

COP16 - Media Briefing

Indigenous Land Rights
The Key to Biodiversity and Climate Survival

Countries have committed to conserving 30% of the planet's lands, water, and seas. At COP16 the focus will be on how countries achieve that. Are Indigenous Peoples' territories the silver bullet solution?

AVAAZ

"The Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon and the world have the most suitable knowledge and governance systems to care for our planet because they serve life, defending and protecting it for all of humanity."

Oswaldo Muca Castizo
General Coordinator of OPIAC
(Organización Nacional
de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia)

1. COP16 Overview

Biodiversity is declining faster than at any time in human history, with one million species at risk of extinction, and this crisis also impacts our daily lives and economies, generating profound risks for all of us. To picture the scale of biodiversity loss in figures, between 1997 and 2011 global estimates suggest the world lost US$4-20 trillion per year in ecosystem services because of deforestation and US$6.3-10.6 trillion per year from land degradation, and these losses are continuously rising.

In recognition of this profound crisis, two years ago 196 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) delivered an ambitious and inclusive plan to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 in the Kumin-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Among its main highlights are the target to conserve 30% of our planet's lands, waters, and seas; the mobilization by 2030 of at least $200 billion per year from developed countries for developing countries to invest in biodiversity conservation; and the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights and roles in protecting biodiversity.

From October 21 to November 1, these Parties will meet again for COP16 in Cali, Colombia, and together with other stakeholders will discuss, and hopefully agree on, how to achieve the goals and targets of the GBF.

The fact that COP16 will take place in an Amazonian country couldn't be more symbolic to illustrate the effects of biodiversity loss and climate change as well as the solution. The Amazon rainforest, one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world, is reaching a tipping point, it has been hit hard with wildfires across its different borders in the past weeks, and its majestic rivers are drying out.

For COP16, Indigenous leaders across the Amazon alongside 1 million people around the world are calling for Parties to legally recognize Indigenous Peoples' territories as a key strategy for conservation, and to provide them with direct access to funds so they can keep safeguarding biodiversity and healing our planet.

IVAN CASTANEIRA



2. The Missing Solution: The Role of Indigenous Leadership in Protecting Biodiversity and the Climate

Scientists have shown that when Indigenous Peoples manage their land, deforestation declines, species thrive, and forests continue to act as the carbon sinks we desperately need. Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples manage over 50% of the world's land, but they only legally own 11.4% of this land. And without legal protection, their lives and territories are threatened by deforestation, extractive industries, and land grabs.

Indigenous Peoples have a track record of successfully protecting biodiversity, but what is lacking—and what we need—is the political will to put our most precious asset formally under their legal guardianship, and to provide them with direct access to the funds to make it happen. For Parties to fully recognize Indigenous Peoples' territories at COP16 would go a long way toward solving this.

Governments formally recognizing the land currently under management by Indigenous Peoples as their legal territories would be the most effective and efficient way to achieve the target in the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) of conserving at least 30% of lands, waters, and seas by 2030. This 30% is the bare minimum of what the world needs to protect the biodiversity essential for our survival.

The facts at a glance:

Indigenous Peoples' territories intersect

40%

of **intact land ecosystems**, demonstrating extraordinary conservation success.
Read more



Indigenous Peoples' stewardship and ancestral knowledge have conserved nearly

45%

of the **Amazon's intact forests.**
Read more



Ecosystem services provided solely by savannas, forests, tropical forests, and shrub and rangelands **under Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities'** stewardship are estimated at

US$1.16 trillion yearly.

Read more

If governments formally recognize Indigenous territories, **target 3 of the GBF** of conserving

30% by 2030

could already be achieved.
Read more

More than

74%

of all mapped Indigenous lands, covering 28 million km², **are classified as Carbon Stabilization Areas**, storing more than 931,000 megatons of carbon biomass. (Read more)



Formally recognizing Indigenous Peoples' territories is essential to meeting local and global biodiversity, climate, and development goals—especially when considering that their territories are the best conserved.

