

STATEMENT ON THE CRISIS OF FIRES AND DROUGHTS IN THE AMAZON

Call for a new look at our common home

Faced with the serious situation of the prolonged drought and the spread of forest fires in the Amazonian territory, the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) and the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA) want to express our deep concern for the destruction of millions of hectares of the Amazon biome. This destruction affects not only the flora and fauna, but also the peoples who have inhabited this sacred territory for centuries, whose lives and cultures are deeply interconnected with the ecosystems that are now under threat.

We regret that we continue to transform God's great gift of creation into a commodity (*Laudato Si'*, n. 30) and that the Amazon continues to be perceived as a territory to be exploited. The growing pressure of extractive activities, both legal and illegal, is advancing at the expense of the intrinsic value of creation and the communities that inhabit it. The extractive capitalism model is not only unsustainable, but also directly threatens the traditional and communal ways of life that have preserved this territory for millennia.

We know that the Amazon has always experienced periods of drought during certain months of the year. However, these droughts have been significantly aggravated by the climate crisis, exacerbated by human actions and driven by the unbridled exploitation of natural resources. Indiscriminate logging, road construction and other large-scale extractive activities leave huge amounts of dry biomass, which act as fuel in extreme drought conditions, intensifying forest fires.

This vicious circle of stronger droughts, uncontrolled fires and ineffective actions by the authorities is bringing the Amazon to a critical point, threatening its unique biodiversity and irreversibly weakening its regenerative capacity. The consequences are devastating not only for local ecosystems, but for the entire planet. The loss of this biome accelerates the impacts of climate change and alters global water cycles. For Amazonian peoples, the situation is even more tragic, as they face death, severe physical impacts and, in many cases, forced migration. Currently, entire communities are being displaced from their ancestral territories, generating a humanitarian crisis due to the fires.

State inaction and lack of compliance with existing environmental regulations require urgent action. Governments and competent authorities need to implement legislative reforms that strengthen environmental protection, vindicate the rights of communities over their territories, and guarantee human rights, especially those of environmental defenders.

Faced with this situation, we urgently call on the governments of the Amazonian countries and the international community to take firm and coordinated action in the face of the devastating environmental crisis we are facing. A new vision of the Amazon is needed, a vision that is born of intercultural dialogue with the communities that inhabit the territory, and that articulates traditional knowledge with contemporary scientific knowledge (Querida Amazonía, n.51). The current crisis demands that plans and policies be designed effectively, in the long term, and with a focus on co-responsibility, actively involving local communities in the management of their territories, ensuring that their voices and rights are respected.

It is also crucial to strengthen global initiatives that advance the recognition of Amazonian ecosystems as subjects of rights. Respect for the integrity of nature and its conservation must become guiding principles for development models and the exploitation of natural resources, since this mercantilist and predatory approach cannot continue.

It is urgent to promote a vision of good living, inspired by ancestral knowledge, economies for life and the adaptive capacity of Amazonian communities, as an alternative to mitigate existing extractivist practices. We warn about the disconcerting loss of resilience of Amazonian ecosystems, as experts point out that the region could be approaching a point of no return, putting at risk not only the local populations, but also the climatic stability of the planet.

We reiterate that it is essential to question ourselves about the relationship we have with nature, to create citizen awareness about the importance of this territory as our common home, and to act urgently to adopt measures to stop the crisis we are experiencing.

REPAM and CEAMA
September 26, 2024.