



BRAZIL

A PRIMER ON DEFORESTATION FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND FAITH COMMUNITIES

Brazil is home to 60 percent of the Amazon rainforest—and one-third of the world's rainforests. This rainforest cover makes Brazil the most biodiverse country on Earth. Between 2004 and 2014, the rate of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon fell nearly 80 percent to the lowest levels on record. During the same period, Brazil's economy grew roughly 40 percent, suggesting a decoupling of economic growth from deforestation. After a decade of decline, however, deforestation spiked in 2016 to the highest level since 2008, and in 2017 Brazil experienced its second highest rate of tree cover loss.





BRAZIL'S FORESTS ARE A SACRED TRUST

The Brazilian Amazon is the largest remaining expanse of tropical forest in the world, and accounts for almost half of the country's land area.⁴ Tropical forests are also found in Brazil's Atlantic Forest, Cerrado, Caatinga, Pampa and Pantanal biomes. Brazil's forests are truly unique. They are also indispensable to the future of Brazil's people, and to the global environment. As such, they represent a sacred trust which we are bound to protect.

Thanks to its forests, Brazil is the most biodiverse country in the world. It is one of only 17 countries considered to be “megadiverse,” a term used to refer to the world's top biodiversity-rich countries, particularly those with many species that are not found anywhere else.^{5,6,7} Tropical forests in Brazil contain biodiversity unmatched by any other land-based environment on the planet,⁸ including more plant species than any other country, over half of which are found nowhere else on Earth.⁹ Brazil's Atlantic Forest and Cerrado are two of the 25 global biodiversity hotspots, due to the numbers of species that can only be found on these biomes and the level of threat they face.⁶

This biodiversity is a foundation of healthy ecosystems in Brazil and beyond. It represents a source of invaluable knowledge, remarkable beauty, and fundamental cultural meaning to indigenous peoples. Protecting the forest, its biodiversity, and the rights of its indigenous peoples and local communities, is one of the great moral imperatives of our time.

The Amazon rainforest supports human well-being by playing an active role in local, regional and global hydrological and climatic systems by storing and cycling water and carbon—a phenomenon sometimes called the “Amazon effect.”^{10,11} Healthy forests help ensure plentiful rain. In fact, through evaporation, the Amazon forest puts more water into the atmosphere than flows through the Amazon River itself, water which provides rain across Brazil and much of South America. Conversely, large-scale deforestation contributes to extreme drought,¹² such as the recent severe droughts in São Paulo which have been linked to forest loss.¹¹ Further deforestation will worsen these dangerous trends, putting all Brazilians at risk.

A close-up photograph of a vibrant poison dart frog, likely a species of Dendrobates, resting on a large green leaf. The frog's body is primarily black, adorned with bright orange and yellow stripes along its back and sides. Its legs are a striking blue, decorated with a pattern of black spots. The frog's large, dark eyes are prominent. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a lush tropical forest environment.

Tropical forests in Brazil contain biodiversity unmatched by any other land-based environment on the planet.

An aerial photograph showing a dense green forest on the left side, which meets a cleared, brownish-grey area on the right. In the cleared area, there is an orange excavator and two trucks, one of which is a large white truck with a blue stripe. The ground in the cleared area appears to be dirt and some debris.

BRAZIL'S FORESTS FACE GRAVE THREATS

Agricultural expansion in the 1980s put great pressure on Brazilian forests, causing the loss of 70 million hectares in the Amazon alone.¹³ From the 1990s onwards, halting deforestation became a high priority on both national and international agendas,^{13,14} although continued expansion of cattle ranching and soy cultivation^{14,15} to serve burgeoning consumer demand for these products meant that deforestation levels in the Amazon continued to rise until 2004.¹⁶

Deforestation on private lands in Brazil is governed by the Forest Code, which since 2001 has obligated landowners to conserve native vegetation on their lands. The law required the protection of 80 percent of the land privately held across the Amazon, 35 percent in the Amazonian savannahs and 20 percent within other biomes, but compliance and enforcement were weak.^{14,17} By 2005, land-use change, most of which was attributed to deforestation, accounted for 80 percent of Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions.^{14,18,19}

A significant step-change followed as enforcement of conservation laws tightened, new protected areas were designated, and monitoring systems were improved (including remote sensing, a field in which Brazil is now a global leader).¹⁴ The government intervened in supply chains, and the agricultural sector implemented voluntary actions to reduce deforestation (e.g. the Amazon Soy Moratorium of 2006).^{20,21,22} Livestock yields improved and sufficient cleared land was already available for agricultural expansion.^{20,21,22} Lower prices for soy and beef also played a part by reducing the incentive for farmers to expand production onto new land.¹⁴ By 2012, Brazil reported a stunning 83 percent reduction in Amazon deforestation compared to 2004.¹⁴ In the same period, the country's GDP grew from R\$669 billion to R\$2.5 trillion²³—illustrating that decoupling economic growth from deforestation is indeed possible (Figure 2).

