

Amazon fires: Seven countries sign forest protection pact

8 hours ago

Seven South American countries have agreed measures to protect the Amazon river basin, amid global concern over massive fires in the world's largest tropical forest.

Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru and Suriname signed a pact, setting up a disaster response network and satellite monitoring.

At a summit in Colombia, they also agreed to work on reforestation.

More than 80,000 fires have broken out in the Amazon rainforest this year.

"This meeting will live on as a co-ordination mechanism for the presidents that share this treasure - the Amazon," said Colombian President Iván Duque, who hosted the summit in the city of Leticia.

Meanwhile, Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra said: "Goodwill alone is not enough anymore."

The seven nations also agreed to put more efforts into education and increase the role of indigenous communities.



Burning trees in the Brazilian Amazon

The countries were represented in Leticia by presidents, vice-presidents and ministers.

Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro took part by videolink because he was preparing for surgery.

What's the background to this?

The Amazon is a vital carbon store that slows down the pace of global warming, and 60% of it is located in Brazil.

The number of fires between January and August 2019 is double that of the same period last year, according to the country's National Institute for Space Research (Inpe).

President Bolsonaro has drawn intense domestic and international criticism for failing to protect the region.



President Bolsonaro responds to criticism about his previous comments on the Amazon fire

Environmentalists say his policies have led to an increase in fires this year and that he has encouraged cattle farmers to clear vast swathes of the rainforest since his election last October.

Bolivia has also seen fires rage across the forest near its borders with Brazil and Paraguay.

Meanwhile, Brazil's leading meat export industry group and agricultural businesses have joined an environmental campaign calling for an end to deforestation in public lands in the Amazon and demanding government action.

Several international retailers have said they are suspending purchases of Brazilian leather because of the links between cattle ranching and the fires devastating parts of the Amazon rainforest.

Amazon countries sign pact to better protect the rainforest

Indigenous leaders and analysts remain cautiously optimistic about pact, saying it is thin on details and directives.

by Steven Grattan

7 Sept 2019



Leaders and officials from seven Amazonian countries attended the one-day summit [Steven Grattan/Al Jazeera]

Leticia, Colombia - Leaders of countries home to the vast Amazon signed a pact on Friday aimed at sharing resources and taking greater steps to protect the world's largest tropical rainforest.

The talks, led by Colombian President [Ivan Duque](#), took place in Leticia, the Colombian region home to part of the Amazon rainforest.

According to the "Leticia Amazon pact", the Amazonian countries will "strengthen

coordinated action", "establish [a] regional cooperation mechanism", "increase efforts associated with monitoring forest cover", and "strengthen the capacities and participation of indigenous and tribal peoples", among other actions. The pact was thin on specifics, however.

Among those in attendance at Friday's meeting were Peruvian President Martin Vizcarra, Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno and Bolivian President Evo Morales, as well as the Suriname Vice President Michael Adhin, Brazilian Foreign Minister Ernesto Araujo and Guyana Natural Resource Minister Raphael Trotman. Brazilian President [Jair Bolsonaro](#) who said he was unable to travel due to his health, joined via video conference. Venezuela was not invited to the meeting.

The meeting came against a backdrop of growing international outrage over the [surge in wildfires raging in parts of the Amazon](#). Environmentalists blame the policies and weakened restrictions of Brazil's Bolsonaro for the increased deforestation. Bolsonaro wants to open up the rainforest for commercial exploration. Fires have also broken out in [Bolivia](#).

"We understand the urgency to protect this region, we understand that there are threats in the region, and that they are basically all the same in the countries meeting here today," Duque said.

"It's no surprise to anyone that in recent decades we've lost thousands of hectares of tropical rainforest because of the illegal expansion of the agricultural frontier as well as illegal extraction of minerals and the planting of illicit crops," he added.

Duque called on all the leaders present to work together to combat deforestation and share timely information on the protection of the Amazon.

"When a brother country needs help, we should all do our best to help in these emergencies," Duque said.

Peru's Vizcarra agreed, saying, "If we look back at what's been done over the past 40 years, it isn't satisfactory. As a result we'll change the strategy." Peru has the fourth-largest amount of tropical forest in the world and second in Latin America, after Brazil.

Bolsonaro via video said that the pact affirmed each country's sovereignty.

