June 20, 2024

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

We are individuals and organizations from across Latin America, Asia and Africa who are devoted to principles of human rights, environmental restoration, social justice, peace and human dignity, and we are writing to urge you to sign New York’s historic TREES Act for tropical forest protection (Bill # A.9711/S.8898) into law. With this law, New York can exert significant economic leverage in support of the international movement to combat climate change, and help ensure the world’s irreplaceable tropical forests can continue to play their crucial ecological role.

New York has long been a home of cultural diversity, economic opportunity, and policy that faces the future. In this, New York is an inspiration, and in fact, a literal home to countless of our brothers and sisters. Your cities have ties to every country in the world – and by signing this historic bill you will show that New Yorkers still today are living out the values for which you are known worldwide.

In our work, we have dedicated our lives to promoting environmental and social justice, and to halting the destruction of our lands, our forests, and in many cases, our lifeways — and we have been watching the progress of this and similar legislation around the world. In Europe, the EU Deforestation Regulation, which has taken a decade to become encoded in law, is the first law in the global North to recognize that what wealthy nations purchase for everyday consumption — coffee, lumber, palm oil, beef — wreaks devastation in our home territories, every day.

Last year we saw more than 9 million acres of rainforest land burned, slashed and turned into industrial wasteland. Half of the world’s forests are gone, and this devastation is a critical contributor to the climate emergency, a global existential threat that should unite us all in a struggle to change the way our societies consume goods and extract resources. At this moment, with our lifeways and our very lives at stake, we have no choice but to change the way we manage our relationship with our Pachamama, our Mother Earth. And we must ask you to do what you can to help.

As you have said yourself, New York is a magnet for people fleeing their homelands from the impacts of environmental destruction. The climate emergency, the deforestation crisis, the droughts and wildfires and crop failures and floods that are ravaging our nations and territories — all these are major factors in driving the waves of people leaving our villages, towns and cities for what they hope is a better life elsewhere. Our brothers and sisters from Honduras, from Haiti, from Congo, are fleeing their homes not only because of economic collapse and social unrest, but because the heat and the floods and the desertification of their lands is making their homes unlivable. Many of them aspire to reach physical safety and economic safety on your shores.
And, as you know too well, after great trial and tribulation, if they make it, they are ending up as refugees at Floyd Bennett Field, in Albany’s West Hill neighborhood, on Buffalo’s West Side, in the packed emergency shelters of Manhattan, on Brooklyn’s inhospitable winter streets and in the crowded basements in Queens.

While the crisis of climate migration is among the great catastrophes that we face today, it is also an opportunity for the world to come together. To say it simply, Governor Hochul, our problems are your problems; your economy and our economy are part of a global system that requires global attention; the people in your cities and towns are the children and grandchildren and brothers and sisters of the people in ours.

We need solutions that are global in their vision — but that build on actions taken at the local level everywhere in the world.

Through the TREES Act, you and other New Yorkers can take actions that bring us hope. As you have your Adirondacks, your Niagara Falls, your Hudson River, we have our rainforests — natural wonders that help sustain life and cannot be replaced. The TREES Act is an acknowledgment that what is decided at the state capitol in Albany or in the ports of Manhattan makes ripples that affect us in Brazil, in West Africa, in Southeast Asia. Quite literally, governor Hochul, our rainforests are your Brooklyn Bridge, your High Line, your hamburger, the creamer in your coffee, the chocolate in your ice cream. It is not an exaggeration to say that these come to you at great cost to our families and communities. That need not be the case, and once you sign this bill, it no longer will be.

We applaud your Legislature for its vision in passing the TREES Act, not once, but twice. We understand that, like ripe fruit, any good law takes time to mature into something that will truly nourish our collective future. Like the kind of leadership we cherish, the TREES Act is at once humble and bold; it offers a relatively small and pragmatic change that, over time, will have a deep and indelible impact.

