

At COP27, Brazil's Lula vows halt to rampant deforestation

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In remarks at the COP27 United Nations climate summit, Brazilian President-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva championed his country's role in fighting climate change [Nariman El-Mofty/AP Photo]

Cairo, November 16 (RHC)-- Speaking at the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP27, Brazilian President-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has vowed to crack down on illegal deforestation in the Amazon rainforest and to make his country a leader in the global fight against climate change.

The statements on Wednesday, which come six weeks before Lula is set to take office, signalled a departure from the policies of current President Jair Bolsonaro, who presided over years of rampant Amazon deforestation. By contrast, Lula said that climate change would have the highest profile in his government and that he would work to strengthen oversight and monitoring systems dismantled over the last four years.

“I am here to say to all of you that Brazil is back in the world,” Lula said in front of hundreds of attendees gathered in a pavilion in Egypt’s Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, where he was met with enthusiastic chants. “You all know that we are going to undertake a big fight against deforestation,” he said.

Brazil is home to 60 percent of the Amazon, which spans eight countries and acts as a massive offset for global carbon emissions, a fact underscored by Lula in his address. “There is no climate security for the world without a protected Amazon,” Lula later said in his formal speech. “We will do whatever it takes to have zero deforestation and the degradation of our biomes.”

Among the pledges he made, Lula said he would recommend that the United Nations host the 2025 climate conference in the Amazon, adding it was time that “people who defend the Amazon and defend the climate get to know the region close up.” The president-elect also called on the international community to show better leadership when it comes to climate change. He challenged wealthy nations to deliver on their pledge to provide \$100 billion per year in climate finance.

Meanwhile, he said the global community is in urgent need of “financial mechanisms to remedy losses and damages caused by climate change.”

Lula also used the summit to take a few swipes at Bolsonaro, whom he defeated in a runoff election in October. Bolsonaro’s term saw the weakening of the country’s environmental agencies and a renewed push for development in the Amazon. Meanwhile, the deforested area in Brazil’s Amazon reached a 15-year high from August 2020 to July 2021, according to official figures. Satellite monitoring shows the trend this year is on track to surpass last year’s.

“Brazil can’t remain isolated like it was these last four years. [Officials from Brazil] didn’t travel to any other countries, and no other countries traveled to Brazil,” Lula said.

He did not address Brazilian news reports that have focused on a possible alliance between Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Indonesia, home to the largest tropical forests in the world. The group has been dubbed the “OPEC of the forests”, in reference to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

On Tuesday, Lula met with United States Climate Envoy John Kerry, who later told reporters he was pleased the soon-to-be president “talked about, for once and for all, getting it right, pulling people together in order to preserve the Amazon.”

Still, the task in front of Lula remains massive. Brazilian leaders traditionally face huge domestic pressures – notably from the agriculture and mining sectors – to develop. As he prepares to take office again, Lula has also promoted the idea of creating a new national authority to coordinate climate action among government ministries, and of pursuing a reforestation target of 12 million hectares (over 29 million acres).

He has also called on the U.S. to contribute to the Amazon Fund, considered one of the main tools to reduce deforestation in the planet’s biggest tropical forest. Following Lula’s victory, the fund’s main contributors, Norway and Germany, announced they would participate again. They froze aid in 2019 in the wake of Bolsonaro’s win.

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