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New global initiative aims to place environmental defenders at the heart of climate decisions

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Published: 13 November 2025

Belém, Brazil

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Indigenous groups protest dam construction in Brazil's Amazon. Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images



Campaigners are hailing today's COP30 launch of a new global initiative aimed at advancing the recognition, protection, and participation of environmental

defenders in climate decision and policy-making.

Co-created with more than 300 environmental activists and defenders across Latin America, Africa, Asia-Pacific and beyond, the new Leaders Action Network for Environmental Activists and Defenders (LEAD) initiative is designed to centre the experience of people who bear the brunt of climate violence.

The organisations supporting this large co-creation process include: Global Witness, Alliance for Land, Indigenous & Environmental Defenders (ALLIED), European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL), International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), Global Citizen, World Resources Institute (WRI), Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI), Life of Pachamama, Global Focus, Club de Madrid, among others.

More than 100 thousand citizens globally supported the initiative, which was officially endorsed earlier this year by government champions, such as, Brazil's Minister of Indigenous Peoples, Sônia Guajajara, as well as other ministers and ambassadors for climate change and former heads of state and government.

LEAD brings together governments, environmental human rights defenders, civil society leaders, UN agencies and institutions to coordinate transformative solutions to:

- Secure the recognition of defenders;
- Strengthen their meaningful participation in climate decision and policy making; and,
- Increase their protection and reduce violence against them.

Environmental Defender and Executive Director of IPRI Joan Carling

said: *“This initiative was not born from a boardroom but from territories and struggles. People like Claudelice Santos, who has lost family members to environmental conflict in the Brazilian Amazon, or young leader Juan Amaya, who defends Indigenous land rights in Colombia. Our stories and resistance are the foundation of LEAD. “It is not enough to recognise defenders symbolically. What we demand – and deserve – are guarantees of their safety, of their inclusion in decision-making spaces, and effective accountability for threats and crimes committed against them. “Today’s launch sends a powerful message about global solidarity but what matters most is what happens next.”*

At the endorsement of LEAD in Brazil earlier this year, **Brazil's Minister of**

Indigenous Peoples, Sônia Guajajara, underscored her government's commitment: *"Brazil has a historic responsibility to protect not only our forests, but those who defend them. LEAD advances a vision of climate policy that is territorial, plural, and grounded in ancestral knowledge."*

Speaking at the launch, **Minister Anielle Franco of the Ministry of Racial Equality** of Brazil emphasised the intersection of race and environmental protection: *"You cannot solve the climate crisis without confronting racism. Black, Indigenous and traditional communities are disproportionately affected by both climate change and violence. LEAD helps us say: their lives and leadership matter."*

Carling added: *"COP30 is the beginning, a public commitment to action. Now LEAD must become a living infrastructure – one that binds states, civil society, philanthropy and defenders in a shared responsibility, and shared power. Only then will the voices of defenders be not just heard but heeded."*

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We expose how the industries fuelling the climate crisis profit from destruction, and stand with the people fighting back.

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