



*APPROVED*

### **STATEMENT ON THE AMAZON UNDER THREAT**

*How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who live in it the animals and the birds are swept away, and because people said, "He is blind to our ways." **Jeremiah 12:4***

The Amazon, the green heart of the Earth, is mourning and the life it sustains is withering. Following the prophetic call of Jeremiah, the WCC executive committee, meeting in Amman, Jordan, 17-23 November 2017, urges churches to look deeply into the life of the world, to consider the consequences of our actions, and to act responsibly and urgently.

The Amazon Basin hosts unparalleled biodiversity with 10 percent of the world's plant and animal species being found there. It plays an essential role in helping to control the planet's atmospheric carbon levels, storing many billions of tonnes of carbon in biomass. It is populated by millions of Indigenous People whose ancestors have lived in the region for tens of thousands of years. They are the custodians of this precious heritage. But the Amazon Basin is currently facing immense pressure due to the expansion of cattle pastures, soya farms, mining, hydroelectric projects, urbanization and road networks which have opened previously inaccessible forests to settlement by farmers, illegal logging, and land speculators. The land's custodians cannot protect against these threats alone.

Although annual forest loss began to slow since 2004, over the last two years, many of the achievements have been reversed. Defenders of the Amazon are encountering increasing intimidation and violence, with Brazil recording the highest number of killings of environmental protectors – 49 women and men – many of them Indigenous leaders, in 2016.

The government is now reversing previous protections. Most significantly, on 23 August 2017, President Michel Temer of Brazil abolished by decree a vast national reserve protected since 1984, opening it to commercial mining activities. The area, a delicate ecosystem covering 46,000 square kilometers, straddles the northern states of Amapa and Para and borders Indigenous territories. The government claims that the measure, aimed at attracting new investments, will generate employment and wealth for the country.

However, WCC member churches in Brazil believe that if the decree is enacted, it will further undermine the rights and livelihood of Indigenous Peoples, accelerate deforestation, undermine water resources, hasten the loss of biodiversity and precipitate further land conflicts.

With this proposal, the government of Brazil seeks to roll back environmental protections established over the last two decades, with major implications not only for the protection of

land rights and the survival of the region's Indigenous Peoples, but for the health and sustainability of the entire planet.

On 30 August 2017, following an outcry by environmentalists and civil society, a Brazilian court blocked the decree. However, we are concerned that this is merely a temporary reprieve from the threat of commercial exploitation and destruction of the forest and the Indigenous communities who depend on it.

As churches, we are also concerned for the protection and the health of the recently discovered Amazon Aquifer, a groundwater reservoir, which Brazil shares with Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru, nearly four million km<sup>2</sup> in size, or three times greater than the Guarani Aquifer. Studies have shown that though the chemical quality of water in the Amazon Aquifer is good, there is nevertheless a risk of contamination due to the use of mercury in mining activities and agricultural pesticides. This vast yet fragile groundwater reservoir must be protected and not be exposed to the threats posed by private and commercial exploitation.

The world is created for all, by God, and we are called to live together and within it in harmony. But God's good creation continues to be abused and damaged for the short-term profit of a few.

The executive committee, meeting in Amman, Jordan, 17-23 November 2017, therefore

- Calls on and encourages all churches and people of goodwill to continue to challenge governments, politicians, companies, and enterprises, holding them accountable for all unscrupulous destruction of sources of food, water, shelter, medicine and livelihoods for current and future generations.
- Particularly urges the Congress and Government of Brazil to withdraw the regressive and destructive initiatives to abolish existing environmental protections in the Amazon Basin in order to open those areas to extractive industries and commercial exploitation.