

Amazon Watch Statement on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) and the Use of Market Mechanisms

The mission of Amazon Watch is to *“protect the rainforest and advance the rights of indigenous peoples in the Amazon Basin.”* We believe that indigenous self-determination is a critical component of any successful conservation strategy for the Amazon and for responding to the climate crisis. We also recognize that indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contribute greatly to sustainable and equitable stewardship of Mother Earth.

For over twenty years, we have supported indigenous peoples in their efforts to protect life, land, and culture from unwanted industrial intrusions on their territories, whether caused by oil and gas projects, mining, large dams, agribusiness, or logging. We strive for a world in which states protect, and corporations and civil society respect, the collective rights of indigenous peoples to give or deny free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) regarding any activity affecting their territories and support the full implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Throughout the Amazon Basin, there are a myriad of projects underway, planned, or proposed under the banner of REDD - Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation. These include REDD, REDD+, REM (REDD Early Movers), and Jurisdictional REDD+, among others, all of which seek to halt the loss of standing forests vital to climate stability while providing financial compensation to local communities for managing and protecting forest resources.

Across the Amazon Basin, there are distinct positions among indigenous peoples regarding these mechanisms. As an NGO ally working in partnership with indigenous peoples in the Amazon and around the world, we reject REDD and consider it a false solution to the climate crisis. We do however, respect the autonomy and right of indigenous peoples to participate in these programs if they so choose.

Nevertheless, we have significant concerns about the ways in which REDD has operated. In some cases, REDD projects are implemented without the consent of local communities and, at times, over their outright opposition, or bind communities to onerous contracts for decades. In other cases, these projects have led to the displacement of indigenous peoples and the financial resources tied to the projects have ended up in the hands of government officials or companies, not with the land stewards themselves. We have also witnessed projects that have entailed planting monoculture “tree plantations” and instances in which REDD-style programs have been implemented concurrently with industrial development projects that devastate local ecosystems. “Forest protection projects” with these perverse outcomes distract from substantive action to address the drivers of deforestation and climate change, and we oppose them in no uncertain terms.

We also reject carbon emissions trading and offset programs whether at the subnational, national, or international level, as unjust and ineffective false solutions. Such market mechanisms reward many of the same institutions, companies, and policies that caused the climate crisis. Instead of addressing the root causes of climate change, they tend to simply shift the costs of fossil fuel pollution and climate change onto poor communities and communities of color that already bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change and a fossil-fuel powered economy, while bearing the least responsibility for causing climate change. They also serve as an excuse for wealthy (Annex 1) countries to avoid much-needed policies to restrict new fossil-fuel infrastructure and move toward both a managed decline of fossil fuel production and a just transition to a world powered by 100% clean renewable energy.

We cannot simply offset our way to a climate stable world. We need real climate action that addresses the primary cause of climate change: fossil fuel extraction and commodity-driven deforestation, and calls for climate justice.