'Pact is very vague'

The presidents were joined by indigenous leaders whose communities were most affected by deforestation and the fires in the Amazon.

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'Surrounded, afraid': The indigenous guardians of Brazil's Amazon

Nelly Kuiru, coordinator of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, expressed doubts over the leaders' commitment to protecting the rainforest.

"It's a critical moment for the Amazon in terms of the environment and social issues with indigenous villagers that live in this territory," she told Al Jazeera in Leticia.

"I think it is important the presidents took the time to come to one of the Amazon's regions, in Colombia, and sign the pact. But I have doubts about it," she added. "I doubt the pact will be fulfilled, because to make a pact there first of all has to be an analysis of what is happening."



Nelly Kuiru is the coordinator of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia [Steven Grattan/Al Jazeera]

She added that the pact itself was "very vague".

It is "very abstract and the Amazon region is not abstract, it is a lot more than just rainforest. There is a lot of biodiversity and cultural diversity and of the 102 indigenous villages that exist in Colombia, 69 are found in the Colombian Amazon," she said.

Sergio Guzman, Director of Colombia Risk Analysis, said, "There is this impotence for action in the international community and these presidents want to show that they care

and that they're doing something.

"A meeting in the Amazon is all fair and good, a great photo opportunity, but it doesn't give me a lot of hope for swift change," he added, via phone.

Ricardo Lozano, Colombia's environment minister, told reporters in Leticia strengthening cooperation was key.

He said to do this, he hopes the region can build an Amazon network to work in a "more accelerated" way to have better forecasts, share information on illegal activities in the region and also educate themselves and each other about the communities of the region.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA NEWS

Amazon Watch Statement on the "Amazon Pact" Issued Today by South American Leaders

SEPTEMBER 6, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Amazon Watch

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Today the presidents of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, and Suriname met in Leticia, Colombia to discuss regional cooperation for the Amazon. They issued this "[Amazon Pact](#)" at the end of the meeting, which laid out their agreed-upon commitments.

Amazon Watch's **Moira Birss** made the following statement in response to the Pact:

"While it is a positive sign that governments of the Amazon region met to discuss joint cooperation to 'conserve' the Amazon rainforest, the text of the pact does more to raise questions and concerns than it does to reassure the world that the Amazon will be protected.

"A key red flag in the text is its description of the causes of forest degradation and deforestation; the text does not actually name any specific cause and only very vaguely references a possible link between Amazon deforestation and climate change. This is problematic both because ample scientific research has demonstrated the serious climate impacts of tropical forest deforestation, and because the direct causes of Amazon deforestation and degradation are widely known to be industrial activities like agribusiness and mining.

"Furthermore, the pact's frequent mention of the 'value' of the trees and biodiversity of the Amazon, and of the 'development' of

its natural resources, seem to indicate that the signatories view the rainforest as a commodity to be exploited rather than a vital ecosystem and the ancestral home to indigenous peoples that must be protected.

"This reading of the pact is supported by recent events: this week the Bolsonaro administration has pushed for even more rollbacks to environmental protections in the country's Forest Code, and Ecuador's new Environment Minister declared on Wednesday that, "where there are natural resources, there will be extraction."

"Responses to the Amazon fires will never be effective in protecting the rainforest unless they confront the key driver of Amazon deforestation: profit-seeking at the expense of the rights of forest peoples and environmental protection."

Leticia's Pact for the Amazon

Release



September 6, 2019 - 2:16 pm

Joint Statement 028-19

The Heads of State and Heads of Delegation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Republic of Colombia, the Republic of Ecuador, the Republic of Guyana, the Republic of Peru and the Republic of Suriname meeting in Leticia, Colombia, the September 6, 2019:

Reaffirming the sovereign rights of the countries of the Amazon region over their territories and their natural resources, including the development and sustainable use of those resources, as recognized by international law;

Aware of the value of the Amazon for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as well as, of its tropical humid forests, source of 20% of the planet's fresh water and climate regulator,

which provides essential ecosystem services for the sustainable development of Amazonian populations;

Bearing in mind that more than 34 million people live in the Amazon, including indigenous and tribal peoples and peoples in voluntary isolation and initial contact (PIACI) possessors of ancestral knowledge, traditional knowledge and cultural and linguistic diversity, which must be protected;

