

Brazil's President Lula unveils plan to end deforestation by 2030

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A few logs lying on what was once forest floor, in front of a house near the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve, in Xapuri, Acre state, Brazil

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has fought to reverse trends of deforestation that hit record levels under his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro [File: Eraldo Peres/AP Photo]

Brasilia, June 7 (RHC)-- The administration of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has announced its plan to eliminate deforestation by 2030 as part of an international pledge to protect the

environment. Lula and his Environment Minister Marina Silva unveiled the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Amazon on Monday, touting it as the latest step in their aggressive platform to combat climate change.

“Brazil has resumed its leading role in tackling climate change, after four years in which the environment was treated as an obstacle to the immediate profit of a privileged minority,” Lula said in a post on Twitter, alluding to the policies of his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro. “But rich countries also need to do their part. They were the ones who over the centuries devastated forests the most.”

Fifteen government ministries collaborated on the plan, which includes advancing techniques for documenting and tracking illegal deforestation. The plan stipulates increased use of satellite imagery to identify illegal logging, ranching and mining operations. Government databases containing financial intelligence, for example, will also be deployed to track the flow of money from unsanctioned operations in the Amazon rainforest.

Under the terms of the plan, a system will also be developed to certify the origins of wood and agricultural products that might otherwise come from vulnerable or exploited ecosystems. In addition to its crime-fighting efforts, the plan proposes to standardise land titles and create incentives for sustainable agriculture and other “green” activities.

“Loggers in the country need to be told that, if they want to cut down trees, plant them,” Lula said of the proposed measures. He also warned there would be no excuse for felling old-growth forests. “In the land of the Brazilian people, we will be very tough in complying with the law.”

Lula’s policies mark a departure from those of Bolsonaro, whose tenure in office, from 2019 to 2022, coincided with record deforestation in Brazil. Bolsonaro had advocated for more development in the Amazon region, framing the construction as a potential boon for Brazil’s economy and turning a blind eye, according to critics, to illegal operations.

But Bolsonaro’s opponents decried what they saw as an attack on the country’s environmental protections, one that translated into violence against the Indigenous people who call the Amazon home.

In October, the right-wing Bolsonaro was narrowly defeated in a run-off election against the left-leaning Lula, who campaigned on a platform of restoring the Amazon. Parts of the forest, once a major carbon-trapping sink, now release more carbon than they capture as a result of deforestation and fires.

Nevertheless, in November, Lula appeared at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP27, in a bid to position Brazil as a leader in the fight against climate change. “There is no climate security for the world without a protected Amazon,” he told the conference.

Still, Lula has faced an uphill battle. Deforestation dropped by 61 percent in January, his first month in office, only to hit a record high in February. And Brazil’s opposition-led Congress recently delivered a setback to Lula, voting last week to scale down ministries dedicated to environmental protection and Indigenous peoples.

Monday’s deforestation announcement arrives one year after British journalist Dom Phillips and Brazilian Indigenous expert Bruno Pereira were murdered while reporting on the Amazon. In announcing Monday’s plan, Lula paid tribute to the two men, who had worked to bring attention to deforestation and illegal operations on Indigenous land.

“A year ago, the brutal murder that made them victims shocked the world, which came to see the Amazon as a land without law and on the verge of destruction,” Lula wrote on Twitter. “Today, the world has returned to look at Brazil with hope.”

The announcement lays the groundwork for Brazil to follow through with a 2021 agreement, forged at the COP26 climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland, to halt deforestation by 2030. An estimated 145 countries joined in the Glasgow declaration, which would cover approximately 85 percent of the world's forests and woodlands. Among them, 12 governments pledged \$12 billion to protect and restore forest ecosystems, with funds set aside for Indigenous populations.

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