

Unified Action to Fight Deforestation

The Amazon is burning and global deforestation accelerating - we need unified international action.

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Jair Bolsonaro defied his critics at the UN General Assembly in New York this month - [as expected](#) - denouncing those maintaining that his policies have fanned the flames of the Amazon fires.

Brazil's President [declared](#):

"We all know that all countries have problems. The sensationalist attacks we have suffered due to fire outbreaks have aroused our patriotic sentiment."

This echoed his repeated claim that the fires in the world's largest tropical rainforest were being used as an "excuse" to attack his government by countries who want to "control" the Amazon and get their hands on its riches, and that the G7 nation's [offer](#) of \$20 million to help tackle the fires was [colonialism](#) by another name.

Brazilian vanguard

The idea that outsiders are using the fires to undermine Brazil's sovereignty resonates with Bolsonaro's core constituency. But it ignores key facts.

First, it is Brazilians - among them, the one million Indigenous Peoples who call the Amazon home - who are suffering from the fires' impact, and it is Brazilians who are in the vanguard of fighting them.

Second, while clear [policy choices](#) by the Bolsonaro government have increased the deforestation which has driven the fires, the European leaders criticising him are also complicit, as their countries are often importing the products that are grown on recently deforested land.

At the end of August, Fern and 25 other NGOs highlighted this in an [open letter](#) to the President-elect of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and other EU leaders.

The letter pointed out that European consumption is intimately linked to the current disaster in the Amazon - as well as the global increase in deforestation.

This is because of EU producers' voracious appetite for agricultural products, including from Brazil. The fires in the Amazon were started by landholders wanting to improve grass cover in cattle pastures, or to burn felled trees in preparation for [crops](#). Much of what they

produce is for [export](#).

New chapter

This week in New York, world leaders have the chance to write a new chapter in alleviating the crisis that is affecting the world's forests – which, after all, has [global consequences](#).

It's a path that does not impinge on other countries' sovereignty: international regulatory action.

After all, voluntary commitments by companies, however well-meaning, do not work in isolation. This was the conclusion of those Member States and companies who signed the New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF), which [saw](#) dozens of countries and more than 50 of the world's biggest companies committing to end deforestation by 2020, a deadline which they admit they will [fail](#) to meet. National and international laws will be needed, as all the [evidence](#) shows.

The need for EU governments to take collective action was made by Frans Timmermans, First Vice President of the European Commission, on Sunday in New York at an event to mark the fifth anniversary of the NYDF.

“When it comes to deforestation, no one gets to say that this is not our business too. Forests are a global public good. When healthy we all benefit, when burning we all suffer,” he [said](#).

The EU is considering developing legislation to rid its supply chains of deforestation and human rights abuses, and others should follow suit: on 23 July it released a [communication](#) committing itself to measures to “increase supply chain transparency and minimise the risk of deforestation and forest degradation associated with commodity imports in the EU.”

But it qualified how it wanted to do this, emphasising it wanted to engage in a ‘partnership approach’.

Partnership approach

The communication states that within bilateral dialogues with major consumer and producer countries it would:

“Share experience and information on the respective policy and legal frameworks; and identify joint activities to inform policy developments based on an advanced understanding of the impacts of deforestation and forest degradation”.

While these sound vague, the EU has in the past shown itself to be capable of turning a partnership approach into reality – principally through its flagship measures to address illegal logging, where they chose to hardwire partnership into the core of their approach by negotiating [Voluntary Partnership Agreements](#) with timber-producing countries.

The [strength](#) of these agreements is that they aren't imposed from outside, but evolve

within the countries themselves through wide consultation with a variety of parties, including civil society and forest communities.

Such an approach should be the template for the EU's approach to ending the deforestation and human rights abuses in its agricultural supply chains. It could also set an example for the rest of the world.

As the 2020 commitments approach fast, now is the time for unified, ambitious – and constructive – international action to combat deforestation. And Regulation must be at their core.

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