

# Oxford Letter for the Amazon

Signed by indigenous and peasant representatives, politicians, civil society members, students, artists, activists, researchers and academics

The Amazon rainforest and its people are harbingers of life, knowledge and creativity. The numerous and highly diverse communities that live in the Amazon region demonstrate daily that it is possible to ally the values of nature with those of one's labour so as to form a seamless whole of wellbeing.

Today, however, the Amazon is under an assault which has provoked the displacement of communities, the expropriation of land, resources and livelihoods, the privatisation of collectively-managed ecosystems and an increase in assassinations of rural and indigenous Amazonian leaders. This assault is being led by a narrow, unethical business and political elite seeking rapid enrichment. With the support of authoritarian state planning, this unscrupulous minority has transformed the Amazon into one of the most disputed frontiers of Western modernity.

We, students, indigenous leaders, peasants, workers, researchers, academics, activists and civil society members from different parts of the world, gathered at Oxford University for the "International Colloquium AMAZON'S RISING VIOLENCE AND DISTURBING TRENDS," from 31 January to 02 February 2020, the fifth main event of the Agrocultures International Network, are living proof of the mounting opposition against such perverse forms of economic development based on systematic socio-ecological exploitation.

We believe that the Amazon is more precious and has a much brighter future than the initiatives and strategies of national governments and their geopolitical and economic partners. Working with the forest and other ecosystems, rather than against them, constitutes a crucial element of the concrete alternative path that will lead us safely away from the destructive trends of mainstream development.

We demand that the political and economic rights of Amazonian people be honoured and respected. In full solidarity with other movements, demonstrations and initiatives to save the Amazon, we will do everything in our power to help humanity prevent catastrophic climate change and rising inequalities associated with market-based globalisation in the Amazon and elsewhere on the planet. We are part of a growing awareness throughout the world that social exclusion and failed economic thinking are putting us at risk.

Based on the above, we want to communicate the following demands and urgent messages:



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- We denounce the systematic and increased number of killings of human rights activists, community leaders, peasants, members of indigenous groups and environmental campaigners in the Amazon, particularly in Colombia and Brazil;
- We call for the strict enforcement of the national constitutions and related legislation in order to demarcate indigenous lands, stop mining in the Yanomami territory, to prevent the discharge of mercury and other toxins into rivers and bring to justice those responsible for atrocities associated with drug trafficking (a growing and disturbing phenomenon that is reshaping the region) and the invasions and violent assaults on Amazonian communities;
- We condemn the regional governments, especially the current Brazilian administration, for dismantling public policies, for enflaming racial and ethnic tensions, for undermining and inhibiting the work of researchers and scientists, for the gross mismanagement of natural resources, for dishonestly encouraging further environmental devastation (wildfires, deforestation and pollution, among other impacts) and for the vicious, escalating attacks on indigenous territories, peasant and quilombola communities, shanty towns, and other lived spaces;
- We demand a profound and meaningful reconsideration of economic plans and development programmes that have caused major disruption in the region, mainly for the benefit of external economic agents and social groups, including hydropower dams, large-scale navigation, mining operations, logging, ranches and agribusiness farms;
- We urge governments, businesses and individuals to boycott agricultural goods (soy and meat in particular), timber, gold and minerals from farmers, illegal goldminers, businesses and corporations who clear the rainforest, use slave labour or threaten the basic civil, labour and environmental rights;
- We accuse investment banks and sovereign debt funds of significantly aggravating deforestation and the emission of greenhouse gases, of further encouraging the exploitation of low-paid workers and facilitating the perpetuation of genocidal policies;
- We repudiate the inadequacy and the warped consequences of market-based environmental conservation schemes, such as carbon markets and biodiversity commodification, that end up creating new forms of alienation and conflict;
- We call on the Inter-American and United Nations Human Rights Commissions to investigate the violations of human and ethnic rights occurring throughout the Amazon;
- We expect dedicated, genuine actions from academics, civil servants, politicians and the business community to revert these trends, promote critical and responsible science and prioritise the lives, the heritage, the needs and the autonomous contribution of the peoples of the Amazon.

We, the participants of this event, jointly raise the voice of the majority of social groups in the region, who know and passionately believe that the Amazon has had a troubling past and is undergoing a turbulent present but, because of its people, it can also nourish a much better, and fairer, future.

*Oxford, 31 January 2020*



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