

World Wildlife Fund says UN biodiversity talks hampered by lack of political will

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The UN biodiversity conference, known as COP15, aims to set global biodiversity protection and restoration targets by 2030 [Christinne Muschi/Reuters]

Montreal, December 15 (RHC)-- A "lack of political will" is hindering the United Nations biodiversity conference, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has warned, urging participating nations to set more

ambitious goals to tackle the environmental crisis.

Delegates from nearly 200 countries have gathered in Montreal, Canada in an effort to tackle the rapid decline of global biodiversity – the loss of animals, plants, and other organisms, as well as entire ecosystems around the world.

“Currently, there’s simply a lack of political will compared to what’s needed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030,” Florian Titze, an adviser on international biodiversity policy at WWF Germany, said during a news conference on Wednesday. “Nothing is lost yet. We still look hopeful towards the next week, when ministers are here,” Titze added.

The call to action came after delegates from developing countries staged a late-night walkout of the UN conference – dubbed COP15 – on Tuesday after talks broke down with wealthier nations over the contentious issue of funding.

“The countries left the meeting because they considered that it was impossible to make progress in the discussions because developed countries were not ready to compromise,” the nonprofit group Avaaz said in an update on Wednesday.

David Ainsworth, a spokesman for the UN Environment Programme, also told reporters that “the atmosphere deteriorated when the group started discussing concepts, in particular, the global biodiversity fund proposal.” The proposal is a new fund sought by low-income nations to help them achieve their biodiversity objectives. But wealthier nations have opposed its creation, preferring instead to reform existing financing schemes.

The COP15 talks, which are set to conclude next Monday, December 19, aim to set biodiversity protection and restoration targets by 2030. In addition to funding and implementation, a key topic of debate has been a push to protect at least 30 percent of land and sea globally – the 30x30 proposal.

Experts have warned that one million species currently face extinction across the globe, with various factors – including climate change and development projects – driving the destruction of lands, forests, oceans and other habitats.

A widely cited 2008 World Bank report also estimated that traditional Indigenous territories accounted for 22 percent of the world’s land and held 80 percent of its biodiversity – underscoring the importance of Indigenous leadership on the issue.

Late last week, Dinamam Tuxa, executive coordinator of the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, told reporters that Indigenous voices needed to be at the heart of any COP15 commitments to ensure that funding and other resources get to the communities at the forefront of the fight.

But the current financing gap for biodiversity ranges from between \$600bn to almost \$825bn per year, according to experts. A group of developing nations, including Gabon, Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia, this year called for rich countries to provide at least \$100bn annually – rising to \$700bn a year by 2030 – for biodiversity.

Late last month, Greenpeace urged richer countries to take on a fair share of the financial burden and help nations in the Global South – which are shouldering much of the biodiversity loss burden – protect areas at risk of destruction. Similar debates over a so-called “loss and damage fund” dominated the recent COP27 climate talks in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

Meanwhile, Titze from WWF Germany warned on Wednesday that COP15 negotiations appeared to be on track to deliver targets that are lower than what was agreed to more than a decade ago by the parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. “That is not the political signal that we need,” he told

reporters, adding that a “comprehensive” funding package that includes private-sector commitments is necessary to immediately implement any targets, especially in developing countries.

“A lot of the biodiversity left on this planet is in their territories,” Titze said. “They need the support, and that needs to come through international financing.”

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