Reaffirming all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, taking into account the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities, in light of the different national circumstances, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; the Minamata Convention on Mercury; as well as regional treaties, such as the principles and purposes of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty and other relevant international agreements for the sustainable development of the Amazon and global ecosystems;

Aware of the importance of the implementation and generation of synergies between the 2030 Agenda and its Objectives for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the process of building a global framework for biodiversity after 2020;

Reaffirming that for the conservation and sustainable development of the Amazon, the efforts of the Amazon countries are required, and expressing concern about deforestation and forest degradation that is caused by different causes in each of the countries, taking into account their respective regulatory frameworks, including the causes of deforestation that, according to the necessary evidence, could be associated with climate change and its structural factors, and expressing its commitment to increase national and regional efforts to address this problem in a comprehensive and urgent manner;

Reaffirming that cooperation between Amazonian countries is an important condition for the conservation of the Amazon, which generates opportunities for sustainable development and the well-being of its population;

Considering that, although there are established financial mechanisms and programs, including multilateral banking, which complement the efforts of the Amazonian countries and contribute to the solution of these challenges, it is necessary to increase the provision and mobilization of financial resources to comply with the Commitments made within the framework of these mechanisms to achieve this objective;

Encouraging the international community to cooperate for the conservation and sustainable development of the Amazon, based on respect for their respective national sovereignty, priorities

and interests, we decided to sign the present:

COURT OF LETICIA FOR THE AMAZON

1. Strengthen coordinated action for the valuation of forests and biodiversity, as well as to combat deforestation and forest degradation, based on national policies and their respective regulatory frameworks.
2. Establish mechanisms for regional cooperation and information exchange to combat illegal activities that threaten the conservation of the Amazon.
3. Create the Amazon Network for Natural Disaster Cooperation among the Emergency Operations Centers to coordinate and articulate national disaster prevention and care systems in order to effectively address regional impact emergencies, such as large forest fires scale.
4. Exchange and implement experiences in the integral management of fire, promoting the development of policies, instruments and technical actions, based on the prevention of forest fires, the promotion of alternatives to the use of fire in rural areas and the strengthening of technical capacities , scientific and institutional.
5. Specify accelerated restoration, rehabilitation and reforestation initiatives in areas degraded by forest fires and illegal activities including the illegal extraction of minerals with a view to mitigating the impact, and recovery of species and ecosystem functionality.
6. Increase efforts associated with monitoring forest cover and other strategic ecosystems in the region in order to have periodic reports, in particular, regarding the generation of an early warning system for deforestation and degradation to act With a preventive approach.
7. Exchange information to improve the monitoring capabilities of climate, biodiversity, water and hydrobiological resources of the region under a watershed and community-based approach.
8. Promote initiatives for connectivity of priority ecosystems and protection figures for biodiversity conservation through sustainable use, restoration and landscape management, respecting national sovereignty.
9. Exchange and implement experiences in the integrated management of protected area systems of Amazonian countries at the regional, national and sub-national levels for their effective management and for the benefit of local populations, through the promotion of program development and / or conservation and sustainable use projects.
10. Strengthen the mechanisms that support and promote the sustainable use of the forest, sustainable productive systems, patterns of production and responsible consumption and that promote value chains and other approaches to sustainable production, including those based on

biodiversity.

11. Promote joint actions aimed at the empowerment of women living in the Amazon region to strengthen their active participation in the conservation and sustainable development of the Amazon.

12. Strengthen the capacities and participation of indigenous and tribal peoples and local communities in the sustainable development of the Amazon, recognizing their fundamental role in the conservation of the region.

13. Promote research, technological development, technology transfer and knowledge management processes with the purpose of guiding the appropriate decision making and promoting the development of sustainable environmental, social and economic enterprises.

14. Develop and articulate among the Amazonian countries education and awareness raising activities on the role and function of the Amazon, the main challenges and threats it faces for its conservation and sustainable use of forests and the protection of traditional knowledge of forests. communities that inhabit it; as well as on disaster risk scenarios for strengthening the resilience of Amazonian populations.

15. Work together to strengthen financial programs and mechanisms, claim the commitments of the countries assumed in these spaces, mobilize public and private resources, including Multilateral Banking, as appropriate, for the implementation of this Pact.

16. Fast forward in the formulation of the second phase of the Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Program to the Global Environment Facility.