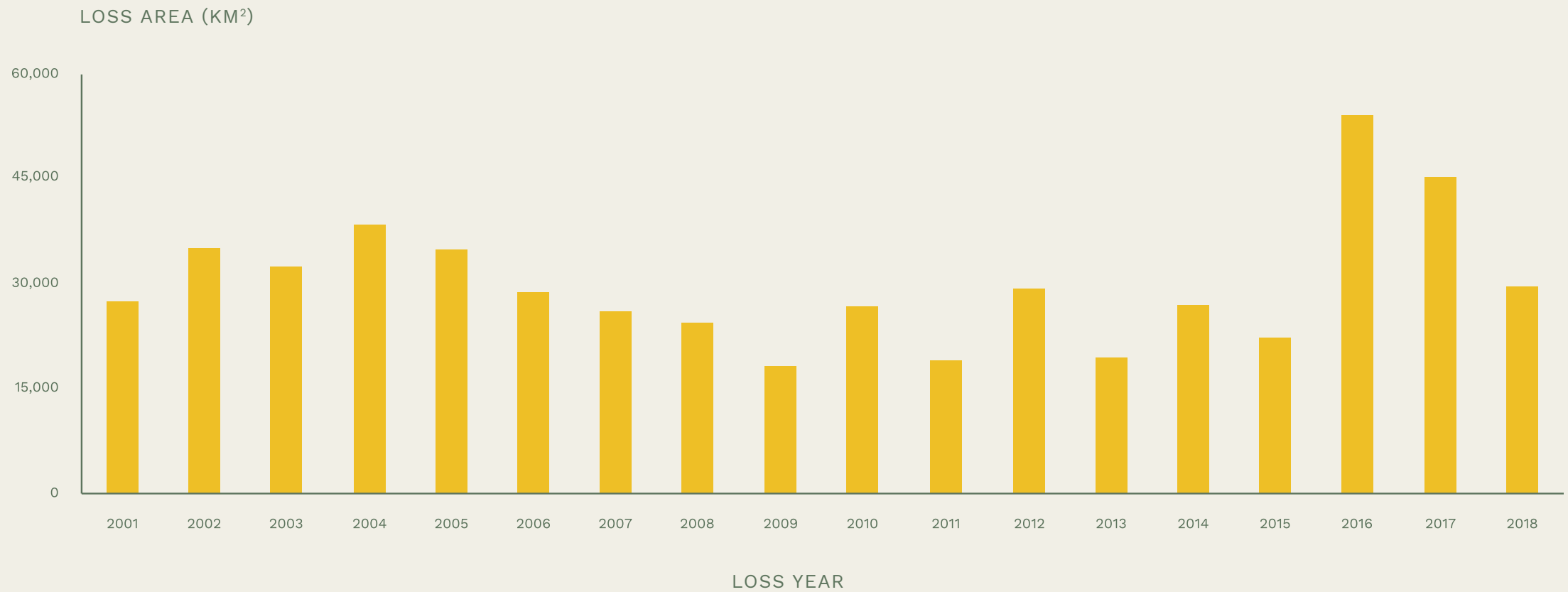


FIGURE 1. BRAZIL TREE LOSS, 2001 TO 2018

Source: Global Forest Watch, Open Data Portal, 2019

Unfortunately, after reaching a historic low in 2012, Brazil's deforestation rate has risen markedly in recent years. 2016 saw a sharp increase in Brazil's deforestation rate, which reached its highest level since 2008.^{14,24} Preliminary data for 2018 released by Brazil's National Space Research Institute (INPE) estimates a further 14 percent increase in the deforestation rate over 2017, substantially missing the official deforestation target.^{25,24} This rise in deforestation is raising serious concerns about whether Brazil will meet its international commitments.¹⁴

