The latest UN Land-Grabbing Summit

The UN Land-Grabbing Summit in Glasgow made it once again clear that these spaces will never advance the already existing solutions to the climate crisis. Its agenda is pre-established by those in power seeking for more profits. In light of this new 'climate package', let's mobilize in solidarity with communities and groups resisting the real drivers of the climate chaos.

World leaders have spent 26 years discussing and negotiating so-called climate policies that clearly have made the climate instability worst. The reality throughout these years of increasing deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions shows that the common ground of most international climate policies has been to ensure that fossil fuels keep feeding an economic model that benefit the rich and powerful. An economic model that thrives on accumulating land, labour and resources. And year after year it becomes more evident that these Summits have little to do with the climate. They should be called UN Summits for Profiteers or UN Land-Grabbing Summits.

This year has not been any different. The fossil fuel industry, together with its corporate and political allies and financial institutions, mostly from the global North, achieved in having so-called 'nature-based solutions' and 'net-zero' emissions included into drafts of the Summit's final Declaration (1).

Before unpacking some of the threats that these concepts represent for forest-dependant and peasant populations, it is critical to underline that at least 503 fossil fuel lobbyists accessed and influenced the latest UN Land-Grabbing Summit in Glasgow. Analysis from several NGOs found out that if the fossil fuel lobby were a country delegation, it would be the largest one. And their analysis did not look at other polluting industries like agribusiness, finance or transportation. (2) Indeed, a UN Summit of Profiteers.

A Climate Deal for More Offsets, Tree Plantations and Land Grabs

The inclusion of seductive terms like 'nature-based solutions' (NBS) and 'net-zero' are concealing what in reality are open doors for governments and corporations to keep on polluting, based on the fantasy of balancing out their emissions with offsets and techno-fixes.

These open doors will fuel even further the grabbing of lands and forests as carbon offsets. Territories of Indigenous Peoples', forest-dependent, peasant and traditional communities' will be closed off as carbon stores for corporate 'net-zero' claims and NBS.

The term 'net zero' essentially allows governments and corporations to not reduce emissions and, hence, to move the burden to future generations. This idea is not new though. It has appeared throughout the history of these Summits with different terminology, such as the Clean Development Mechanism or REDD+. Already, oil companies, retailers, giant agribusiness and airline companies offer allegedly 'carbon neutral' products and services that have caused or can cause 'net zero' emissions. Everyone could become 'net zero', while fossil fuel burning continues. In consequence, the term is completely meaningless as a climate policy. Who benefits from these terminologies are profiteers who want to clean their image and keep their destructive business model alive. The

common purpose of these terms and policies is delaying an end to fossil fuel burning and deferring the problem to somebody else to deal with on somebody else's land. 'Net zero' and 'nature-based solutions' are but a continuation of this catastrophic process.

WRM released a bulletin earlier this year alerting on what we prefer to call 'nature-based ~~solutions~~ dispossessions.' From promoting industrial tree plantations to enclosing more forests as conservation areas without people, these so-called climate policies seriously increase the threat of land grabbing and violence for communities living in and around these areas. Last year, in 2020, during the UN Land-Grabbing Summit, big polluters like Shell, Total and BP, in tandem with big conservationist groups like Conservation International, launched an initiative to promote these NBS land grabs. This year, the term 'nature-based solutions' already made it into drafts of the final UN Summit agreement.

On top of this, these already empty pledges and commitments are only voluntary and there are no legally binding instruments nor legal consequences for not abiding these.

More Money Pledged to 'Save the Forests'… or to Privatize Them?

During the UN Land-Grabbing Summit this November 2021, more than 100 governments signed on to the Glasgow Declaration on Forests and Land Use. (3) Although it was announced as a new international commitment to save the forests, these are not new at all. The 2014 New York Declaration already promised to cut deforestation by 50% by 2020 and end it by 2030. Since then, deforestation has just continued to rise. *And, of course, there is REDD+. Introduced in 2005 and for which many decisions have been adopted at the UN Land Grabbing Summits, millions of dollars have been spent to get countries 'ready for REDD'.* But REDD+ has also completely failed to address deforestation. Even worse, it is largely used as an offset mechanism, meaning that even if emissions from deforestation were reduced, any reduction would be cancelled out by continued emissions from burning fossil fuels. (4)

Furthermore, 12 northern countries have pledged to provide US12 billion dollars of climate finance from 2021 to 2025 to a new Global Forest Finance Pledge. The announcement declares that they will use their public climate finance "to leverage vital funding from private sources to deliver change at scale." (5) Besides, US1.5 million dollars were pledged by 12 northern countries (including the European Union) and the Bezos Earth Fund (from the owner of retail giant Amazon) for protecting Congo Basin forests. This last pledge states that they "intend to build on this in subsequent years, by seeking increased finance and investment from a wide variety of public and private sources while also improving coordination, effectiveness and accessibility." (6)

What are the interests behind these pledges? What are these 'donors' expecting in return? The millions of dollars mobilized largely serve as investments for which donors (or better said, investors) are hoping to not only meet their 'net zero' emissions targets but also to generate high returns. These finance pledges try to make us believe that pushing more money into forests could stop deforestation. Yet, more money means more vested interests and more imposition of governments and corporations' agendas onto forest peoples' territories. This, in turn, means more land grabs and violence. We have seen how more 'climate finance' can easily mean the expansion of monoculture tree plantations (which under UN rules are counted as 'forests'), conservation areas without people, renewable energies including biomass (energy from wood pellets), unproven techno-fixes, and other schemes that only fundamentally harm forest communities and their life spaces.

UN Land-Grabbing Summits will never advance the already existing solutions to address the climate

crisis. Its agenda is pre-established by those in power and by those seeking to obtain more profits.

In light of this new ‘climate package’ full of more land grabbing threats, let’s mobilize and organize our energies and activism by actively standing in solidarity with communities and groups resisting the real drivers of the climate chaos.

The WRM international Secretariat

Sign the declaration, NO to “Nature-Based Solutions”!
It remains open for sign-on until the end of 2021

(1) UNFCCC, Draft COP decision proposed by the President, November 2021
(2) Corporate Europe Observatory, Hundreds of fossil fuel lobbyists flooding COP26 climate talks, November 2021
(3) UN Climate Change Conference, Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests and Land Use, November 2021
(4) REDD-Monitor, The Glasgow Declaration on Forests is far from “unprecedented”. It’s just another in a long line of meaningless UN declarations, November 2021
(5) UN Climate Change Conference, The Global Forest Finance Pledge, November 2021
(6) UN Climate Change Conference, COP26 Congo Basin Joint Donor Statement, November 2021