



Open Letter to the Salvadoran government and the SICAⁱ stance at the New York Climate Action Summit and for the multilateral negotiations under the Paris Agreement

The Climate Change Board of El Salvador (MCC) raises its high concern and disagreement about the approach, declarations and proposals for action on climate change, announced by the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Fernando López, within the framework of the *Climate Action Summit* (Summit) held on September 23 in New York (NY) and facing the next 25th Conference of the Parties (COP-25) that will be taking place next December in Santiago, Chile. In turn, the MCC poses the challenges and its urgent demands to the Salvadoran government in relation to the climate change policy approach and actions.

I. WE EXPRESS CONCERN AND DISAGREEMENT FOR:

1. *The driftingⁱⁱ of the United Nations Climate Action Summit*

- The apparent inconsistency that once existed, on the one hand, between the objectives, principles, policies and commitments of multilateral environmental conventions (biodiversity, climate change and the fight against desertification), and on the other hand, the objectives, regulations and obligations of international trade agreementsⁱⁱⁱ, today has vanished; since the current course of the negotiations and the multilateral climate agenda have been fully subordinated to the prevailing global trade and economic agenda.
- The current agenda of the multilateral negotiations on climate change, with the proactive and belligerent support of the United Nations (UN) system, does not approach or address the contribution of the fossil fuel industry to climate collapse, and favors the adoption of «compensation mechanisms for emissions»^{iv} via carbon emission markets. Today the most promoted compensation mechanism is referred to under the euphemism «nature-based climate solutions»^v. This approach has leaked to climate negotiations via the slits attached to the Paris Agreement (Agreement) in Arts. 4, 5 and 6 of this one^{vi}.
- The so-called «nature-based climate solutions», including the REDD-plus^{vii} mechanism, are being used to divert the climate debate from true solutions, based on avoiding and reducing emissions from the burning of fossil fuels^{viii}. A quick end to the use of fossil energy needs to be done if forests, biodiversity, human societies and life are precisely to be preserved as we know them. In a side event^{ix} to the Summit, the progress of the 2014 NY Declaration on Forests (NYDF) was evaluated, concluding that “there is little evidence that the goals of the NYDF are on track, and it is likely that it is impossible to achieve the goal of reduce deforestation by 50% by 2020”^x.
- Although in the voluntary promises -they are not binding commitments- announced at the Summit by the countries and relevant actors, and triumphantly resumed in the final speech of the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, the term «zero net emissions» resonated by 2050^{xi}; The countries did not detail how they would achieve such announcements. Tacitly it is an excessive commitment to compensation mechanisms for emissions and emission markets, which enable emitters to obtain credits to offset their own emissions without having to reduce them, via payment to who generated the credits.
- During the Summit, the *Oil and Gas Climate Initiative* did not announce goals that could affect the obtaining of profits from the burning of fossil fuels by its partner corporations, defining its goals by 2025 to: invest in carbon capture, use and storage -CCS-; support carbon pricing policies and contribute to “nature-based

climate solutions”, stating that the latter are crucial to achieve «zero net emissions», in tandem with CCS technologies.

2. *The SICA initiative as a sounding board for compensation mechanisms*

- From the middle of June 2019, the preliminary official agenda was published with the list of agreed topics for the general debate^{xii} of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly and which took place from September 24th to October 4th this year in NY. This list included the subject "Protection of the global climate for present and future generations of mankind"^{xiii}, however, Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele did not refer to the issues on that agenda and neither referred to nor addressed the SICA regional initiative announced the previous day during the Summit by Fernando López, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources of El Salvador, who in turn participated as President Pro Tempore of the SICA's Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD).
- Minister López had expressed at the NY Summit: "... we consider it a duty of our presidency pro tempore to put all the means at our disposal so that the SICA region is not only a legitimate recipient of technical and financial support in environmental matters and climate, but a relevant and exemplary actor in the international concert". In addition, in full harmony with the campaign for "nature-based climate solutions", the Minister presented the *Resilience Construction initiative in the SICA Region under a Synergistic Approach between Mitigation and Adaptation* focused on the rehabilitation of degraded lands, conservation and forest restoration, and low carbon agriculture; announcing that it would be presented in detail at COP-25 and that 10 million hectares would be preserved and restored by 2030.
- It is striking that only 10 years are raised to achieve the promise announced by SICA, since in many territories of the region there are acute socio-political conflicts due to: invasion, colonization and dispossession of indigenous lands; displacement of communities due to the expansion of monocultures (African palm, sugar cane and forestry), livestock, mining, oil exploration and exploitation and large hydroelectric dams; abandonment of territories and emigration due to concessions of public natural commons, establishment of special economic zones (EEZ), illegal timber and drug trafficking. This conflict is exacerbated by climate change and the lack of policy actions that regulate the occupation, use and transformation of the territories according to a socio-environmental land planning, and that promote sustainable living systems^{xiv} articulated to family farming, food security and nutrition with sovereignty, and a plural, social and solidarity economy under a democratic and social State of law.
- Government visions, both at the national and SICA level, have promoted a model of economic accumulation based on exports with insertion into global value chains (GVCs) in alliance with transnational corporations, which includes corporate and extractive agriculture inserted into the international market. This model requires a free trade environment, deregulation of foreign investment, labor and environmental flexibility, and under unionism. The GVCs when articulated to EEZ ensure: access and control of raw materials and sea and land routes; evasion of environmental, labor and fiscal regulations; production costs reduction; and usufruct and appropriation of land, territories, biodiversity and carbon. Along these lines, President Alvarado of Costa Rica said "the promotion of public-private partnerships is one of the best ways to help meet the challenge of converting a country's economy into «carbon neutral»^{xv}.
- The impacts of climate change, such as: loss of biodiversity, poor agricultural performance, outbreaks of pests and diseases, changes in water and nutrient cycles, plant wilt and forest fires, such as those in the Amazon rainforest^{xvi}; it would turn carbon sinks into sources of biogenic carbon emissions, putting the SICA and El Salvador's bet in «nature-based climate solutions», such as REDD-plus, at high risk. According to the IPCC *Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C*, adopted in 2018: "a warming of 1.5 °C or more