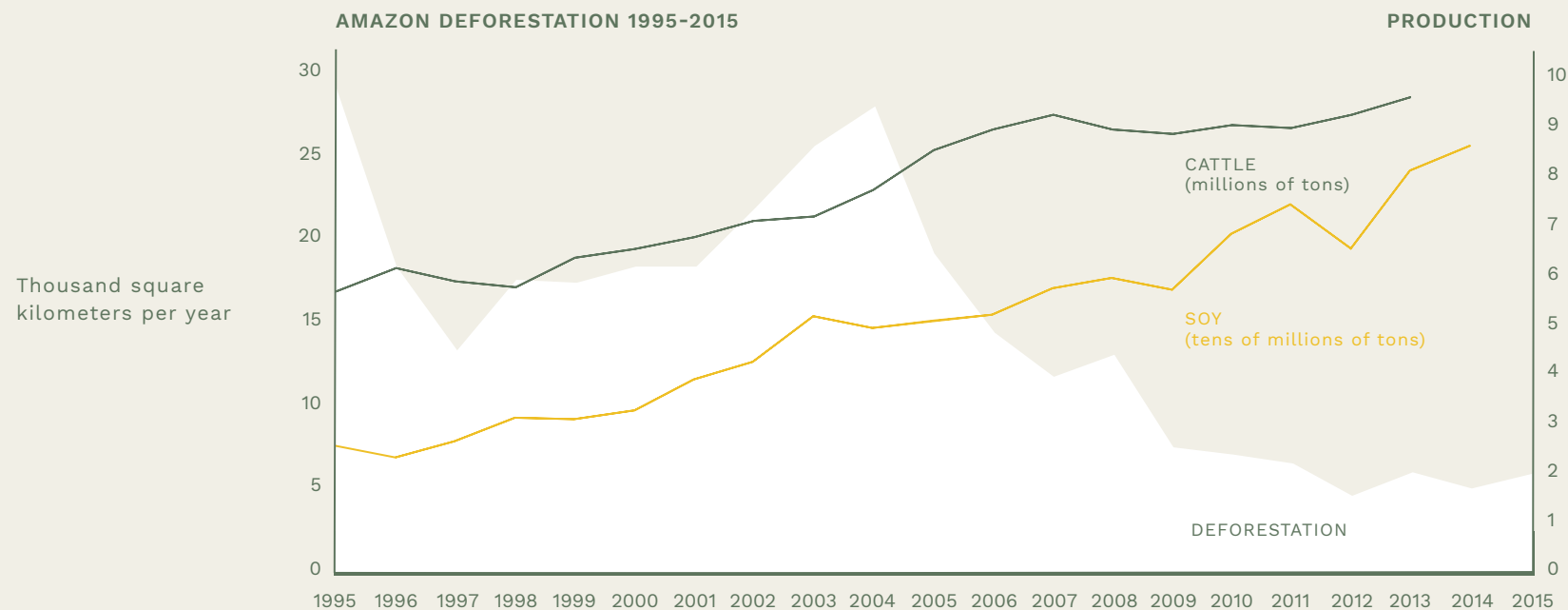
Recent changes to the Forest Code came as a blow to environmentalists who believe the changes will weaken the protection of Brazil's forests. The changes include an exemption from restoring illegally deforested areas for

landowners who cleared land before 2008, a reduction in the area where vegetation clearance is prohibited, and a provision allowing deforestation to be compensated by purchasing lands where forest is still present.^{14,17} The effects of these changes are yet to be seen in practice.

The urgency of halting and reversing the deforestation of the Amazon cannot be overstated. Scientists estimate that once 20-25 percent of the Amazon is deforested, the rainforest may reach a tipping point that will see large swaths of the forests transform into savannah, with a devastating loss of the ecosystem services the rainforest currently provides.²⁶ Currently, cumulative deforestation of the Amazon is already approaching 20 percent.²⁶

FIGURE 2 DECOUPLING ECONOMIC GROWTH FROM AMAZON DEFORESTATION

BRAZIL REDUCED DEFORESTATION AND INCREASED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AT THE SAME TIME



Source: Center for Global Development; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Statistics Division, "Production quantities by country," updated 2015, http://faostat3.fao.org/browse/Q/*E; National Institute for Space Research (INPE), "Projeto Prodes: Monitoramento da Floresta Amazônica Brasileira Por Satélite," updated 2016, <http://www.obt.inpe.br/prodes/index.php>



WHAT IS CAUSING BRAZIL'S DEFORESTATION?

AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK: Cattle-ranching has been the leading cause of forest loss in Brazil, accounting for 1.6 million hectares of forest loss in 2011.²⁹ Soybean cultivation was another major contributor prior to the enactment of the Amazon Soy Moratorium. Recent spikes in deforestation (Figure 1) were expected²⁴ as a result of economic and political conditions in Brazil, together with changes in global trade agreements²⁵, according to the Deforestation Alert System developed by Imazon (Instituto do Homem e Meio Ambiente da Amazônia—a non-profit research institute supporting conservation of Amazon rainforests).^{25,30}

FOREST FIRES: Fire is often used to clear forest for agriculture and mining. A warming climate also increases the frequency of forest fires, which are now more widespread than at any time in Brazil's recorded history.²⁷ Most fires occur in areas opened for agriculture and pasture²⁷, and fires have also caused the loss of large forested areas within the Kayapó and Xikrin do Rio Catete Indigenous Territories²⁸. Agriculture and extractive activities are subjecting

the forest to fires of unprecedented frequency and intensity.²⁸ A vicious cycle is now in play: the more a forest is cleared, the more vulnerable to fire the remaining forest becomes.

URBANIZATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE: More than half of the cities in Brazil that doubled in population during the past decade were in the Amazon, and the region's rate of population growth was almost twice that of the country as a whole.³¹ As cities grow, infrastructure and services expand to serve them. According to the Global Forest Atlas, almost all Amazon deforestation occurs within 50 km of roads.³²

MINING: The Amazon contains extensive mineral assets including copper, tin, nickel, bauxite, manganese, iron ore and gold. Mining accounted for almost 10 percent of forest losses in the Amazon between 2005 and 2015, not just as a result of the mining operations but also because of surrounding infrastructure development, urban expansion and supply chain activities.³³



PROTECTING BRAZIL'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Study after study has shown that one of the most effective ways to protect forests is to defend the legal rights of indigenous peoples.³⁴ However, in Brazil and around the world, indigenous peoples face a growing array of threats to their rights, their legally protected territories, and their safety. This trend must be reversed, and religious and spiritual communities can play an important role.

The 896,000 indigenous people recorded as living in Brazil in 2010 belonged to 305 ethnic groups.³⁵ Brazil is also home to the largest number of South America's isolated indigenous communities.³⁵ Specialists at FUNAI (Fundação Nacional do Índio—the government agency charged with protecting indigenous interests and culture³⁶) have confirmed that 27 uncontacted tribes live in the Brazilian Amazon and believe that there could be as many as 113 uncontacted tribes in total.³⁷

Brazil is host to 713 designated indigenous areas, encompassing a combined area of more than 117 million hectares (14 percent of the country's land area and 21 percent of its forests).³⁶ Almost all these territories are concentrated

within the Amazon rainforest. In 2012, the Brazilian government established the National Policy on Territorial and Environmental Management of (PNGATI), a national policy that promoted participatory territorial planning and environmental management of indigenous lands by indigenous people.³⁸

Although these lands have been designated for indigenous peoples, legal title remains with the government,³⁹ meaning that the lands' protection as indigenous territory is vulnerable to political changes and industry pressure. For example, 37 million of the 106 million hectares in the Amazon designated for indigenous peoples and local communities⁴⁰ are earmarked for exploration and exploitation³⁵, leaving indigenous communities vulnerable to incursion by extractive industries and the development of hydroelectric dams.^{41,42} Almost one third of indigenous land in Brazil is reserved for exploration by mining companies.^{28,33,35} Budget cuts to FUNAI make it almost impossible to protect existing indigenous lands from ongoing threats.³⁵ And recently introduced regulations would hinder the demarcation and establishment of new indigenous territories.³⁶ These concerns have increased recently as the new Brazilian

government stripped FUNAI of the responsibility for demarcation, passing it on to the Ministry of Agriculture.⁴³ The decision is contested in the Brazilian Congress, however, and may be reversed.

As noted before, studies have shown that indigenous peoples are most successful at preventing deforestation.^{44,45,46} The World Resources Institute found that forest was lost at ten times the rate outside indigenous lands in the Brazilian Amazon between 2000 and 2012, as inside indigenous lands.⁴⁷ And indigenous and community forests in Brazil were found to store over one third more carbon per hectare than other forests.⁴⁷ Despite their valuable contribution to climate change mitigation, indigenous peoples in Brazil are highly vulnerable to climate change.⁴⁸ Thus, the Amazon Environmental Research Institute developed the Sistema de Observação e Monitoramento da Amazônia Indígena (SOMAI) platform to support indigenous peoples' efforts to adapt to climate change and to continue their climate regulating activities through management of their territories.⁴⁸

Tragically, indigenous people who defend their lands from incursion face severe threats. 2017 saw the murder of 57 environmental defenders in Brazil—the worst year on record for deaths of environmental defenders anywhere in the world, with indigenous people representing a large proportion of the victims.⁴⁹

DEFENDING INDIGENOUS LAND RIGHTS: THE KAYAPÓ^{50,51,52,53,54}

The Kayapó are an indigenous tribe living along the Xingu River in the Brazilian Amazon. They employ many ingenious techniques to sustainably manage their natural resources, as exemplified by their transformation of infertile and dry lands into productive forest patches by using mulch and the crumbled nests of termites and ants. The Kayapó have been in contact with the outside world only since the 1960s.