WE DECLARE:

Our willingness to host the present Leticia Pact for the Amazon.

Our commitment to coordinate, through the Foreign Ministry and the competent authorities, the formulation of an action plan for the development of the actions taken, as well as to carry out follow-up meetings to evaluate the progress in the formulation and implementation of said plan.

Our intention to cooperate and our call to other interested States, to the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) and other regional and international organizations to cooperate in order to achieve the actions agreed here, building in harmony with national efforts and in attention to the requests of the Amazonian countries signatory to this Covenant and with full respect for their sovereignty.

Amazon fires are 'true apocalypse', says Brazilian archbishop
Erwin Kräutler says he expects next month's papal synod to denounce destruction of rainforest

Jonathan Watts and Harriet Sherwood

Thu 5 Sep 2019 15.05 BST

Last modified on Thu 5 Sep 2019 18.37 BST



A firefighter looks at the destruction caused by a fire in the municipality of Sorriso, Mato Grosso state. Photograph: Mayke Toscano/AFP/Getty Images

The **fires in the Amazon** are a “true apocalypse”, according to a Brazilian archbishop who expects next month’s papal synod at the Vatican to strongly denounce the destruction of the rainforest.

The comments by Erwin Kräutler will put fresh pressure on the Brazilian president, **Jair Bolsonaro**, following criticism from G7 leaders last month over the surge of deforestation in the world’s biggest terrestrial carbon sink.

The archbishop’s words also highlight a widening division between the Catholic church and the Pentecostal movement. **Pope Francis** has championed a more harmonious relationship with the natural world for the sake of future generations, in contrast to the fast-growing new-world Pentecostals who form the support base for the ramped-up resource exploitation advocated by Bolsonaro and Donald Trump.

The gathering of bishops would condemn all forms of Amazon destruction and advocate a new view of ecology based on Christian faith in God as the creator of a “common home”, Kräutler said in an email exchange with the Guardian. Although retired as a bishop of Xingu, he is one of 18 members of the preparatory council appointed by Francis ahead of next month’s papal synod on the Amazon.

Following the meeting, Francis is expected to reinforce this message with an “apostolic exhortation”. It is likely to build on his influential 180-page encyclical on climate change, *Laudato Si’*, published four years ago, which called for concrete steps to tackle the environmental crisis.

Preparations for an Amazon synod have been under way since 2016, but the issue has become more urgent in recent months due to fires, threats and a hostile government, Kräutler said.

“There have always been fires in the Amazon. When they are smaller, nature rebuilds itself within a few years. But what you are seeing now is a true apocalypse,” said the archbishop, who has spent 54 years in the region.

“The fires this year surpass anything you can imagine. Undoubtedly, it is the consequence of comments by [Bolsonaro] about the opening of the Amazon to national and multinational companies. He understands ‘opening the Amazon’ as a licence to clear a rainforest and gain space for cattle to graze and plant monocultures such as soybeans and sugar cane.”

Earlier this week, Catholic clergy in the Amazon released an open letter condemning violence and intimidation they say they are experiencing as a result of efforts to protect the forest, indigenous people and poor communities from miners and farmers.

“We are deeply disappointed that today, instead of being supported and encouraged, our leaders are criminalised as enemies of the fatherland,” they wrote.

“Together with Pope Francis, we are uncompromisingly defending the Amazon and demanding urgent measures from governments in the face of violent and irrational aggression against nature and the destruction of the forest that kills ancient flora and fauna with criminal fires.”

Kräutler said the letter was necessary because the government had spread false rumours that the Catholic church was undermining Brazilian sovereignty.

Priests and nuns have a long history of working with poor communities in the Amazon, which has often put them at odds with powerful business interests and the authorities. During the 1970s, the Liberation theology movement was closely aligned with leftwing resistance to the military dictatorship of the time.

In 2005, the America nun Dorothy Stang was murdered by landowners. One of her followers, Father Amaro Lopes, was **arrested last year** in the Xingu River basin. Kräutler had so many death threats he needed police protection for more than 10 years.

Tensions have risen further since Bolsonaro – a former military officer who has defended the use of torture and killings during the 20-year dictatorship that ended in 1985 – became president.