increases the risk associated with lasting or irreversible changes, such as the loss of some ecosystems"; besides that "the effectiveness of the techniques that absorb carbon from the atmosphere is not proven on a large scale and would entail significant risks for sustainable development."

I. CHALLENGES AND URGENT DEMANDS

1. *Challenges of the States for the COP-25 in Chile and for future generations*

- Despite the vast capital and technical expertise of the public and private oil, gas and coal industries, their executives and the governments that support them in the process of climate negotiations, they have sabotaged for decades any progress in effective mitigation, to continue producing and increasing their profits; changing the legitimate objective of humanity to move towards a «low carbon» or «zero-carbon» world, by a «neutral carbon» or «net zero emissions» world. For which ecological laundering is used embodied in the mechanisms of compensation and emissions trading; which today include "nature-based climate solutions" such as REDD-plus whose local negative impacts and inefficacy for global mitigation have been widely documented and disseminated^{xvii}.
- There are no regulations on the type and amount of compensation mechanisms that governments could use to reach the global goal of «zero net emissions», but the political moment in NY would indicate that at COP-25 Parties could negotiate rules and procedures that enable the large-scale use of compensation mechanisms via emissions trading. Thus, «ecological bleaching» or «green makeup» would be institutionalized as the main effort to supposedly achieve the goal stipulated in Art. 4, and consequently, also the goal of Art. 2.1 (a) ^{xviii} of the Agreement.
- Prior to COP-25, the Pre COP-25 was held in Costa Rica whose objective was to promote political dialogue to bring positions closer on pending issues related to the rules and procedures for the full implementation of the Agreement. The meeting convened negotiators, companies, indigenous communities and youth, among others. The Costa Rican organizing team emphasized the importance of increasing the ambition of the NDCs of each country, identifying three fundamental axes for COP-25: the supposed nature-based climate solutions, sustainable cities and the «blue economy». This last term had been launched in 2012 by the "small island developing States", as a particular variant of the «green economy» eventually applicable in island and coastal territories^{xix}.
- During the COP-25, the supreme bodies of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Convention), the Kyoto Protocol and the Agreement, and the respective subsidiary bodies will meet to discuss the pending issues to decide. The agenda of the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties as a Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement (CMA-2) includes four key themes: (a) common terms of the NDCs with increasing level of ambition, (b) cooperative approaches, focused on the compensation mechanisms and emission markets, (c) climate finance and (d) Periodic Review of the long-term goal under the Convention and the global progress towards its achievement.
- With the negotiation and adoption at COP-25 of the pending rules and procedures, the implementation phase of the Agreement would begin in 2020, which includes the updating of the NDCs of the Parties increasing their level of ambition regarding the NDCs in force. This is essential, since according to the IPCC greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions would have to be reduced by 45% in 2030 compared to 2010 levels, if global warming is to be maintained below 1,5 °C. Such a global effort would require an unprecedented transition to "low carbon" or "zero carbon" economies, since the aggregate level of emission reductions from existing unconditional NDCs would lead to a warming greater than 3 °C, far from the 1,5 °C target established in Art. 2.1 (a) of the Agreement^{xx}.

