

Brazil supreme court ruling to reactivate Amazon Fund gives hope in fight to save rainforest

Fund was paralysed when far-right president **Jair Bolsonaro** wound up two committees in 2019



A deforested plot of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil. The supreme court's ruling for the reactivation of the Amazon Fund is a major weapon in the fight against deforestation. Photograph: Bruno Kelly/Reuters

Andrew Downie *in São Paulo*

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Brazilian environmentalists have celebrated a timely victory after the country's supreme court ruled for the reactivation of **the Amazon Fund**, a major weapon in the country's fight against deforestation.

The fund was paralysed in 2019 when far-right president **Jair Bolsonaro** wound up two of its key committees, citing unspecified irregularities.

Thursday's ruling orders authorities to reactivate the fund within 60 days and will allow Brazil's state development bank to start using the more than 3 billion reais, or £525m, that has been stuck in its coffers since 2019.

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"The Amazon Fund is the biggest fund for the protection of forests ever created," said Tasso Azevedo, one of its architects and now technical coordinator for the Climate Observatory, a Brazilian NGO.

"The losses through its paralysis over these (almost) four years is irreplaceable but its reactivation is more than urgent and enables us to start protecting the forest, promote sustainable development and fight deforestation again."

The organisation said its return would allow not just for the funding of environment and ecology programs across the Amazon but also give the government resources to use in rebuilding the organisations hollowed out by the Bolsonaro regime.

It also gave a lift to **the president-elect, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva**, who beat Bolsonaro in a run-off election on 30 October, and has promised to roll back much of the far-right leader's anti-environmental policies.

The leftist former president set up the fund in 2008 during his first second term in power.

He cut deforestation by more than 70% during his eight years in the presidency and said last week he was aiming for zero deforestation after his scheduled inauguration on 1 January.

That goal will not be easy. Deforestation has gone up every year since Bolsonaro took power and this year hit a 15-year high.

Illegal logging, ranching, land grabs and especially prospecting have all shot up over the last few years, as Bolsonaro gutted environmental and indigenous

agencies and encouraged people to go to the far-flung region and take advantage of its abundant natural resources.

The court ruling said the Bolsonaro government's decision to suspend the fund was unconstitutional and remiss at a time when the deforestation was rising and the number of fires increasing.

With destruction on the increase and Bolsonaro neutralising the fund, donor nations Norway and Germany withdrew their support. **Norway alone donated 94% of the fund's spending.**

A June report from Brazil's federal controller general said Bolsonaro's decision cost the fund billions in missed opportunities.

Within hours of the decision, Germany's ambassador to Brasília recognised the court's ruling and indicated Berlin would contribute once again.

Referring to previous governments, Heiko Thoms said: "Brazil achieved impressive results in reducing deforestation in Amazonia and it can do the same again in the future."

Others celebrated the decision with caution, warning that it was the first step along a very long road.

"It's not sufficient, because we need to reduce deforestation," said Carlos Minc, the environment minister when the fund was launched. "But this government is ending and I hope the next one retakes the original principles."