Governor Hochul, we are hopeful that you will see the opportunity before you, for New York and for the world, and will sign this bill into law.

In solidarity and respect,

Alfred Lahai Brownell, Green Advocates; 2019 Goldman Environmental Prize Winner (Liberia)
Marcel Gomes, Reporter Brasil; 2024 Goldman Environmental Prize Winner (Brazil)
Tarcísio Feitosa da Silva, Municipal Councilor for the Environment and Climate of the City of Rio de Janeiro; 2006 Goldman Environmental Prize Winner – Forests (Brazil)
Zenzi Suhadi, WALHI / Indonesian Forum on the Environment (Indonesia)

On behalf of the undersigned 154 civil society and Indigenous Peoples organizations from Latin America, Asia and Africa, across 28 countries and territories in tropical forest regions:

Regional
Andrew Miller, Advocacy Director
Peter Quaqua
Juliano Bueno De Araújo, Director

Amazon Watch (Amazon Region/US)
Mano River Union Civil Society Natural Resources Rights and Governance Platform (West Africa)
COESUS - Coalizão Não Fracking Brasil (Latin America)
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Chalani Rubesinghe, ISS Focal Point for Asia Pacific

Ilang-Ilang Quijano, Communications Officer
Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific

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Shibli Anowar

All Bangla Fisherman's Association (ABFMA)
Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association
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5 Elementos
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ActionAid

Amadjah
Articulação carioca por justiça socioambiental
Associação Alternativa Terrazul
Associação Soluções Inclusivas Sustentáveis (SIS)
Associação Viração Educomunicação
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Comissão de Atingidos por Barragem de Vila Regência Augusta e Entre Rios - Linhares, State of Espírito Santo
Engajamundo Youth Association

FBOMS - Fórum Brasileiro de ONGs e Movimentos Sociais pelo Meio Ambiente
iCMBio

Instituto Democracia e Sustentabilidade
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Mater Natura - Instituto de Estudos Ambientais

Mighty Earth
National Committee in Defense of Territories against mining
Network for Social Justice and Human Rights
Observatório de Justiça e Conservação
Observatório do Clima (Brazilian Climate Observatory)
OPAN - Operação Amazônia Nativa – Amazon Region

REPAM-Brasil
Rede Vozes Negras pelo Clima - Linhares, State of Espírito Santo
Uma Gota no Oceano

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Ponlok Khmer Organization, Preah Vihear Province
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Real Talk: Colombia

Costa Rica
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Red de Coordinacion en Biodiversidad

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ACRC, Association Communautaire pour le Relèvement Communautaire,
Centre de Recherches sur l'Environnement, la Démocratie et les. Droits de l'homme : CREDDHO- DRC
Fédération des comités des pêcheurs individuels du Lac
Fondation des amis de la nature (FAN)-DRC
FORED, Forum des Engagés pour le Développement Durable
FECOPELEA, Fédération des Comités des Pêcheurs du Lac Albert
AEDIF, Association d'Entraide pour le Développement Intégral de la Femme
FOPED, Forum pour la Paix, l'Environnement et le Développement
RPDI, Rassemblement des Personnes handicapées pour le Développement Intégral
FEJEC, Fédération des Jeunes Entrepreneurs du Congo
AEDIF, Association d'Entraide pour le Développement Intégral de la Femme
Southern Africa Resources Watch
Justice verte a.s.b.l
Dynamique pour le Droit, la Démocratie et le Développement Durable, en sigle D5
SJDDH "Synergie des Jeunes pour le Développement et les Droits Humains"
Alerte Congolaise pour l'environnement et les Droits de l'Homme (ACEDH)
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WALHI East Java Region
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African Indigenous Foundation for Energy and Sustainable Development (AFES)
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Initiative For Green Planet Uganda (IGPU)  
Weka Afri sustainable Biodiversity and Food Security Foundation  
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YOUTH FOR NATURE CONSERVANCY-YNC  
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