- Since the establishment in 2013 of the Warsaw International Mechanism for loss and damage, “developing countries” have pressed for it to be conceived as a means to cover the costs of climate change impacts in countries particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, and raise their link to financing. In this regard, all “developed countries” oppose creating a new flow of climate funds in addition to those for mitigation and adaptation, and prefer to address loss and damage within the issue of adaptation.
- The CMA-2 will analyze and adopt the issues related to Art. 6 of the Agreement regarding the guidelines on “cooperative approaches”, including the prevention of double counting of carbon notified in the NDCs^{xxi}; and to the rules, modalities and procedures of the new *mechanism to contribute to the mitigation of GHG emissions and support sustainable development*. There is concern that an unsuitable carbon accounting could result in large amounts of extra emissions produced, which would weaken the level of ambition and undermine the comprehensive credibility of the regime under the Agreement.

2. Urgent demands on the Salvadoran government for the five-year period 2019-2024

- **To comply** with the obligations arising from the Convention and the Agreement by formulating, updating, notifying and registering in "time and form", among others, the National Communications on Climate Change, the Biennial Update Reports and the National GHG Inventories, as per the Convention; and the successive NDCs with an increased level of ambition, the National Communications on Adaptation, the long-term strategy for low GHG development and the National System for Monitoring, Reporting and Verifying of mitigation and adaptation action, and the support received under the Agreement. COP-25 will report on the status of the presentation and the results of the analysis of the content of said documents of the Parties.
- **To substantially modify** the approach and content of the first NDC notified in 2018 by the government on behalf of the Salvadoran State, for it evidence substantive defects such as those related to double carbon accounting, since the central measures included are articulated to REDD-plus as detailed in the *Ecosystem and Landscape Restoration and Reforestation Plan* which supports the *National REDD-plus Strategy* submitted to the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility of the World Bank and the Bonn Challenge; and therefore, they fall into the category of emission compensation measures. Hence, carbon credits should be accounted in due time in favor of the countries that would eventually buy them, and not be registered in favor of the Salvadoran State, as presented in the first NDC.
- **To notify** the Secretariat of the Convention, by 2022, the second NDC of El Salvador, ensuring that it is clear, transparent and understandable via the application of the environmental integrity, accuracy, completeness, comparability, coherence and absence of double carbon accounting criteria. For which the government must carry out an analysis of economic feasibility and legal, social and environmental viability of the offer embodied in the first NDC, in which it is proposed to establish and manage one million hectares through the restoration and reforestation of ecosystems and landscapes, and low carbon agriculture. In addition, this offer must be submitted to the Strategic Environmental Assessment in accordance with the Environmental Law and to extensive consultations^{xxii}, respecting the right of citizen participation in public administration^{xxiii}, in order to address the social, economic and environmental implications -even in the global climate- of the offer consigned in the first NDC of the country.
- **To abandon** the environmental and climate change approach and policy, inherited from the previous government, as they contribute to ineffective global action by supporting the agenda of the most emitting countries that are members of the G20, which contribute 75% of global GHG emissions and refuse to reduce their emissions and promote emission compensation schemes to continue increasing them. Along these lines, «nature-based climate solutions», such as REDD-plus, should be excluded from the second and successive NDC of the Salvadoran State, since the mitigation results that would occur would not be real because they are not additional, permanent, measurable nor verifiable; and in the case of being transferred internationally,

they would be registered only in the NDC of the country receiving the international transfer to avoid double carbon accounting.

- **To support** during COP-25: (1) a common period of five years from 2031 for the notification of the NDCs of all Parties, with a substantial increase in the level of ambition; (2) the exclusion of cooperative approaches focused on «nature-based solutions» as in the case of REDD-plus; (3) strengthen financing windows for adaptation, impact assessment, climate scenarios, education, science, technology and climate innovation; and (4) the continuity of the Periodic Review of the long-term goal under the Convention and global progress for its achievement, as a separate process of the five-year Global Stocktake beginning in 2023.
- **To render accounts** to the Salvadoran society in a transparent, truthful, timely and sustained manner about the opportunities for technical support and national and international financial resources available to the country regarding: adaptation to climate change, and its level of use to strengthen and expand national climatic capacities; development and application of climate science, technology and innovation; and the reduction of the technical-scientific, intercultural and human rights information gap in the matter.
- **To adopt** in advance and in the light of the best available knowledge, climate action proposals and negotiating positions to be raised by the Salvadoran delegation during COP-25, with a view to reducing the climatic risks of most vulnerable populations, territories and natural systems. Said proposals and positions must be disclosed and consulted in a timely and transparent manner with the relevant actors and sectors, in order to legitimize the official position of the Salvadoran State. The country's delegation must report publicly upon their return, on the role they have played in the negotiations and their results.

ⁱ Central American Integration System, includes: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and the Dominican Republic.

ⁱⁱ Reach a level of emissions such that the CO₂ emitted into the atmosphere would be somehow compensated or neutralized (Art. 4 of the Agreement).

ⁱⁱⁱ World Trade Organization and free trade agreements.