He has weakened government protections of the rainforest, verbally attacked indigenous groups, accused environmental NGOs of starting fires and **broken ties with foreign donors to the Amazon Fund**. In July – when deforestation alerts **jumped by 278%** compared with the same month last year – he **fired the head of the space agency** that provided the data.

On Saturday, Bolsonaro confirmed that he wanted the Brazilian intelligence agency to conduct surveillance on the Amazon synod. “There is a lot of political influence there,” the president **reportedly** told journalists.

Although nominally a Catholic, Bolsonaro was **baptised a few years** ago by evangelical pastors in Israel. His rise to power has depended heavily on support from the Pentecostal movement, which is growing far more rapidly than the Catholic church.

A primary goal of the synod is to increase the ability of the Catholic church to evangelise in the Amazon and – although unstated – to counter the rise of Pentecostalism, which tends to support resource exploitation and has made inroads among indigenous and riverine communities. But bishops have been hamstrung by the difficulty of finding priests willing to work in the remote region.

One of the more radical ideas in a preparatory document for the synod, *Instrumentum Laboris*, is to allow older married men to be ordained – a move which would end a centuries-old requirement that priests are celibate.

Francis has previously said he would be open to allowing married men to be ordained in areas where there is a scarcity of priests, but the idea is highly controversial among Vatican conservatives, with cardinals having described it as “heretical” and “apostasy”.

Instrumentum Laboris also laments the crisis in the Amazon, which it attributes to “secularisation, the throwaway culture and the idolatry of money”.

“Today the Amazon is wounded, its beauty deformed, a place of pain and violence,” it continues. “The manifold destruction of human and environmental life, the diseases and pollution of rivers and lands, the felling and burning of trees, the massive loss of biodiversity, the disappearance of species (more than 1m of the 8m animals and plants are at risk), constitute a brutal reality that challenges us all.

“Violence, chaos and corruption are rampant. The territory has become a space of discord and of extermination of peoples, cultures and generations.”

Amazon fires: Jair Bolsonaro to miss summit for surgery

52 minutes ago

Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro will miss a planned summit on the fires ravaging the Amazon rainforest to prepare for surgery, an aide has said.

The operation will be the far-right leader's fourth after he was stabbed in the stomach during his presidential election campaign in 2018.

Brazil may send a representative in his place or ask for the summit to be postponed, the spokesman said.

More than 80,000 fires have broken out in the Amazon rainforest this year.

Mr Bolsonaro has drawn intense domestic and international criticism for failing to protect the region, which is a vital carbon store that slows the pace of global warming.

Environmentalists blame policies enacted by the Brazilian president for the 77% increase in fires this year compared with the same period in 2018. They say he has encouraged cattle farmers to clear vast swathes of the rainforest since his election. The controversial leader was elected to the presidency in October 2018, a month after he was stabbed at a campaign rally.



Jair Bolsonaro: Brazil presidential front-runner stabbed at rally

His surgery is to correct an incisional hernia and is his fourth operation since the attack. The surgery is scheduled for Sunday, and Mr Bolsonaro must start a liquid diet on Friday - the day of the regional conference in Colombia. Doctors said he would need 10 days of rest after the treatment. Speaking to reporters outside his official residence, the president vowed on Monday to defend his Amazon policy "even in a wheelchair" at a UN General Assembly meeting on 24 September. "I will appear because I want to talk about the Amazon," he said. Mr Bolsonaro has accused other nations of colonialism for offering \$20 million to help tackle the fires.

has called for a ban on Brazilian beef imports to the European Union.



An aerial view of a burned tract of the Amazon near Porto Velho, Brazil, on Aug. 29. The government owns vast, uninhabited swaths of the rainforest. (Ricardo Moraes/Reuters)

Now Bolsonaro is under pressure from the agricultural lobby that helped get him elected to ease tensions with the international community before boycotts affect their profits.

Bolsonaro has said farmers and loggers would no longer be allowed to use fires to clear land. But critics said the efforts would be hard to enforce without changes. Ibama is unable to effectively patrol a rainforest that covers 60 percent of Brazil's territory.

Governors of the Amazon states have warned that land ownership laws must be rewritten before they can clamp down on deforestation.

“Without land reform, we have great difficulty holding accountable the people who commit this crime,” Wilson Lima, governor of Amazonas state, told Bolsonaro in a meeting last month. “We don't know exactly whose land it is.”