

• STOP ECOCIDE FOUNDATION •

STATEMENT TO THE 21st SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY OF STATES PARTIES TO THE ROME STATUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

DECEMBER 2022

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

Etymologically, the word “ecocide” means, from the Greek and Latin “to kill one’s home” - an apt way to describe what is happening to the planet at the present time. And we can feel a deep and rising frustration, from the streets all the way to the conference halls of the UN, with the painfully slow pace of action to address this.

Your Excellencies, you are here at the Assembly because your governments have all agreed that the peace, security and well-being of the world matters, and that those who threaten it should be held to account. This makes the International Criminal Court a unique institution, and a necessary one.

In the face of a planetary-level crisis - one that is already of existential proportions in many of the Rome Statute’s signatory states - the relevance of the Court could be greatly enhanced if its remit is extended to deal with those who knowingly threaten the very fabric of the living world upon which we all depend.

There is increasing demand across many sectors of society for governments to recognise ecocide under the Rome Statute, ranging from environmental interest groups to political and civil society influencers, from lawyers and academics to faith and youth networks.

Spiritual leaders have been vocal: Pope Francis, for example, has just re-iterated his specific support for ecocide to become “a fifth category of crimes against peace.” Indigenous elders such as Chief Raoni of the Kayapó, among many others, have spoken out in no uncertain terms.

Appetite in the general public is there, even in countries less affected by climate and ecological breakdown: a professional survey conducted in the UK this year found that a majority support criminalisation of ecocide the moment they hear about it.

The business sector is also beginning to engage seriously and positively with this initiative. The International Corporate Governance Network of global investors and asset managers has, for the second year in a row, urged governments to “collaborate internationally to criminalise ecocide.” The UN’s *Race2Zero Pivot Point* report, launched in September, included a significant section on ecocide law as a key driver of corporate action towards Net Zero, reflecting that even seeing the law approaching can have - indeed is already having - a galvanising effect.

This year has also seen “ecocide.. walk its way into the UN vocabulary”, via side events, official statements, stakeholder documents and policy demands at the UNFCCC, the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, the Montevideo Programme, UNTOC, Stockholm +50, Africa Climate Week and the Oceans Conference.

Discussion of ecocide law is now on public record at parliamentary and/or government level in no fewer than 24 countries which are signatories to the Rome Statute, as well as at the Inter Parliamentary Union and in the EU.

Your excellencies, naming the worst environmental harms as international crimes will provide a foundational piece to shore up and support the wider body of environmental legislation which is at present under-prosecuted and poorly followed.

More broadly, it can help to steer our reckless civilization towards a place of safety. If we are to successfully weather the decades to come, we must know that the outer guardrails are in place to prevent us from sinking our own ship.

Earth’s most vital ecosystems and keystone species, and thus humanity’s ability to survive and thrive, are now at stake. It is time to recognise a truth that indigenous cultures have never forgotten - that when we damage Mother Earth, there are consequences. That is a simple matter of fact. We can see it all around us.

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen - it is time now to work on making it a matter of law. The voices of support are there. The conversation is already in progress, led by Vanuatu, Belgium and other interested states. It is time to join in.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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