

Recognition is Survival: Afro-descendant Peoples Seek Climate Justice

Afro-descendant peoples across Latin America and the Caribbean have long been underrecognized leaders in climate action, with practices that protect their lands and maintain lower deforestation rates than average. Yet they are often left out of climate discussions and denied their rights. CITAFRO, the regional alliance of Afro-descendant and Quilombola organizations, is advocating for Latin American and Caribbean countries to include territorial protection for Afro-descendant communities in their official climate action plans—including them in key discussions and centering them more fully in the conversation around the changing climate.

Transcript begins.

[Animated text appears on screen throughout the video, in sync with the narration delivered by a diversity of voices. Footage and photographs of people who represent the different communities being described are interspersed.]

NARRATOR: Who are Afro-descendant peoples? Across Latin America and the Caribbean, more than 150 million people trace their roots to enslaved Africans. Today, almost one-quarter of the region's population identify as Afro-descendant.

[A quick succession of people speak to camera in Spanish and Portuguese.]

LEIDY TATIANA RAMOS ANGOLA (in Spanish): I am a Black woman.

OSVALDO BILBAO LOBATÓN (in Spanish): I am a Black man.

KÁTIA DOS SANTOS PENHA (in Portuguese): I'm a Black woman, a *quilombola*.

DIÓGENES DÍAZ (in Spanish): Being Afro-descendant isn't a skin color, it's an identity.

[Miguel Pereira, Uruguay. La Voz de la Comunidad. A Black man wearing glasses and a t-shirt.]

MIGUEL PEREIRA (in Spanish): Today, we face the challenge—the international community faces the challenge—of recognizing Afro-descendants as a people. And that is what we are trying to push for.

NARRATOR: For generations, Afro-descendant peoples have safeguarded forests, rivers, marine, and coastal territories. Their lands are among the most biodiverse on Earth—with up to 55% less deforestation than the average. Yet too often, the contributions of Afro-descendants are unrecognized, their rights denied, and their communities rendered invisible.

[Sonia Viveros Padilla, Ecuador. Fundación Azúcar. A Black woman wearing a brightly patterned yellow blouse, glasses, and earrings in the shape of the African continent]

SONIA VIVEROS PADILLA (in Spanish): The invisibility of a large number of Afro-descendants across the Americas also makes invisible the contributions we have made to protecting our territories and keeping them alive.

NARRATOR: Afro-descendant peoples steward millions of hectares of land, but most remains untitled and unrecognized. Without land rights and recognition, they face displacement, violence, and inadequate access to health care, education, safe water, and basic services. And the worsening impacts of climate change—drying rivers, failed crops, and rising seas—deepen every injustice.

[**José Silvano Silva**, Brazil, CONAQ. A tall Black man of medium build, wearing a dark blue shirt.]

JOSÉ SILVANO SILVA (in Portuguese): In the last two years, extreme droughts dried up all the rivers. Our rivers are our roads, so now we can't move around. It causes food shortages, both in crops and in fish.

NARRATOR: In response, Afro-descendant leaders have come together to form CITAFRO—a coalition uniting territorial communities across the region. CITAFRO works to defend rights, secure land tenure, and demand recognition and territorial protection in national climate action plans.

[**Maria Isabel Cabral da Silva**, Brazil. CONAQ. A Black woman with cornrows mixed with box braids, wearing a colorful orange dress, a denim jacket, and red glasses]

MARIA ISABEL CABRAL DA SILVA (in Portuguese): Climate justice for us means definitive legal recognition of *Quilombola* territories.

[**Altagracia Balcacer**, Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diáspora, Dominican Republic. A Black woman with curly hair, wearing a blue striped blouse and hoop earrings,]

ALTAGRACIA BALCACER (in Spanish): Climate justice means finding ways to ensure that the countries most destructive to the climate take responsibility for their share.

NARRATOR: In 2024, global leaders at the COP16 biodiversity conference recognized Afro-descendants as essential partners in nature protection. Today, their demands are urgent and clear: Collective rights must be recognized, territories must be titled, flexible climate finance must reach communities directly, and Afro-descendant voices must be at the table where decisions are made.

[**Leidy Tatiana Ramos Angola**, Colombia. Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN). A Black woman with long hair, wearing a bright orange shirt and a necklace that depicts the African continent.

LEIDY TATIANA RAMOS ANGOLA (in Spanish): Afro-descendant people must have a voice and a vote. We are the ones who know how to care for the land. We know what must and must not be done to reduce climate change.

NARRATOR: Their recognition is not only justice—it is essential for climate resilience, for survival, and for our collective future.

[The Ford Foundation logo is stacked in a bold black serif font, then transforms into a single letter “F” set inside a black circle.]

Archival Footage and Stills

CONAQ Archives

Darwin Torres / PCN / CITAFRO

Envato

Pixels

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End of transcript.