

# Brazil's promises to slash forest losses 'empty', researchers say ahead of Biden summit

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In advance of President Joe Biden's international climate summit this week, Brazilian scientists say their country's forest protection promises don't add up

By Mauricio Angelo

BRASILIA, April 19 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Brazil's updated national climate change plan would allow the country to step up forest losses to a rate 78% above those before President Jair Bolsonaro took office and 20% above last year's levels, Brazilian researchers said.

As Bolsonaro prepares to take part in U.S. President Joe Biden's international climate summit this week, Brazil's plan - announced in December - shows a lack of ambition to tackle climate change that could undermine global efforts, they said.

Bolsonaro's administration has overseen large-scale expansion of farming, ranching and mining in the Amazon and other natural areas of Brazil as the country pursues economic development.

The president sent a letter to Biden last week recommitting his country to eliminating illegal deforestation by 2030, as it originally promised under the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015.

Brazil and the United States have been negotiating since February on a possible deal to boost cooperate on tackling the problem, though no announcement is expected this week.

But Brazil's environment minister, Ricardo Salles, has said the country would need \$10 billion annually in foreign aid to reach economy-wide net-zero emissions by mid-century, a climate change goal adopted by a growing number of major countries.

About \$1 billion of that would allow Brazil to eliminate illegal deforestation ahead of the 2030 target, he said.

In its previous 2015 climate plan, Brazil had said efforts to slash emissions would **"not be contingent upon international support"**.

The revised national climate change plan takes advantage of **methodological changes** to boost Brazil's base emissions in 2005, from which it is measuring cuts, said Minas Gerais Federal University (UFMG) researchers.

That would effectively allow the country to continue increasing its emissions through 2030 while meeting promised percentage decreases, researchers said.

Márcio Astrini, executive secretary of Brazil's Climate Observatory, said Bolsonaro's promises to eliminate illegal deforestation by 2030 amounted to "an international fraud".

"Practice shows that the commitment is to increase deforestation and not to decrease it," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a phone interview.

The president's office and the Ministry of Environment, asked for comment on the study and on criticism of the country's updated climate plan, did not respond to repeated emails and phone calls.

## 'EMPTY STATEMENTS'?

The study by Minas Gerais Federal University and other researchers showed Brazil could deforest 13,400 sq km of land annually each year until 2025 while staying within its updated Paris Agreement commitment.

That is 20% higher than the recorded deforestation rate in 2020, when the Amazon saw 11,000 sq km lost, a 12-year high, and 78% higher than the 7,400 sq km of forest Brazil lost in 2018, before Bolsonaro took office, the study noted.

The updated climate action plan would also let Brazil increase its greenhouse gas emissions until 2030 by a total equivalent of Spain's emissions in 2018, it showed.

The nearly 200 countries that signed the Paris Agreement were due by the end of last year to deliver updated and ideally more ambitious plans to try to hold global warming to safe levels.

However, many countries have not yet delivered plans, in part as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Raoni Rajão, an author of the UFMG study and a social scientist at the university, called Brazil's updated commitments "empty statements".

The study recommended that to play a fair role in global efforts to curb climate change Brazil should cut its greenhouse gas emissions, compared to its 2005 baseline, by 44% by 2025 and 50% by 2030.

Ricardo Galvão, a former director of Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE), said asking for billions in help to cut emissions while putting forward a plan that would allow them to rise amounted to offering "empty proposals".

"The most absurd thing is to ask for billions of dollars without doing anything, putting us in a very awkward situation," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a telephone interview.

John Kerry, Biden's special envoy on climate change, said on Twitter on Friday that Bolsonaro's recommitment to eliminating illegal deforestation was important.

But he said the U.S. administration awaited "immediate actions and engagement with indigenous populations and civil society so this announcement can deliver tangible results".

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