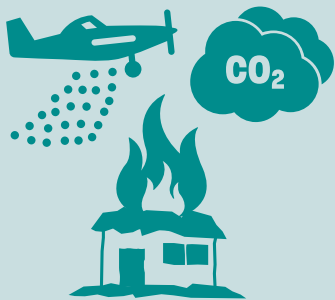


# How current drug policy acts as a barrier to delivering climate justice

The United Nations drug control system, often referred to as prohibition, catalyses a cascade of devastating environmental effects; penetrating the agricultural frontier with programs and narratives that promote monoculture, illegal activity, large-scale mining, and corporate greening. This not only ignores the diversifying orientation of native, indigenous, Afro-descendant and peasant communities, leaving them aside in the reconfiguration of their own territories, but also accelerates processes of soil erosion, deforestation, natural resource and land grabbing. **The urgent action needed to tackle the climate emergency demanded by UN bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will be near impossible without drug policy reform.**

## 1 Methods used in the illicit trade

When drugs and plants are made illegal, it makes anyone involved in growing or moving them targets of law enforcement. To hide, growers, producers and people who transport drugs will often conduct activities in dense ecosystems such as jungles to avoid being seen. Invisibility leads to zero regulation and environmentally destructive production methods are often used, such as dumping of chemical waste, polluting natural water supplies and cutting down trees to produce drugs.



## 2 Methods used to fight the so-called 'war on drugs'

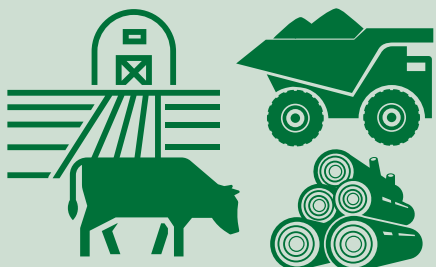
Police and militaries around the world, paid for by public money, patrol the sea, air and land emitting vast amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> in their quest for a drug free world. Law enforcement destroys drugs through the burning of clandestine labs and the eradication of crops manually or by aerial spraying with chemicals, such as glyphosate, causing damage to all local biodiversity.

## 3 Corruption and governance

Making a commodity illegal immediately increases profits for those who trade it. Drug prohibition enables an unregulated, untaxed and profit driven trade to thrive. This trade is run by sophisticated organised crime groups that are so wealthy and powerful they can corrupt state actors to act in their favour. This is happening in fragile ecological regions that are key to our climate future, such as the rainforests of Central and South America and forests of West Africa.



This corruption weakens the ability of governments and communities to govern and prepare for climate mitigation, adaptation and justice. It means corrupted governments make policies and spend public resources in favour of maintaining illicit markets and profits for organised crime groups instead of protecting people and the environment.



## 4 Money laundering

Money from the drugs trade is reinvested to finance other environmentally destructive illegal practices and industries such as logging, mining, plantation agriculture and cattle ranching. This fuels land speculation and threatens the land rights and conservation practices of peasants, indigenous peoples and environmental defenders.



**Environmental defenders from the Philippines to Brazil are standing up to illegal and legal environmental violence, at a huge risk to their lives.**

1733 defenders have been killed trying to protect their land and resources over ten years – that amounts to almost one defender killed every two days. Beyond killings, many defenders and communities also experience attempts to silenced them, with tactics like death threats, surveillance, sexual violence, or criminalisation.\*

\*[globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/decade-defiance/#decade-killings-globally](http://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/decade-defiance/#decade-killings-globally)

Forests are not only home to an incredible diversity of species and communities, they also have a critical cooling effect on the planet.

Forests absorb and store carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) from the atmosphere. Conserving, restoring and improving land management of these regions can provide up to 37% of the emission reductions needed by 2030\* to keep global temperature increases under 2°C.

The jungles of south-east Asia, forests of West Africa and the rainforests of Central and South America are some of the planet's largest carbon sinks and key to our climate future. This equatorial line also correlates to many of the world's major drug trafficking routes and threatens these forests, ecosystems and communities.

**Protecting them is necessary for slowing down climate change.**

\*[pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1710465114](https://pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1710465114)



Burned areas of the Amazon rainforest, near Boca do Acre, one of the most deforested areas in the state due to the advance of livestock and agriculture.  
© Lula Sampaio/Afp/Metsul Meteorologia

## **SOLUTION:** Ecological harm reduction through urgent reforms

The UN bodies and global efforts for climate justice must be aligned to end these harms.

Instead of leaving the control and profits in the hands of violent criminal syndicates, the regulation and taxation of drugs such as cocaine, cannabis, and poppy could fund programmes for public health, human rights and climate resilient development. All future drug policy reforms must centre an ecological, sustainable and social justice approach to ensure that new legal drug trades are equitable and fair to those working within them, while also protecting biodiversity and supporting planetary and public health.

## **DRUG POLICY REFORM & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

### **INTERNATIONAL COALITION**

A coalition of advocates, activists, artists and academics aiming to raise awareness of the environmental impact of current drug policy by centering the voices of those from impacted regions.

