

COALITION FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL TERRITORIAL RIGHTS OF AFRO-DESCENDANT PEOPLES OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN¹

Final Recommendations from the International Event on

"Securing Afro-descendant Peoples' Land Tenure Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Effective Pathway to Conservation and Climate Change Action"

Afro-descendant Peoples are an integral part of the history, economy, and political and social processes of nation-building and development in Latin America and the Caribbean. National censuses estimate that 21 percent of the total population of the region is of African descent, which is a little more than 154 million people. However, despite international and national legislative advances recognizing the cultural and ethnic diversity and rights of Afro-descendant Peoples, they continue to face drastic social and economic inequality as well as gaps in information and recognition impacting all their rights.

In addition to the above, we have identified a significant number of hectares with territorial presence of Afro-descendant Peoples in 16 countries, of which a little more than 9.4 million hectares are collectively titled. These territories are characterized by having mostly natural cover, with less anthropic transformation, and are part of areas considered biodiversity hotspots (highly biodiverse areas in a state of great threat). These include floodplain ecosystems, marine-coastal areas, tropical humid forests, and dry forests, all crucial ecosystems for conservation, adaptation, and mitigation to climate change.

These territories contain the specific attributes determined by the ILO Convention 169 for Indigenous and tribal peoples, as already ratified by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for the Afro-descendant Saamaka, Moiwana tribal communities in Suriname; the Garifuna communities of Triunfo de la Cruz, Punta Piedra, San Juan in Honduras; the Black communities of Cacarica in the Lower Atrato River in Colombia; and the Quilombola communities.

Afro-descendant territories go beyond rural areas and extend to aquatic spaces, both in the sea and in inland waters, including marine and aquatic areas containing highly diverse and important ecosystems in the context of the climate crisis, such as mangroves and coral reefs, which have been largely conserved due to the knowledge and practices of Afro-descendant Peoples, underscoring the urgency of granting their rights.

¹ We are a **coalition of Afro-descendant** organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean that was formed in 2022 in the Chota Valley, Ecuador, with the aim of **defending Afro-descendant territories and our collective rights**.

Despite an increase in environmental protection laws, serious failures in implementation pose challenges to climate and ethno-racial justice. A global commitment is essential to ensure the right of Afro-descendant communities to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, with measures to prevent and mitigate the harmful effects of extractive activities, infrastructure projects, and renewable energy in the territories of Afro-descendant Peoples.

Within Afro-descendant communities, it is important to highlight the importance of women as holders and transmitters of traditional knowledge and key actors in the protection of biodiversity, sovereignty, food security, and economic autonomy, all essential elements to achieve environmental and climate justice. However, women face differentiated impacts and environmental risks from climate change, making them more vulnerable to the climate crisis.

Within the framework of the international event on *"Securing Afro-descendant Peoples' Land Tenure Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Effective Pathway to Conservation and Climate Change Action"* held in Bogotá, Colombia from June 11–14, 2024, and which brought together the countries of Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela, we present the following statement and recommendations:

1. We demand the inclusion of the term Afro-descendants Peoples in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), among other international instruments, mechanisms, bodies, and protocols.
2. We request the inclusion and full and objective participation of the Afro-descendant Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean in the institutional arrangement for the CBD Working Group on Article 8 (j) and its related provisions, and incorporating a new provision relating to the issues of Afro-descendant Peoples.
3. We demand to constitute ourselves as a CAUCUS of the Afro-descendant Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean within the Convention on Biological Diversity.
4. We demand compliance with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DPAD), which proposes concrete measures to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance throughout the world.
5. We urge states, donors, and/or cooperating partners to develop flexible mechanisms within existing programs for direct financing to Afro-descendant Peoples in their territories.

6. We demand the right to historical reparations for the transatlantic slave trade and enslavement of Afro-descendant Peoples in the Americas, expressed as a set of special measures to bring environmental and ethno-racial justice.
7. We demand processes to create economic sustainability for women of African descent, their families, and communities, with direct financing to support their access to land, empowerment, security, and protection from all forms of violence.
8. We demand that our Afro-descendant children, adolescents, and young people enjoy their ancestral and traditional territories free of violence and all types of pollution; and that they have access to education, recreation, health, and sports activities that guarantee the transmission of their inheritance, knowledge, and ancestral customs.
9. We urge states and organizations to build efficient mechanisms for the implementation of the collective and individual rights of Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean.
10. We demand special mechanisms for the protection, conservation, and management of ancestral/traditional Afro-descendant Peoples' territories; adaptation and mitigation to climate change and disaster risk; protection of ancestral knowledge; and preservation of water sources guided by their worldviews.
11. We demand that Afro-descendant Peoples' ancestral/traditional management of territories, titled or not, be recognized as efficient mechanisms for biodiversity conservation and adaptation and mitigation to climate change; therefore, it is necessary to guarantee their access, use, enjoyment, titling, and expansion of these territories.
12. We demand that governments guarantee special mechanisms for access to individual and collective justice and protection for Afro-descendant defenders and territorial leaders as integral elements of their action plans to ensure biodiversity and protection and mitigation and adaptation to climate change.
13. We demand that the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) support national and local governments in strengthening and implementing public health systems that ensure Afro-descendant Peoples' access to health services and the preservation of their ancestral knowledge and traditional medicine from a perspective of ensuring equity, health sovereignty, and the decolonization of health.

14. We demand that states carry out national evaluations on the implementation of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent, especially in relation to territories, biodiversity, and climate change.
15. We demand that the significance of these recommendations be acknowledged and included in draft declarations for the rights of Afro-descendant Peoples, communities, and individuals being currently discussed in the United Nations and Inter-American institutions, promoting their participation in these processes and right to prior consultation in accordance with the ILO Convention 169.