

An Open Letter to Mr Rémy Rioux, Chief Executive Officer of the French Development Agency, the Paris Peace Forum Executive Committee, and Public Development Banks Participating in the Finance in Common Summit

November 11, 2020

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Our world is in crisis.

Climate change, global pandemics, biodiversity loss – the planet, and humanity’s present and future generations, are facing an unprecedented trifecta of existential challenges. We recognize that the Third Annual Paris Peace Forum is in part an attempt to inspire “collective action to bounce back to a better planet”, focusing on environmental sustainability and promoting a low carbon economy¹. Given the state of the world, we are grateful that the Finance in Common organizers and partners are forging on in hosting this summit.

In the multilateralist spirit of the Paris Peace Forum, we believe all participants in the Finance in Common Summit, and particularly those in the international banking sector writ large, bear a clear and strong obligation to take bolder, faster steps to dramatically reduce their role in accelerating climate change, facilitating the emergence of infectious, zoonotic diseases, and driving biodiversity loss. **As upstream actors, all banks and financial institutions play a critical role in screening out environmentally and socially unsustainable activities. Humanity’s success in solving climate change, the emergence of zoonotic diseases, and biodiversity loss is inherently intertwined – it is impossible to resolve one without the others.** It is time the banking sector collectively considers these issues and urgently develops holistic methodologies and policies to address them.

As a first step towards ensuring banks do their part in driving solutions, **we represent civil society, academics, and non-governmental organizations calling on banks to adopt the Banks and Biodiversity No Go Policy:**

In order to safeguard the rights of Indigenous and traditional communities in formally, informally, or traditionally held conserved areas – such as Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCA), Indigenous Territories (ITs) or public lands not yet demarcated – as well as to better address and reflect the current crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and emergence of zoonotic diseases, the Banks and Biodiversity campaign calls on banks and financial institutions to adopt a “No Go” policy which prohibits any direct or indirect financing related to unsustainable, extractive, industrial, environmentally, and/or socially harmful activities in or which may potentially impact the following areas:

AREA 1:

Areas recognized by international conventions and agreements including but not limited to the Bonn Convention, Ramsar Convention, World Heritage Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity, or other international bodies such as UNESCO (Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO Global Geoparks, etc) or Food and Agricultural Organization (vulnerable marine ecosystems), International Maritime Organization (particularly sensitive areas), IUCN Designated Areas (Categories IA – VI)

AREA 2:

Nature or wilderness areas that are nationally or sub-nationally recognized and protected by law or other regulations/policies, including those which may be located in or may overlap with formally, informally, or traditionally held conserved areas such as Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCA), Indigenous Territories (ITs) or public lands not yet demarcated

AREA 3:

Habitats with endemic or endangered species, including key biodiversity areas

AREA 4:

Intact primary forests and vulnerable, secondary forest ecosystems, including but not limited to boreal, temperate, and tropical forest landscapes

AREA 5:

Free-flowing rivers, defined as bodies of water whose flow and connectivity remain unaffected by human activities

AREA 6:

Protected or at-risk marine or coastland ecosystems, including mangrove forests, wetlands, reef systems, and those located in or which may overlap with formally, informally, or traditionally held conserved areas, Indigenous Territories (ITs), or public lands not yet demarcated, or Indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCA)

AREA 7:

Any area where the free, prior, informed consent of Indigenous and Traditional Communities have not been obtained, particularly including Indigenous Peoples and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs), community-based conservation areas, formally, informally, or traditionally held conserved areas, Indigenous Territories, sacred sites and/or land with ancestral significance to traditional and Indigenous communities

AREA 8:

Iconic Ecosystems, defined as ecosystems with unique, superlative natural, biodiversity, and/or cultural value which may sprawl across state boundaries, and thus may not be wholly or officially recognized or protected by host countries or international bodies. Examples include transboundary ecosystems, such as the Amazon, the Arctic, among other at-risk ecosystems

Other international bodies have already recognized the value of developing No Go Areas, such as the World Heritage Committee and the UN Environment's Principles for Sustainable Insurance Initiative (PSI). The Banks and Biodiversity No Go Policy also aligns with banks and financial institutions' current practice of following institutional Exclusion Lists for sensitive industries or areas, as well as global goals of preventing further biodiversity loss. Projects

that do not fall within Exclusion Lists should still be subject to rigorous environmental and social assessment and screening, planning and mitigation¹.

As you know, time is running out. The Banks and Biodiversity No Go Policy aims to broadly identify key areas which may be our best defense in providing humanity more time to better fight climate change, the spread of zoonotic diseases, and biodiversity lossⁱⁱ.

