Position Paper

of the Dialogue on Tropical Rainforests

Building a Transcontinental Network to Defend Indigenous Life in the Rainforests in South America, Africa, and Asia

Photo: Regina Reinart/Misereor

misereor

ALLY FOR A JUST WORLD

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Participating organisations

ELSHAM

Indonesia (West Papua)

Indonesia (Kalimantan)

Thailand

DR Kongo

Colombia

Bolivia

Brazil

Supporting organisations

Current situation

1. Around 5,000 Indigenous Peoples live in approximately 90 countries around the world – an estimated 476 million Indigenous or autochthonous individuals. About 25 percent of the Earth‘s land surface is inhabited and used by Indigenous communities. Many Indigenous Peoples live in (sub)tropical rainforests, which host the majority of the world’s biodiversity. These ecosystems are essential for the Earth‘s climate. When Indigenous Peoples migrate to cities, they often establish connections to both worlds, forests and urban life at the same time.

2. The three largest contiguous rainforest regions are located in Amazonia (South America), the Congo Basin (Africa), and in Indonesia and Thailand (Asia). The survival of all humanity is tied to the preservation of these tropical forests.

3. The international framework for the protection of Indigenous Peoples’ Rights is provided by:
   - the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966), Art. 27. It protects minority rights, including those of indigenous groups, in particular the right to their own culture, religion, and language
   - the ILO Convention 169 (1989). It regulates land rights, participation in decision-making, protection of culture, and prohibition of discrimination
   - the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII, 2000)
   - the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples (2001)
   - the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007). It calls for the right to self-determination, land rights, cultural identity, education, health, and the right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) in all projects affecting indigenous territories
   - the EMRIP advises the UN Human Rights Council on issues relating to the rights of Indigenous Peoples. It supports member states in achieving the goals of the UNDRIP

4. The Indigenous Peoples and other rainforest dwellers from the three rainforest regions face existential threats, primarily due to the prevailing global model of prosperity. The way of life and production of this model is based on a hunger for resources, which leads to the exploitation and destruction of people and nature. Underlying are discriminating ways of thinking that legitimise and reinforce global injustices: racism, sexism, patriarchy, and prevailing capitalism.

5. Indigenous ways of life and the rainforests as our habitats are under threat due to multiple systematic discrimination, to deforestation, different kinds of extractivism, the climate crisis and the loss of biodiversity. Indigenous ways of living are disappearing in multiple places. Their human rights continue to be fundamentally violated up to this day. Indigenous Peoples‘ resistance to these threats is readily criminalised, and defenders of human and environmental rights are threatened or even murdered. Some governments use the police and military to repress them.

Seven Languages, One Purpose: Building Bridges Between Indigenous Communities and German Civil Society.

6. We, representatives of Indigenous Peoples and allied NGOs from Thailand, Kalimantan and West Papua in Indonesia (South-East Asia & Pacific), the Democratic Republic of Congo (Africa), and from Colombia, Bolivia, and Brazil (South America) came together from October 20–22 2025 with representatives from civil society, academia, and policy makers from Germany.

7. Thanks to the support of professional interpretation we could communicate in seven different languages. Coming together from three continents, listening, exchanging, identifying commonalities and differences, planning, and celebrating—this was the great appeal and joy of the gathering for all participants.

8. This meeting is part of a joint process initiated by Misereor, the West Papua Network in Germany, and the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), based in Thailand, since 2023. After several digital formats, this was the first in-person gathering. This position paper was developed through a participatory process that captured the essence of our common perspectives while recognizing the complexities and nuances that arise from diverse cultural contexts and languages. It reflects our collective understanding of shared challenges and potential avenues for action.

Five Key Challenges

9. During this intercontinental dialogue, we identified five shared core concerns that are of highest relevance to us as representatives of Indigenous Peoples from the three continents:

1 Everything is Connected: Our Indigenous Knowledge as a Path to Gloal Sustainability

10. Referring to the world around us, we Indigenous Peoples say: "Everything is connected to everything." We understand human life as part of all living creation, a large and closely interconnected whole, not as separate or opposed. Through our languages, bodies, symbols, and rituals we are protecting and defending our territories. Traditionally, we cure illnesses with medicine from the forest. We Indigenous Peoples contribute culturally, ecologically, socially, and economically through distinct knowledge systems, cosmologies, and spiritualities to the well-being of all people and life. We emphasize our role as guardians of biodiversity (Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Agreement).

