

# Europe's Complicity in Latin America's Deforestation Crisis

Open Letter

By [Forest Peoples Programme](#)

Global Research, September 20, 2019

[Forest Peoples Programme](#)

Region: [Europe](#), [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [Law and Justice](#)

*Dear President-elect Ursula von der Leyen,  
First Vice-President Frans Timmermans,  
President of the European Parliament David Sassoli,*

*Dear Heads of State [heads of government] of countries signatory to the Amsterdam Declaration:*

*Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, President Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, Chancellor Angela Merkel, Prime Minister Mark Rutte, Prime Minister Erna Solberg,*

Plea to address EU complicity in current deforestation crisis and instruct the European Commission to work on EU regulation to end deforestation

The dramatic acceleration in deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon which has led to an alarming number of fires is one of the world's most urgent problems. The fires have evoked a powerful worldwide response, as people look on in anger and desperation at the worsening situation.

The sharp increase in fires, both in Brazil and in surrounding countries like Bolivia and Paraguay, is [not natural](#). They are lit by landholders in an effort to improve grass cover in cattle pastures or to burn felled trees in preparation for crops or pasture. [Neither are some of the fires incidental](#), since in the state of Pará, for example, 'dias de fogo' – days of fire – have been planned and announced in advance by landholders.

The high deforestation rates and forest fires in Brazil can be directly associated with the Brazilian federal government. Public statements by President Bolsonaro outlining his commitment to loosen law enforcement, have sent a clear signal of impunity that encourages environmental crimes.

The largest and most dangerous impacts of these crimes are felt not only by nature but also by indigenous peoples and traditional communities, whose ways of life, traditional knowledge and livelihoods are under severe threat from a serious increase in violations of their nationally and internationally protected rights. Women are particularly impacted.

Combined with the refusal to demarcate indigenous lands, the deliberate dismantling of the

operational capacity of the federal environmental agency IBAMA, backsliding in the legal framework for environmental licensing of infrastructure, logging, mining and agribusiness projects and [much more](#), it is clear that the current Brazilian administration is deeply embroiled in the current deforestation emergency facing Brazil, which harms Brazilians first and foremost.

This subject was judiciously put on the Agenda of the recent G7 meeting in Biarritz. However, we do not believe that the actions decided on go anywhere near far enough to tackle the escalating deforestation emergency.

You not only have the power to do more – you also bear the responsibility.

European consumption and finance is intimately linked with the current deforestation crisis in Brazil and neighbouring countries. The EU is Brazil's [second biggest trading partner](#) – with [19%](#) of all soy the EU consumes coming from Brazil (for the period July-December 2018) and 10% of all Brazilian beef for export is destined for the EU, two of the commodities that are highly associated with the current deforestation crisis. The EU is also a large importer of tropical hardwoods. [According to the UN](#), 70% of deforestation due directly to agricultural clearing is precipitated by the existence of logging roads, with logged tropical forests being [eight](#) times more likely to be completely deforested than those remaining unlogged. As well, the degradation caused by logging is a significant source of emissions itself.

We believe the EU can act decisively in two ways.

1. Suspend ratification of the Free Trade AgreementAs you are well aware, the EU has recently concluded a Free Trade Agreement with Mercosur countries, including Brazil. Within this Free Trade Agreement, Brazil pledged to uphold its commitment to the Paris Agreement.

The current deforestation crisis contravenes the stated aims of the Paris Agreement. It is therefore a matter of urgency for the EU to formally suspend the ratification process, as a number of EU leaders have called for. It should contain [strong and binding safeguards](#) that will ensure that forests are protected, and Indigenous and traditional communities' rights respected.

Furthermore, we believe it is pertinent to remind EU leaders that the Mercosur Free Trade Agreement negotiations were conducted despite the lack of up-to-date analysis of the deal's potential social, human rights and environmental damage.

2. Prepare legislation which will ensure companies and the finance sector do due diligence to guarantee that products placed on the EU market and investments have not led to recent forest degradation or deforestation or caused human rights abuses

It has become apparent that the provisions within the existing Free Trade Agreements, including with Mercosur countries, are not strong enough to hold trading partners to account for their environmental and human rights performance, especially when reckless administrations take hold.

A recent poll showed that [87% of Europeans](#) support new laws to ensure that

the food they eat and the products they buy don't drive global deforestation. European citizens will not continue to allow further destruction of the forests we all depend on to stabilise our climate, maintain rainfall, nurture biodiversity and protect the world's poorest people.

On the 23rd of July, the European Commission issued a [Communication on Stepping up EU Action to Protect and Restore the World's Forests](#). Within this Communication, the EU commits to:

“assess(ing) additional demand side regulatory...measures to ensure a level playing field...in order to increase supply chain transparency and minimise the risk of deforestation and forest degradation associated with commodity imports in the EU”

Our main ask to you today is to instruct the European Commission to work on such legislation with immediate effect and suspend the process on the conclusion of the Mercosur free trade agreement.

Yours sincerely,

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Christoph Wiedmer, CO-Director Society for Threatened Peoples Switzerland

Faith Doherty, Forests Campaign Leader, Environmental Investigation Agency

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Patrick Alley, Director and Co-Founder, Global Witness

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Nikolai Lang, Constituted executive Director, Forests of the World

Karin Lexén, Secretary general, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

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