

Brazil, Indonesia and DRC in talks to form ‘Opec of rainforests’

Spurred by Lula’s election, the three countries, home to half of all tropical forests, will pledge stronger conservation efforts



Brazil’s president-elect, Luiz Inácio ‘Lula’ da Silva, has promised to fight to halt deforestation in the Amazon. Composite: Guardian Design/EPA

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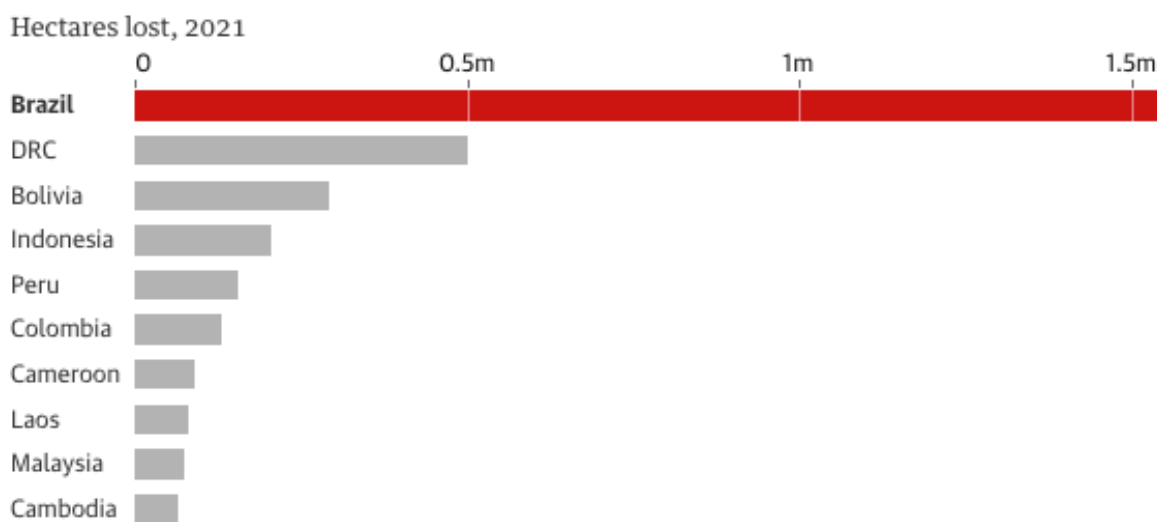
The big three tropical rainforest nations – Brazil, Indonesia and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** – are in talks to form a strategic alliance to coordinate on their conservation, nicknamed an “Opec for rainforests”, the Guardian understands.

The **election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva**, known as Lula, has been followed by a flurry of activity to avoid the destruction of the Amazon, which scientists have warned is **dangerously close** to tipping point after years of deforestation under its far-right leader, Jair Bolsonaro.

During his first speech as president-elect, Lula pledged to fight for zero deforestation in the Amazon, while **Colombia has proposed creating an Amazon bloc** at Cop27, and **Norway's environment minister is moving** to reinstate a billion-dollar fund to protect the rainforest after it was halted under Bolsonaro.

Brazil, Indonesia and DRC are home to 52% of the world's remaining primary tropical forests, which are crucial to avoiding climate catastrophe, and the conservation talks are fulfilling **a campaign promise by Lula**.

Brazil lost 1.55m hectares of tropical primary forest in 2021



Guardian graphic. Source: World Resources Institute

The alliance could see the rainforest countries make joint proposals on carbon markets and finance, a longtime sticking point at UN climate and biodiversity talks, as part of an effort to encourage developed countries to fund their conservation, which is key to limiting global heating to 1.5C (2.7F) above pre-industrial levels.

The three countries – home to the Amazon, Congo basin and Borneo and Sumatra forests, which are threatened by commercial logging, mining and illegal exploitation – signed an agreement at Cop26 in Glasgow to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030.

Oscar Soria, campaign director of the activism site Avaaz, said the alliance could be an “Opec for rainforests”, akin to the oil producers’ cartel, which coordinates

on the fossil fuel's production levels and price. Before being elected, **Lula said any alliance could** be expanded to other rainforest countries, such as Peru and Cambodia.

“This deal could be a promising step forward, as long as Indigenous peoples and local communities are fully consulted in the process and their rights and leadership respected,” Soria said.

“These three ecosystems are critical for the ecological stability of the world, and the answer for these forests to thrive lies with the people that live in them.”

Carlos Nobre, a Brazilian Earth system scientist and co-chair of the Science Panel for the Amazon (SPA), said Lula's election was a moment of opportunity for rainforest conservation.



An Mbuti boy in the DRC's Ituri rainforest. The IPCC has stressed that efforts to conserve tropical forests will only succeed by protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples. Photograph: Hugh Kinsella Cunningham/EPA

“The president-elect is already working with DRC and **Indonesia** to protect all tropical forests on the planet. He also reiterated the commitment of his government to get to zero deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon during his presidency,” he said, explaining that SPA would launch a proposal for an “arc of

restoration” covering more than 1m hectares (about 4,000 sq miles), mainly in the southern Amazon near the Andes.

“Implementing such a project will protect the **Amazon rainforest** from reaching the tipping point and also will remove more than 1bn tonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere for several decades – a mandatory goal to combat the climate emergency,” he said.

Joseph Itongwa Mukumo, an Indigenous Walikale from DRC’s North Kivu province, said any alliance must recognise the **role Indigenous communities play in protecting forests**.

He said: “The IPCC [UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] scientists tasked with advising Cop negotiators made clear in a recent report the urgent need to recognise the rights of Indigenous peoples and support adaptation of ecosystems, calling us ‘fundamental to reducing the risks of climate change and for effective adaptation (with a very high level of confidence)’.



Nothing will change on climate until death toll rises in west, says Gabonese minister

“Proposals to conserve tropical forests that fail to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities in the forests of **Africa**, Latin America and Indonesia, cannot succeed.”

At Cop26 in Glasgow last year, three big initiatives to protect the world's forests were launched: a **commitment by more than 140 world leaders to halt and reverse deforestation**, the creation of a working group of producers and consumers of commodities linked to deforestation, and **a commitment by major commodity producers** of soya, palm oil, cocoa and cattle to align their business practices with the 1.5C target.

However, despite the agreement, data from **Global Forest Watch shows that Brazil**, DRC and Indonesia were among the top five countries for primary forest loss in 2021, with 11.1m hectares of tree cover lost in the tropics overall last year.