Threatened by ranchers, loggers, and gold miners, the Kayapó tribe fought for and won legal recognition of their lands in the 1990s. Through the formation of alliances among themselves, and with national and international NGOs, they have managed to protect their land from incursion by outside logging and mining interests.

Although not guaranteed, the prospect of forest conservation in the Kayapo territory is brightened by the Kayapó's security of tenure, traditional knowledge, expertise in resource management, outside incentives, and long-term partnerships with conservation organisations. Strengthened by their relationships with Brazil's indigenous rights agency (FUNAI), Floresta Protegida Associationl and other organisations, the Kayapó have been among the most politically successful defenders of indigenous peoples' rights in the Brazilian Amazon.

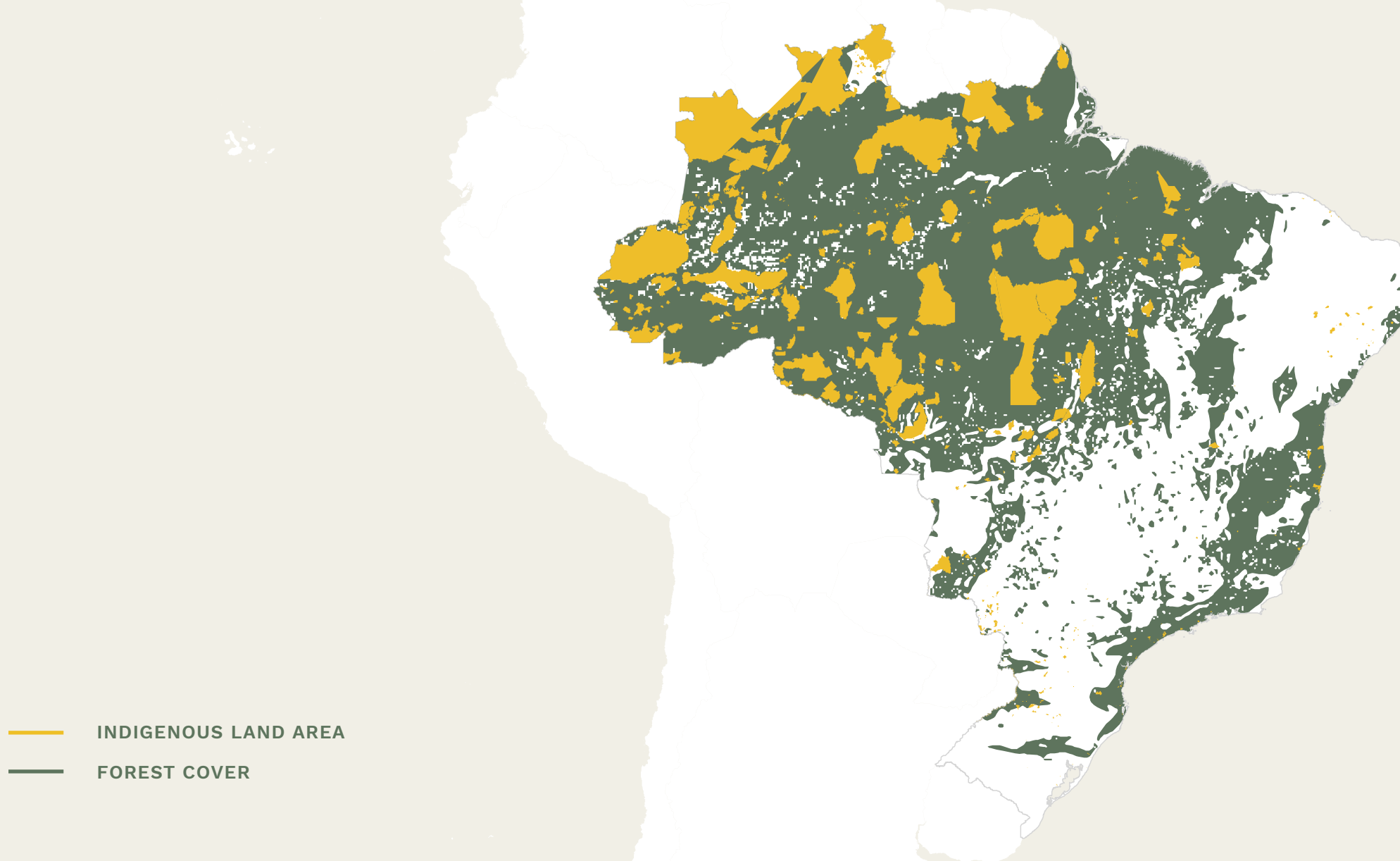


FIGURE 3. FOREST COVER AND INDIGENOUS LAND AREA IN BRAZIL

Source: Garnett, S.T., Burgess, N.D., Fa, J.E., Fernández-Llamazares, Á., Molnár, Z., Robinson, C.J., Watson, J.E.M., Zander, K.K., Austin, B., Brondizio, E.S. et al. 2018. A spatial overview of the global importance of Indigenous lands for conservation. *Nature Sustainability*, 1(7): 369–374. Hansen, M. C., P. V. Potapov, R. Moore, M. Hancher, S. A. Turubanova, A. Tyukavina, D. Thau, S. V. Stehman, S. J. Goetz, T. R. Loveland, A. Kommareddy, A. Egorov, L. Chini, C. O. Justice, and J. R. G. Townshend. 2013. "High-Resolution Global Maps of 21st-Century Forest Cover Change." *Science* 342 (15 November): 850–53. Data available on-line from: <http://earthenginepartners.appspot.com/science-2013-global-forest>.

The boundaries and names shown and the designation used on maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UN Environment or contributory organisations.



KEY COMMITMENTS AND INITIATIVES

INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

Under the Paris Agreement, negotiated as part of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Brazil pledged to reduce its carbon emissions by 43 percent by 2030 compared to 2005 levels, making commitments to reduce deforestation, (including ending illegal deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon by 2030), to restore or reforest 12 million hectares of forests by 2030, and to enhance its sustainable management of native forests.⁵⁵ Brazil's chances of meeting this goal are threatened by the sharp uptick in deforestation rates since 2014.

In 2016, as part of its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, Brazil also committed to protect at least 30 percent of the Amazon by 2020.⁹ This effort aligns with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets set out by the Convention on Biological Diversity, and contributes to the country's ambition of reducing greenhouse gas emissions under the Paris Agreement.⁵⁵

THE AMAZON FUND

In 2008, Brazil launched the Amazon Fund, a REDD+ initiative to raise funds to prevent, monitor and combat deforestation, as well as to promote the preservation and sustainable use of forests in the Brazilian Amazon.⁵⁶ REDD+ is an international climate mitigation strategy with the goal of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in tropical forest countries, while providing sustainable development benefits to participating communities. It does this, in part, by providing financial incentives for sustainably managing forests, and halting or reversing forest loss. As of the end of 2017, the Amazon Fund had raised US\$ 1.2 billion⁵⁷ and had funded 103 projects.⁵⁶

