the most important areas for biodiversity and ecosystem services. It is imperative that such areas are secured through appropriate policy and regulation from industrial extractive activities that are proven threats to biodiversity."

Juan Carlos Jintiach Arcos, Executive Secretary, Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC): "Protecting 30% of the planet can't simply mean counting hectares while our territories remain open to extraction. We, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, know how to care for these territories because we have governed and defended them for generations. 30x30 must recognize our rights, guarantee our consent, and put resources directly in the hands of those who protect these territories."

Lucy Mulenkei, International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) Co-Chair: "Indigenous and traditional territories are among the most important places for biodiversity on Earth, and we welcome recognition of them as a distinct pathway toward the 30x30 goal. Recognition must come with respect for our collective rights, our full and effective participation in the biodiversity decision-making processes, and direct access for Indigenous Peoples and local communities to the finance needed to keep protecting these lands and biodiversity."

Brian O'Donnell, Director, Campaign for Nature: "The 30x30 Global Assessment we recently released showed that the world has real momentum toward protecting 30% of the planet. However we must be clear eyed about what could erode that progress. When protected areas are leased for oil drilling, mining or other industrial activities, governments are undermining the meaning and purpose of protected areas. At COP17, governments must redirect harmful subsidies, and give protected and conserved areas the long-term funding they need to succeed."

Key Context and Materials: High Integrity 30x30 Implementation Report and downloadable maps

Findings Analyzing threats in 33 highly biodiverse countries based in Central America, the Amazon and Congo Basin regions, and Southeast Asia reveal:

- Over 62 million hectares of terrestrial protected and conserved areas, roughly 2.5 times the size of the United Kingdom, are overlapped by oil and gas blocks, with nearly 43 million hectares overlapped by mining concessions.
- When it comes to the ocean, over 13 million hectares (130,000 square kilometers) of Marine Protected Areas - roughly the size of Nicaragua are overlapped by oil and gas blocks
- Unprotected Key Biodiversity Areas are also highly at risk - across the four regions as 19% of both marine and terrestrial KBA's are threatened by oil and gas blocks and 15% of terrestrial KBA's are threatened by mining concessions

Call to Action

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, along with public and private actors, should commit to high-integrity implementation of 30x30. Specifically:

- Above all, governments must recognize, secure, and resource the rights, territorial governance, and traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as essential partners in durable conservation.
- Governments should measure progress by biodiversity outcomes rather than hectares alone, avoiding "paper parks" and treating the 30 percent target as a global minimum rather than an ecological ceiling.
- There should be established and enforced geographical exclusions that keep new extractive and large-scale industrial activity out of protected and conserved areas, and review, retire, or phase out existing concessions that undermine ecological integrity.
- Expansion toward 30x30 should prioritize the places that matter most for biodiversity, beginning with Key Biodiversity Areas and intact, high-integrity ecosystems.
- Governments must redirect harmful subsidies and give protected and conserved areas the long-term funding they need to succeed.

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