11. Our understanding of life as the mutual connectedness and interdependence of all living things offers valuable perspectives for global sustainability. Our understanding of tropical forests and our continuous presence in our territories make us strategic actors for climate and biodiversity protection. We as Indigenous Peoples hold knowledge vital for protecting ecosystems and restoring their balance. Integrating this wisdom into public policies—through collaboration with Indigenous authorities, guards, and community monitoring groups—is not only strategic for environmental and territorial governance, but essential for our collective survival as humanity.

2 Territory, Identity, Power: Indigenous Peoples Demand Self-Determination and Self-Governance

12. State recognition of our land rights in the form of indigenous territories, as well as self-determination and self-government in these territories, are fundamental prerequisites for the preservation of Indigenous Peoples' livelihoods and the protection of our identities and cultures. We emphasize the need for legal recognition of Indigenous identities and collective rights, as well as qualified political representation, in order to assert our legitimate interests and needs and to be able to take active part in political processes.

13. A strong lobby, global networking, and exchange among Indigenous organizations are vital for developing joint strategies and gaining political recognition and agency. In the face of deliberate attempts by states and corporations to divide our communities and weaken our resistance, it is crucial that we organize autonomously and reinforce traditional mediation and dialogue structures. Political representation further empowers communities to advocate effectively for our rights.

14. Direct access to climate finance based on prior and full information and fair contracts is key to ensuring real territorial autonomy and strengthening our self-governance. All ways of financing Indigenous life and rainforest initiatives have to respect the cultural identity of all Indigenous Peoples.

3 Defending Land, Life, and Climate: Indigenous Resistance to Deforestation, Mining, and False Solutions

15. While we contribute the least to climate change, we bear a disproportionately high price for its impacts. Our Indigenous Communities are on averaSge at greater risk of poverty due to multiple systematic discrimination, displacement, the man-made climate crisis, False Climate Solutions and loss of biodiversity. Deforestation and the global climate crisis are primarily a threat to our food security and health: droughts, floods and strong winds make gathering, fishing, hunting, sowing and harvesting unpredictable. Ongoing deforestation and forest fires pose a severe threat to tropical rainforests, risking the loss of their essential ecological functions as carbon sinks and water reservoirs. The Amazon is in danger of being degraded into a steppe. Our habitat is thus in danger of being irretrievably lost. We seek global recognition of our contributions to climate protection—recognition that is too often denied or dismissed —and we continue to assert our rights on international platforms such as COP30 in Belém, Brazil.

16. Our territorial sovereignty is further actively curtailed by state interventions. Invasive conservation programs, infrastructure projects, and land acquisitions in the context of carbon credit initiatives threaten our habitats and thus our livelihoods severely.

17. Extractivism in the form of exploitation of nature through deforestation, agribusiness and mining is another catastrophe that leads to environmental destruction and threatens our livelihoods worldwide. National and transnational agribusiness companies destroy cleared land in just a few years through monocultures (e.g. soy, oil palm) and extensive livestock farming. Legal and illegal mining activities (e.g. oil, coal, gas, metals and rare earths) destroy and poison fertile land, forests, rivers and seas. Pharmaceutical companies patent the genetic material of medicinal plants and expropriate us of our ancient knowledge.

18. These practices raise urgent questions for us as Indigenous Peoples. Are governments and corporations truly respecting and fulfilling our rights, including our human rights and the protection of our environments? Who will take responsibility for the loss and damage caused by the climate crisis—damage that disproportionately affects our communities? How can we gain direct access to climate finance and participate meaningfully in a just climate transition? And what spiritual, social, and economic alternatives can we offer to counter the destructive logic of extractivist capitalism?