The Government of Norway has been the principal donor to the Amazon Fund, pledging in 2008 to contribute up to US\$ 1 billion to the Fund up to 2015 if Brazil could show reductions in Amazon deforestation—a pledge that was ultimately fulfilled.⁵⁸ In 2015, the bilateral partnership between Brazil and Norway was extended through 2020. In line with its policy of paying for results, Norway reduced its contribution to the Amazon Fund to US\$ 35 million when

deforestation rose in 2016⁵⁹ and in 2017 issued a warning that the upward trend in deforestation could bring Norway's contributions to zero.^{60,61} Germany is also a major donor to the Fund and had contributed over US\$ 68 million as of the end of 2017.⁵⁷

FOREST MONITORING

Brazil is a world leader in the development and management of satellite systems for monitoring changes in forest cover, including forest fires. The National Institute for Space Research (INPE) runs the Satellite Monitoring of the Brazilian Amazon Forest Project (PRODES), which can provide, among other data, real time information on forest loss. More recently, the government announced the Brazilian Biomes Environmental Monitoring Programme to advance monitoring across the country in alignment with the national REDD strategy.

PRIVATE SECTOR COMMITMENTS: THE SOY MORATORIUM AND BEEF AGREEMENTS

Brazil's Soy Moratorium, agreed in 2006, was the first voluntary zero-deforestation agreement implemented in the tropics and set the stage for similar initiatives covering commodities such as beef and palm oil.²² Under the moratorium, major soybean traders committed not to purchase soy grown on lands deforested after July 2006 in the Brazilian Amazon. The Moratorium is widely considered a success to date; the first ten years of implementation saw a 260 percent increase in the area under soy production in the Brazilian Amazon (from just over 1 million to 3.6 million hectares) yet less than one percent of that growth happened in newly deforested areas.⁶² In 2016, the soy moratorium was extended indefinitely.

In 2009, responding to pressure from NGOs and the federal prosecutor in the state of Pará, Brazil's three largest meatpacking companies (JBS, Marfrig and Minerva) agreed to stop purchasing beef from ranches that cleared more forest than legally permitted.⁶³ A few months later, the same firms signed a more stringent agreement with Greenpeace, committing to buy only from suppliers that reduced deforestation to zero.⁶³ Both agreements required suppliers to enrol in a public environmental registry, identifying the boundaries of their ranches, thus facilitating monitoring of changes in forest cover. Within months, almost two thirds of suppliers had registered, and by 2013, compliance had reached 96 percent.⁶³ While the Beef Agreements were found to have a real impact on rancher and slaughterhouse behaviour in the Amazon⁶⁴, 80 percent of new deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon is still caused by the conversion of forest to cattle pasture⁶⁵.

