

## **Stop Ecocide International Forest Network Manifesto**

Forests cover little more than 30% of the world's land surface but the multitude of ecosystems they have woven over millions of years make them vital to the rest of planetary life. From the towering rainforests of the Amazon, Africa and Southeast Asia to the ancient boreal forests of the Arctic, from the mangroves of the tropics to the temperate forests of both hemispheres, forests display a mosaic of life of indescribable beauty and make our planet liveable.

**Forests play a crucial role in regulating the world's climate** through both the oxygen they produce and the carbon they store. They are also essential to the water cycle, capturing, storing and regulating the flow of water, while protecting and conserving this life-sustaining element: their headwaters and wetlands provide 75% of the world's accessible freshwater. They also provide food, fuel and direct shelter to more than a billion people, and stand as the great natural pharmacy against all kinds of diseases. Their existence protects against soil erosion, preventing nutrient loss and providing key organic material for soil fertility and plant growth.

As the habitat of the vast majority of known terrestrial plant and animal species (many of them endemic), 80% of the world's biodiversity is found in forests. Indigenous peoples are the Guardians of this wealth of life and who provide traditional knowledge, practices and spiritual connections which are not only integral to the survival of our forests, but also offer teaching and wisdom from which the rest of the world can learn and benefit.

However, half of the world's forests have already disappeared due to human activity, with the greatest destruction occurring in the last 150 years. The myriad threats they face are innumerable: from indiscriminate logging and illegal mining to severe pollution, climate change and the destructive development of industrial agriculture and livestock. This must be curbed if we are to stop biodiversity loss and climate breakdown.

**Making ecocide an international crime can provide a vital framework** to protect our forest ecosystems from the worst harms. It will protect indigenous peoples and forest defenders who face danger on a daily basis. It will ensure that regulation and protection are taken seriously at the highest level. It will encourage greater due diligence, preventing the worst damage and encouraging human activity that works in harmony with nature.

Forests are much more than a collection of trees. They are living, breathing entities that sustain life on Earth. They are the lungs of the Earth, the cradle of biodiversity and countless forms of life. They transcend borders, cultures and ideologies.

**Their survival is essential and their protection paramount.**

We invite all individuals, governments and organisations to join us in this collective endeavor to safeguard the world's forests for the benefit of all beings, present and future, by supporting the creation of a new crime of ecocide within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

