28 October 2018

To: California Air Resources Board

I write on behalf of UN Environment in strong support of the California Tropical Forest Standard and I urge the approval of these innovative, strategic, technically solid and vitally important standards.

It is a tribute to the State of California that so soon after hosting the influential Global Climate Action Summit in September 2018, California continues to provide global leadership by leveraging its immense economic power and progressive social and environmental agenda to protect tropical forests.

From the perspective of the United Nations, there is no greater global and local imperative than stopping the loss of tropical forests. This enables us to address climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as numerous other Sustainable Development Goals, including the protection of indigenous peoples lives and cultural identities, conserving biodiversity, and the provision of ecosystem services such as delivering clean water for drinking, sanitation and irrigation. Tropical forests also provide resilience to “natural “disaster such as landslides, fires, flooding and extreme weather events. Recent research shows that forests influence rainfall patters and therefore agricultural productivity at continental scales. The value of these services provided by intact tropical forests has been estimated to be an average of 4000 pounds sterling per hectare per year.

With respect to climate change, if tropical forests were a country, they would be the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases after China and the U.S. Furthermore, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the loss of tropical forests generates nearly 50% more greenhouse gases than the entire global transportation sector.

Natural climate solutions, notably protecting tropical forests, along with forest restoration, the protection of peatlands and better soil management offer up to 37% of the GHG mitigation needed between now and 2030 to keep global temperature rise below 2 degrees C, and yet they receive only 4% of the world’s funding. This California Standard can help address this inequity.

Tropical forests are home to millions of indigenous peoples who often suffer violence or are forced off their lands. And in fact, the evidence is clear that where indigenous peoples are present, forests are likely to be maintained. More than 20% of the world’s forest carbon is within the customary territories of indigenous peoples.

And yet more traditional community management of forests could offer a key to curbing emissions. We have seen this in the Amazon where deforestation rates are five times greater outside indigenous territories and conservation units than inside. This California Standard can help enhance community management by providing needed resources.

The rights and safety of those local and indigenous communities on the front lines of habitat loss must be protected, and these standards can help ensure this.

After having worked for many years on social and environmental safeguards for UN-REDD programs throughout the developing world, I am particularly encouraged by the safeguards being proposed in the California Tropical Forest Standard since they build upon our own work through the United Nations and World Bank forest programs, including the REDD+SES and FCPF. And the recognition of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is extremely welcome and important.

Furthermore, I support in this draft California Standard the proposal for IPCC-consistent reference level methodologies, the establishment of crediting periods and baselines, and provisions for managing and mitigating leakage and setting up robust monitoring and reporting practices. The standard could be made even stronger by incorporating the GCF Principles of Collaboration, reflecting the multi-jurisdictional commitment to recognize rights that California has endorsed as well.

The nature and value of offset crediting programs designed to reduce overall emissions is often misunderstood or under valued. To address climate change we need to make use of a wide variety of mechanisms and tools and I am convinced that this California Standard will enhance the rigor of subnational, national and international programs to reduce tropical forest emissions.

This California Standard is truly cutting edge, urgent and important, and should be supported and implemented.

Respectfully yours,



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