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HOW RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES CAN GET INVOLVED



Religious believers and spiritual communities have a unique role to play in protecting Brazil's rainforests and supporting its indigenous peoples. The ethical case for caring for the planet is deeply rooted in all of the world's religious traditions, and now is the time to reinvigorate and mobilize our respective spiritual resources, our influence, and our moral authority to collectively make the case that rainforests are a sacred trust and that tropical deforestation is a sanctity of life issue: it is wrong and it must stop.

Brazilian religious believers can take action at several different levels, including regulating their personal choices and working through their religious institutions to promote education about the value of and dangers to rainforests, advocate for economic choices that safeguard rainforests, and pursue coordinated political initiatives that combat deforestation and support indigenous peoples' rights.

PERSONAL CHOICES

People of faith can honor the planet and forests by making conscious and informed decisions that signal an awareness of where and how their food and consumer items are sourced and who produces them. Diet is one area where personal choice can directly support rainforest health. A shift toward a plant-based diet and eating less meat, particularly beef, is one of the most powerful personal choices any individual can make in solidarity with rainforests, since beef and soy production (much of it used as cattle feed) are important drivers of deforestation. Indeed, animal raising is remarkably land-intensive: supplying meat to a global population requires two-thirds of the world's agricultural land, including pastureland and cropland for feed. This extensive area is often taken from forests. Even reducing meat intake to twice a week can make a measurable impact. Reducing meat consumption also reduces pressure on a range of agricultural resources beyond forest land. Water use, fertilizer production, and greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change—each of these declines substantially for every foregone kilo of meat.

As with meat, religious believers can make informed consumer choices around palm oil, paper, and wood products. Consumers can look for products made by companies committed to zero deforestation and ensure that up and down their supply-chains there is no activity that negatively impacts forests. This means choosing paper, wood, and other products made from 100 percent post-consumer content materials and opting for virgin wood products certified by reputable authorities such as the Forest Stewardship Council.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

Religious believers can also help to address deforestation by working with and through their own religious institutions. More than 85 percent of people in the world have a religious affiliation, making the religious public a formidable force

for positive social and environmental change when they and their institutions pursue a common goal. Religious institutions and places of worship can incorporate forests into existing communal religious activities and practices—such as liturgies, large prayer gatherings, or celebrations around festivals, feasts, or commemorations. For example, communities that emphasize fasting can include a notion of “fasting for the forest.” And communities can set aside particular periods to pray for the forests.

Religious communities, congregations, universities, schools and places of worship can also counter deforestation by protecting trees on religiously owned land. This can involve declaring protected forests, putting in place prohibitions on deforestation or hunting wildlife, or restoring degraded lands. Many of these practices have been adopted by Hindus in India, Christians in Africa, Buddhists in Thailand and Cambodia, and followers of Shinto in Japan. Because places of worship are community gathering spots, they can help to set norms around respecting and protecting forests and biodiversity. In Ethiopia, for example, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, a Christian denomination that traces its lineage to the first century, is credited with saving many of the nation's remaining trees. Its churches have planted more than 1000 “sacred forests,” each averaging a few football fields in size, around its many churches. The forests are seen as the “clothing” of the churches, serving as community centers, meeting places, schools, and burial grounds, in addition to providing shade for people and habitat for many species.

ECONOMIC ACTION

Every economic decision constitutes a moral decision. Businesses and investors that work in forest landscapes and that depend on forests for their products have a responsibility to social and environmental stewardship that can and must be guided by the world's religious communities. Investor movements driven by people of faith can exert shareholder pressure on

businesses by insisting that they adopt sustainable practices, clean up their supply chains, and respect the forests. Corporations run by people with religious convictions need to hear from religious leaders and places of worship that deforestation is a sanctity of life issue and that business practices that destroy forests and biodiversity and that disregard the rights of indigenous peoples and forest communities are in violation of the tenets of their faith.

Divestment can be another potent strategy, given the substantial financial assets and investment portfolios held by some faith groups. There is great potential for a faith-based movement that encourages divestment from industries that engage in deforestation and investment in renewable energy projects, community-based natural resource management and social enterprises that benefit local people and local economies, not multi-national corporations and their shareholders. Making the moral decision to refuse to fund activities that destroy forests is a powerful and effective avenue to bring about change. There is ample evidence to suggest that divestment from industries that damage the planet and a transition to ethical investing can change behavior and will ultimately encourage other investors to follow suit. The faith-based movement to divest from fossil fuels—from oil, coal and gas companies—provides an instructive example of what is possible when religious institutions take a stand in this regard.

