

December 10, 2015

Dear President Kim,

As faith based organizations and denominations, we come from unique faith traditions but we share common values to protect God's creation and the most vulnerable human communities. As world leaders gather in Paris to work together on a global agreement to address climate change, we encourage the World Bank to adopt a Zero Deforestation policy that takes into account forests and forest peoples in all World Bank Group investments.

Forest ecosystems are an important, vital, and sacred gift that sustains incredible biodiversity and indigenous communities. In his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis recognizes the Amazon and the Congo basins as the lungs of our planet.ⁱ He also bemoans the loss of forests as a key source of food and medicinal plants for forest peoples. Concern for trees and forests is also present in other major world traditions such as Islam (Wasaa'il 11), Christianity and Judaism (Deut. 20:19-20), Hinduism (dharma), Buddhism and indigenous faiths.

The loss of biodiversity in these and other forest ecosystems due to World Bank and International Finance Corporation investments including logging, agriculture, or extractive industries also have global consequences. Twenty percent of all freshwater comes from the Amazon Basin and twenty percent of all the air we breathe comes from rainforest ecosystems. Deforestation in all forest ecosystems contributes to carbon emissions that causes climate change and removes a powerful source of carbon sequestration. Undisturbed natural forests are estimated to store eighty percent of the Earth's aboveground and forty percent of belowground terrestrial carbon.

Forests, in effect, are essential for providing basic human rights such as food, water, air, and land and to preventing climate change. The United Nations Forum on Forest estimated that 1.6 billion people depend on forests.ⁱⁱ

Yet in an independent study of World Bank investment projects, the projects driving deforestation vastly outnumber projects aimed at forest management or conservation. Additionally, the projects driving deforestation not only destroyed complex forest ecosystems but also have restricted or removed land rights for indigenous and other forest-dependent communities, or led to involuntary resettlement.ⁱⁱⁱ

We applaud the efforts by the Bank to move away from funding energy projects that contribute to climate change. We hope that as the World Bank considers funding alternative energy projects such as hydropower dams and biofuels that these projects do not contribute to climate change by destroying critical forest habitats.

We encourage the World Bank to announce a Zero Deforestation policy at COP21, underway right now in Paris, to ensure forests and forest peoples are protected during development

ⁱ *Laudato Si*, (May 24, 2015), 38

ⁱⁱ "Report on the eleventh session", *United Nations Forum on Forests* (April 19 2013-May 15 2015), 5

ⁱⁱⁱ "Analysis of World Bank Finance and Forests: The Impact of Development Projects on Tropical Forests and Forest Peoples." Bank Information Center. 6/30/2015.

projects. We hope the Bank can support and follow through on a win-win scenario in which the need to protect and preserve forests are thoroughly mainstreamed into future projects, both large and small, and throughout the World Bank Group's lending portfolio as financing for infrastructure, extractive industries, and agricultural projects can have significant impacts on forests. We look forward to dialoguing with you and other relevant World Bank staff about a Zero Deforestation policy in the near future.

Sincerely,

Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Dominican Sisters of Hope
Franciscan Sisters of Allegany
Interfaith Oceans
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice
Midwest Coalition
School Sisters of Notre Dame Cooperative Investment Fund
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Justice Team
Sisters O.L. of Christian Doctrine
Sonen Capital
Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment
Unitarian Universalist Association
Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk, U.S. Province