^{iv} The emission compensation mechanisms enable emitters to obtain credits to offset their emissions via the payment to who generated the credits. Such mechanisms include climate solutions based on nature, such as REDD-plus.

^v The Nature-based Climate Solutions Initiative was convened by an alliance of the World Economic Forum, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and Nature4Climate.

^{vi} Article 4 of the Agreement refers to achieving a carbon neutral world in 2050; Article 5 establishes that the Parties should adopt measures to conserve and increase, as appropriate, the sinks and deposits of greenhouse gases, including forests; and Art. 6 establishes the cooperative mechanisms between the Parties for climate mitigation, with emphasis on compensation mechanisms and emission markets.

^{vii} Reduction of emissions from deforestation and degradation of tropical forests, conservation of carbon forest reserves, sustainable forest management and increased carbon forest reserves.

^{viii} In 2014, the IPCC had proposed that in order to have a 67% chance that the increase in the global average temperature of the Earth would not exceed 1,5 °C, global emissions should reach a maximum of 420 gigatonnes (Gt) of CO₂, being this the global carbon budget available as of January 1, 2018, which today has been reduced to less than 350 Gt of CO₂. Under current emission levels, the remaining CO₂ budget would be fully depleted in less than eight and a half years.

^{ix} It took place on September 22, 2019 in NY.

^x The document released during the NYDF event is a five-year evaluation and is entitled: Protecting and Restoring Forests: A Story of Large Commitments yet Limited Progress.

^{xi} Reach a level of emissions such that the CO₂ emitted into the atmosphere would be somehow compensated or neutralized (Art. 4 of the Agreement).

^{xii} The preliminary agenda (code A / 74/100) is an official document that was distributed to the States on June 14, 2019.

^{xiii} Literal "d", numeral 19 of the preliminary agenda (code A / 74/100).

^{xiv} Life systems are complex systems of organization, planning and territorial and community management of a territory constituted by different ecological and microclimate floors, whose access and management are defined by coupling human and natural dynamics within the critical thresholds of the latter, in order to live with well-being.

^{xv} Expressed as part of his speech during the general debate that kicked off the 74th 2019-2020 session of the UN General Assembly and that took place from September 24 to October 4 this year in NY.

^{xvi} During 2019, forest fires caused the loss of 5,3 million ha in the Bolivian Amazon (40% were forests); 906.000 ha in the Brazilian Amazon; 350.000 ha in the Paraguayan Amazon (70% of the national forest reserve); and 2.700 ha in the Peruvian Amazon (according to preliminary official and press data). If galloping deforestation continues in the Amazon -17% already deforested- coupled with government predatory policies, the forest could dangerously reach an irreversible tipping point in about two years (2021). This point would be reached with 20% to 25% deforestation, from which the forest would stop producing enough rain to support itself and begin to degrade becoming a drier savanna; releasing billions of tons of carbon into the atmosphere, which would exacerbate global warming and disrupt the climate, including hydrological patterns, of the Southern Cone (De Bolle, M. 2019): <https://www.piie.com/sites/default/files/documents/pb19-15.pdf>

^{xvii} REDD-Monitor (<https://redd-monitor.org/>), World Movement for Tropical Forests (<https://wrm.org.uy/en/>), World Coalition for Forests (<https://globalforestcoalition.org/en/>), Friends of the Earth International (<https://www.foei.org/es>), GRAIN (<https://www.grain.org/>), ETC Group (<https://www.etcgroup.org/en>) and Indigenous Environmental Network (<https://www.ienearth.org/contact-us/>), among others.

^{xviii} Art. 2.1 (a) of the Agreement: "Maintain the increase in global average temperature well below 2 °C with respect to pre-industrial levels, and continue efforts to limit this increase in temperature to 1,5 °C with respect to pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and effects of climate change."

^{xix} In a blue economy, the use of the ocean as the main source for development would be promoted through public policies, in order to strengthen sustainability and improve the well-being of the population. This approach does not incorporate the effects and impacts of climate change on the oceans, such as: the acidification and warming of seawater, the increase in sea level rise and the height of the waves, spatial changes in the distribution of marine species, loss of marine biodiversity, changes in marine currents, including an eventual collapse of the global scale thermohaline current (referred to as oceanic conveyor belt), among others.

^{xx} UNEP (2018): Report on the Emissions Gap 2018: <https://www.unenvironment.org/interactive/emissions-gap-report/en/>

^{xxi} Avoid double carbon accounting: a State that has sold credits backed by emission reduction projects should not be allowed to also account for such emissions reduction in its own NDC.

^{xxii} Applying the principle of free, prior and informed consent.

^{xxiii} As stipulated in the Ibero-American Charter for Citizen Participation in Public Management adopted by the XIX Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in Portugal in 2009.



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