EDUCATION

Religious leaders are often among the most trusted figures in any society, looked to for ethical and spiritual guidance on economic, social and political life. They are also teachers and conduits of education, awareness and learning. Religious leaders then are key actors in the effort to raise awareness about the deforestation crisis, the risks that deforestation poses to progress on climate change and sustainable development, and the entry points for people of faith to get into action to fight for the protection of forests.

As such, one of the best ways for religious leaders to take action on forest protection is to use their influence and authority to relay information and resources on the deforestation crisis to those in their congregation.

Some of the most powerful lessons to be taken from forests are not on deforestation rates and numbers of displaced indigenous peoples (important as these are), but lessons of the heart that teach appreciation of forests in their spiritual fullness. Attitudes toward forests and trees could be markedly changed for western audiences if forests were viewed primarily as a gift, rather than resources. Indigenous traditions have much to teach in this regard. Gratitude and sufficiency are familiar concepts to people of many faiths; it is not a stretch to imagine applying these attitudes widely in our consumption of palm oil, paper, wood, and other forest products. Such a shift could be transformational.

POLITICAL ACTION

Ending deforestation comes down to mobilizing sufficient political will. Until now, globally and in major rainforest countries, the enforcement of laws and policies around forest protection have been largely insufficient to stop the destruction. Religious believers, leaders and places of worship can help to influence public debate and public policies on forests and the rights of indigenous peoples, making them moral issues that demand a moral response from elected officials. Halting and reversing deforestation will require the cultivation of new public virtues and a seismic shift in values and the way that we as a human family understand and manage forests.

Many religious leaders are uniquely positioned to lobby governments at local, regional, national and global levels and other decision-making bodies that determine the policies and practices that govern forests and the rights of their guardians. Advocacy can take various forms, ranging from quiet

diplomacy and back-channel meetings to more public statements, campaigns, petitions and demonstrations around the moral and spiritual responsibility to protect forests. To be effective, coordination across sectors is critical, to ensure that advocacy by religious believers is bolstering and advancing campaigns and efforts already underway by the broader coalition of indigenous peoples, NGOs, multilateral organizations, and grassroots activists working to end deforestation. Religious leaders also have a role in holding political leaders accountable for past commitments, and encouraging greater ambition to new commitments over time.

MULTI-RELIGIOUS COLLABORATION

The gains from deploying religious resources in the fight against deforestation are multiplied when the world's religions stand together. This kind of cooperation can prove more powerful—symbolically and substantively—than unilateral action by individual religious groups. When religious communities demonstrate the ability to work closely together, they build credibility and trust among the population at large. When they speak with one voice on issues like forest protection, their moral authority is magnified, giving them greater ability to influence policies through their influence on individuals and institutions.

For more information on actions you can take to support rainforests in Brazil, connect with the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Brazil at brazil@interfaithrainforest.org.

The ethical case for caring for the planet is deeply rooted in all of the world's religious traditions. Now is the time to mobilize our spiritual resources, our influence, and our moral authority to collectively make the case that rainforests are a sacred trust and that tropical deforestation is a sanctity of life issue: it is wrong and it must stop.

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ABOUT THIS PRIMER

This primer is part of a series of briefs meant to inform and inspire faith communities to action to help safeguard tropical forests and their inhabitants. Through facts, graphics, analysis, and photos, these primers present the moral case for conserving and restoring rainforest ecosystems, supported by the latest science and policy insights. They bring together the research and practical tools that faith communities and religious leaders need to better understand the importance of tropical forests, to advocate for their protection, and to raise awareness about the ethical responsibility that exists across faiths to take action to end tropical deforestation.

PARTNERS

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative welcomes engagement by all organizations, institutions and individuals of good faith and conscience that are committed to the protection, restoration and sustainable management of rainforests.

INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is an international, multi-faith alliance working to bring moral urgency and faith-based leadership to global efforts to end tropical deforestation. It is a platform for religious leaders and faith communities to work hand-in-hand with indigenous peoples, governments, NGOs and businesses on actions that protect rainforest and the rights of those that serve as their guardians. The Initiative believes the time has come for a worldwide movement for the care of tropical forests, one that is grounded in the inherent value of forests, and inspired by the values, ethics, and moral guidance of indigenous peoples and faith communities.

QUESTIONS?

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is eager to work with you to protect tropical forests and the rights of indigenous peoples. Contact us at info@interfaithrainforest.org.



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