4 No Climate Justice Without Gender Justice: Indigenous Women as Pillars of Transformation

19. The mobilization and advancement of Indigenous resistance movements are increasingly inseparable from the leadership and voices of Indigenous women. Across forest, land and territory struggles, Indigenous women have emerged as key organizers, peacebuilders, and defenders of our peoples' collective rights. In all kinds of conflicts, women are part of the solution, may it be in conflicts between farmers and herders, conflicts over water or, above all, conflicts over the maintenance of livelihoods.

20. Women leadership transcends traditional roles, connecting generations by actively involving children, youth, and elders in intergenerational movements that sustain community resilience and knowledge transmission. However, structural gender inequalities continue to limit women‘s potential. Indigenous women and girls still face systemic and often overlooked barriers such as discriminatory norms, gender based violence, political exclusion, and restricted access to land, education, and financial resources. Especially the exclusion from land ownership carries significant economic consequences since it is the sole source of income in many rural areas.

21. These injustices not only marginalize women but also weaken the collective power of our indigenous movements as a whole. Therefore, advancing gender equality within Indigenous resistance means ensuring that women are not only participants but decision-makers equipped with the resources and recognition needed to lead transformative change. In order to unfold this potential, the safety of women and female representatives of social movements or churches is a non-negotiable prerequisite. Promoting women’s leadership in indigenous governance, climate justice, and territorial defense is not merely a matter of representation; it is a prerequisite for justice, sustainability, and the full realization of Indigenous self-determination.

5 From Recognition to Implementation: Defending Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Fragile Democracies

22. Recognition of the dignity and rights of all human beings and rule-based national and international policies are the foundation for peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, the protection of Indigenous Peoples is enshrined in international human rights frameworks. We must not face discrimination for our traditions and must have the right to free, prior, and informed consent for all matters that concern us (UNDRIP 2007, ILO 169). Yet, our rights are still widely violated. In many countries, authoritarian leaders neglect democratic principles and minority protection. Defending our Indigenous Rights strengthens democracy, safeguards natural resources, promotes food sovereignty and hence remains vital in the strive for a just and sustainable world.

23. A cross-cutting and global issue threatening our Indigenous life in rainforest regions is the lack of legal protection for Indigenous groups, or rather the inadequate implementation of such protection. Furthermore, impunity for offences against Indigenous Peoples is widespread in many countries.

24. While formal land rights are central to the survival of our communities, there are multiple countries where land titles are often not permanently or legally secured. Even in countries where collective land rights are constitutionally recognized, implementation is frequently lacking in practice.

25. One form of resistance to such external interference are self-organized mechanisms for protecting our land rights, territories and livelihoods. These mechanisms work by documenting violations of our land rights or the exploitation of our nature, and by reporting and publicizing them. The guardians are mostly rooted in ancestral authority and are involved in local governance.

Politics, Business and Civil Society Worldwide Must Uphold Our Indigenous Rights

26. According to international law, our human rights and our indigenous rights to self-determination must be respected. We demand that international commitments be reflected in policy measures and resources that take into account the specific contexts and needs of Indigenous Peoples not only in tropical rainforests, but worldwide.

27. National and transnational companies must recognize and respect the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. They must not engage in activities that violate human rights and indigenous rights, they must ensure transparent consultation and consent, prevent and remedy harm, and comply with international standards and national laws.

28. We call upon civil society worldwide to promote and protect our rights and to demand their implementation. We urgently appeal to civil society to raise awareness for our concerns and to actively support our self-determination and the preservation of our livelihoods — both locally and globally. Transcontinental networking and international solidarity among civil society are tasks and resources that can be used to increasingly overcome destructive power structures.

Next steps following our Transcontinental Rainforest Dialougue

29. We are entering a new phase of ownership in this intercontinental network we are in the way of establishing. While the process was initially led by AIPP, MISEREOR, and the Westpapua-Network — bringing together Indigenous Peoples from the three major rainforest regions — we, as indigenous representatives, are now taking the lead in shaping future joint cooperation. We are connecting and strengthening existing capacities and networks in our shared struggle for a life of dignity and justice. Empowered by this process and enriched by mutual learning, we are now encouraged and more broadly equipped to advance our work both (1) within our respective local contexts and (2) through joint efforts across countries and continent.

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