Besides safeguarding their legal rights over their territories, this COP needs to address another elephant in the room: the funding gap is enormous, the current biodiversity finance model is not working, and the much-needed funds are not reaching the hands of those who actively work for our planet. Currently, only 6% of the biodiversity funds are earmarked for Indigenous Peoples, and huge amounts of money are lost through intermediaries.

Direct access to finance promotes justice and delivers concrete results: it ensures Indigenous People's right to self-determination and enables them to better assert their rights, pursue their economic, social, and cultural development, and fund their land-management practices and governance structures under which they have been conserving biodiversity for centuries.

IVAN CASTANEIRA



3. COP 16: What is at stake?

COP16 is happening in one of the world's "megadiverse" countries. Colombia, host to nearly 10% of the planet's biodiversity, has several areas of high biological diversity not only in the Amazon rainforest but also in the Andean ecosystems and the humid ecosystems in the Chocó area.

Chairing the COP Presidency, Colombia promised to make this a people's COP, and, for the first time, their National Biodiversity Plan has been developed in consultation with a wide array of civil society.

COP16 will focus on how the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) will be implemented. One of the main issues at stake is going to be how countries plan to achieve target 3 of the GBF, which sets the goal of conserving 30% of the planet's lands, water, and seas.

Countries were expected to present their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with updates to align them with the GBF ahead of the COP. At the time of publication of this briefing, many countries have yet to present their plans.

Countries will also discuss how to monitor progress, build accountability mechanisms, and deliver the money needed to implement the GBF. As always, the issue of finance is sure to be a contentious one. At COP15 in 2022, donor Parties agreed to increase financial resources for supporting developing countries to implement the GBF to at least US$20 billion per year by 2025. But so far only 41% of that figure has been publicly announced, according to some estimates.

Another important topic is going to be how to share monetary and non-monetary benefits with countries, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities from the use of digital sequence information from the DNA of native species for different industrial sectors including pharmaceutical, cosmetics, and agribusinesses. COP16 will discuss how to operationalize a multilateral mechanism for the fair and equitable sharing of those benefits, including a global fund.

Finally, let's stress that our human well-being and global economy depend on ecosystem services, such as the provision of food, fresh water, medicine, timber, and fuelwood; regulation of climate; and protection from extreme weather events, among many others. Approximately $44 trillion of economic value generation—over half of the world's GDP—is dependent on nature, and global ecosystem services provide benefits between $125-145 trillion/year, 1.3 times the global GDP.

These values, however, must be taken as the baseline, as there are many contributions that biodiversity provides to our well-being that simply cannot be accounted for in monetary terms. We are part of nature. We depend on it for everything from connection and grounding to spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation, aesthetic experiences, and much more.



Additional Resources

For more information and interview requests:

media@avaaz.org

Luciana Weyne (English and Portuguese):
+1 (571) 621-2896

Raúl Estrada (English and Spanish):
+52 1 55 8019 6422

Real-Time Updates from COP16

Want more information on COP16? Join Avaaz's WhatsApp channel to receive updates from our experts: Updates Avaaz

About Avaaz

Avaaz, meaning "voice" in multiple languages, was founded in 2007 as a global people-powered movement with a simple mission: to unite citizens globally to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people want. With more than 69 million members worldwide, Avaaz empowers individuals to take action on issues like biodiversity loss, climate change, corruption, conflict, and human rights.

Our model of internet organizing allows thousands of individual efforts, however small, to be rapidly combined into a collective force. Avaaz sets its priorities based on member polls; for example, 2023's top concerns were the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and defending democracy.

As a fully member-funded organization, Avaaz accepts no money from governments, corporations, or political parties, ensuring our independence and democratic accountability. Global campaigns run in 19 languages, and Avaaz engages with civil society and international organizations to drive progress on multiple and urgent public issues.

Avaaz is mobilized on all three Rio conventions, engaging with civil society at the national and global level and with officials from Parties and international organizations to invove everyone in the common goal of seeking a sustainable future.

Avaaz has campaigned on biodiversity protection and the rights of Indigenous Peoples since its creation in 2008. Through over a decade of campaigns, millions of our members have taken action to effectively move world leaders into action. In this crucial moment, our movement rises again and will be at COP16 to ensure people's voices are shaping the fate of our planet.