However, these critical ecosystems and areas are at high risk of exploitation, degradation, and thus disappearance. This is because there are increasingly few of left. **Pristine areas with high levels of biodiversity are also typically protected and occupied by traditional and indigenous communities, who have been proven to have developed cultural and at times irreplaceable practices which ensure long term sustainability for both people and natureⁱⁱⁱ. Yet indigenous and local environmental defenders face criminalization, harassment, and even death for warding off exploitative or extractive activities^{iv}, many of which are only possible with direct or indirect financial support.**

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), failing to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius is strongly expected to lead to more frequent extreme temperatures and weather events, droughts, heavy precipitation, sea level rise, and forest degradation and loss^v. Climate change will likely increase poverty around the world, and negatively impact the most vulnerable and poor who are dependent on agricultural and coastal livelihoods. Climate change impacts biodiversity loss as well by impacting the geographic range of species while also facilitating the spread of invasive species. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) predicts that without deliberate systemic and policy changes, **over one million species may go extinct within our lifetime**. Marine and terrestrial ecosystems, which are the world's sole carbon sinks, are being threatened or disappearing. Sixty six per cent of the ocean area is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts, over eighty five per cent of wetlands has been lost, and tropical forests are still shrinking^{vi}. Biodiversity and habitat loss in turn directly impacts food security, economic livelihoods, and water security.

To quote the IPBES: “The diversity of nature maintains humanity’s ability to choose alternatives in the face of an uncertain future”^{vii}. Banks and financial institutions play an outsized role in “humanity’s ability to choose alternatives” due to their inherent function of financing harmful or non-harmful activities. In spite of this significant role, however, many banks have yet to develop robust, comprehensive, and consistent policies or practices to address the climate and biodiversity impacts of their lending. This is why we hope this public statement can galvanize all banks to adopt the No Go to categorically prohibit direct or indirect financing of harmful activities in or near sensitive areas.

Urgent times demand urgent action from us all. According to scientists, worst case climate scenarios are unfolding, triggering potentially irreversible tipping points^{viii}. As such, we urge you to publicly and actively support the broad adoption of this Banks and Biodiversity No Go Policy in the international and public banking sector writ large.

¹ As the Banks and Biodiversity campaign is a collaborative effort across civil society, the specific text of the proposed No Go policy may evolve to reflect civil society's expectations of positive bank behavior, but the heart and spirit of it will remain the same, which is the need for banks to prohibit sensitive and critical ecosystems from harmful projects.

You can find more information about the Banks and Biodiversity campaign at www.banksandbiodiversity.org.

Please contact us anytime for any questions:

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Sincerely,

1. A Rocha Ghana
2. AbibiNsroma Foundation
3. Alerte Congolaise pour l'environnement et les Droits de l'Homme, ACEDH
4. Asociación Ambiente y Sociedad
5. Attac France
6. Australian Forests and Climate Alliance
7. BankTrack
8. Centre de Recherche Sur l'Environnement, La Democratie ET Les Droits l'Homme
9. Centre d'Education pour la Protection de l'Environnement et Développement durable (CEPED)
10. Counter Balance
11. Friends of the Earth US
12. Friends of the Siberian Forests
13. Front Commun pour la Protection de l'Environnement et des Espaces Protégés
14. Fund Our Future International
15. GegenStromung/CounterCurrent – Institut fuer Oekologie und Aktionsethnologie
16. Gender Action
17. Inclusive Development International
18. Internet Rights and Principles Coalition
19. Jamaa Resource Initiatives
20. Jordens Vänner / Friends of the Earth Sweden
21. London Mining Network
22. Mouvement Ecologique
23. Observatoire d'études et d'appui à la responsabilité sociale et environnementale
24. Open Briefing
25. Oyu Tolgoi Watch
26. Partnership for Policy Integrity
27. Protection International Mesoamérica
28. Recourse
29. Rivers without Boundaries Coalition Mongolia
30. Rivers without Boundaries International Coalition
31. Save Lamu
32. Swedwatch
33. Tree Union
34. Professor Pichamon Yeophantong, University of New South Wales (Canberra)
35. Professor Patrick Bond, University of the Western Cape

36. Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI)
37. World Animal Protection
38. Youth For Environment Education And Development Foundation

ⁱ “Paris Peace Forum Press Kit”, Paris Peace Forum, April 2020. https://parispeaceforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020_04_28-DP-Bouncing-back-to-a-better-planet_EN.pdf

ⁱⁱ E. Dinerstein, A. R. Joshi, et al, “A ‘Global Safety Net’ to reverse biodiversity loss and stabilize Earth’s climate”, *Science Advances*, September 4, 2020: Vol. 6, no. 36. <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/6/36/eabb2824>; Niko Kommenda, “Planetary ‘safety net’ could halt wildlife loss and slow climate breakdown”, *Guardian*, September 29, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2020/sep/29/planetary-safety-net-could-halt-wildlife-loss-and-slow-climate-breakdown-aoe>

ⁱⁱⁱ E. Dinerstein, A. R. Joshi, et al, “A ‘Global Safety Net’ to reverse biodiversity loss and stabilize Earth’s climate”, *Science Advances*, September 4, 2020: Vol. 6, no. 36. <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/6/36/eabb2824>; IPBES (2019): Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

^{iv} “Uncalculated Risks: Threats and attacks against human rights defenders and the role of development financiers”, Coalition for Human Rights in Development, May 2019. <https://rightsindevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Uncalculated-Risks-Full-report-cmpr-h.pdf>

^v IPCC, 2018: “Summary for Policymakers. In: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate”, World Meteorological Organization, Geneva, Switzerland. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/spm/>

^{vi} IPBES (2019): Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

^{vii} Ibid

^{viii} Michael Marshall, “The tipping points at the heart of the climate crisis”, *Guardian*, September 19, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/sep/19/the-tipping-points-at-the-heart-of-the-climate-crisis>