



The Amazon Rainforest Is Disappearing - What can be done?

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AcTVism: 1. Thanks for joining us today. Will you introduce yourself and Observatório do Clima, where you are the Executive Secretary?

Marcio Astrini (MA): So I am Marcio Astrini, Executive Secretary of the Climate Observatory - the Climate Observatory is a coalition of 68 environmental organizations working in Brazil. And we have been together, working on the climate agenda since 2002, so for 18 years, more than 18 years.

AcTVism: 2. Can you explain how you observe the Amazon rainforest? What equipment and technology do you use?

MA: The forest of the Amazon as a whole, is a very well-covered forest in comparison to other forests we have around the world, in terms of satellites, in terms of technologies being used to see what's happening on the ground of the forest. Recently, the Brazilian government has developed new satellites and new technologies to watch the Amazon, and to identify deforestation spots in the Amazon and how deforestation is developing in the Amazon. Our problem is definitely not about knowledge about what's happening in the forest. The problem in Brazil right now is taking action about what we are seeing.

We are checking the forest to the ground and have a lot of information. We have ways of working strategically to face deforestation in the Amazon. I can mention one specific period, between 2004 and 2012, when deforestation in the Amazon dropped by 18% or more than 18%. To do that the Brazilian government, Brazilian civil society, companies operating in the Amazon, local governments, were all together acting against deforestation and promoting sustainable economy and sustainable projects in the forest, using satellite images and satellite information to identify deforestation and to face deforestation in the Amazon. So since years ago, we have enough information in terms of deforestation and what's happening in the Amazon. What we are facing right now is not an information problem, what we are facing right now is a willing political problem. The government, even more the federal government, definitely doesn't want to take action against deforestation.

AcTVism: 3. How will you characterise the current state of the Amazon rainforest regarding

deforestation?

MA: So, deforestation has been present in the Amazon for a long time, deforestation has been happening in the Amazon for a long period. And every year, the government releases a number, and this number is how much we are losing the Amazon. It's absolutely a sad situation, a sad perspective. Because we have another perspective in terms of how to indefinitely deforest the Amazon. So every year we are counting how much damage and how much of a problem is happening in the Amazon, and particularly now in this recent period, we are facing a very different situation. For the first time, we have a president and government who stand beside the criminals in the Amazon. This government is supporting criminals in the Amazon, the foresters in the Amazon: those who are promoting illegally mined gold, who are promoting illegal timber activities, who are grabbing land in the Amazon. They are, since Bolsonaro took the presidency in Brazil, they are feeling more comfortable in their activities to promote the illegal activities in the Amazon. They are being supported by the government. That's why deforestation in the Amazon is increasing, deforestation in the Amazon rose by 46% in comparison to the last year before Bolsonaro's government. There isn't any new reason, there isn't any other explanation for this terrible situation, this growth of deforestation other than the government. The government actions are in favor of deforestation in the Amazon. That's really a new scenario, having a government who supports deforestation in the Amazon, who supports criminals in the Amazon. That's really a new perspective in Brazil. And the numbers tell us the tragic results of these terrible policies promoted by Bolsonaro's government.

AcTVism: 4. Let us move to politics: in a recent press release you say that "Bolsonaro is Amazon's worst enemy today". How was the Amazon managed by previous governments? And what is different today under president Jair Bolsonaro?

MA: If you take the average deforestation rates 10 years before Bolsonaro, it's 68% lower than in comparison to the average of deforestation in the three years of Bolsonaro's government. That's the main comparison. Bolsonaro is really promoting deforestation in the Amazon. In actions, in speech, in messages, Bolsonaro really sends the message to the criminals that the law in Brazil, the law which protects the Amazon, the law which protects the environment in Brazil, this law is wrong. And the foresters and their activities, for instance, some of the people in the Amazon, some criminals in the Amazon invading indigenous lands - they are right. They are right, they are doing the right things because they are promoting Brazilian development. It's absolutely a mistake. Yep. And in the Amazon, you're facing that right now.

This government took a series of measures, going against the forest and going in favor of deforestation in the Amazon. Many in this government are undermining the state's capacity to face criminals, to face environmental crime on the ground. He (Bolsonaro) is dismantling the surveillance agencies. He's promoting a series of decrees in an official act in favor of, for instance, the illegal timber activities in the forest, even more in the Amazon. Just to give you an idea, the former environment minister in Brazil is facing one prosecution right now, one

legal case in the Brazilian Supreme Court, where he's being accused of promoting illegal timber traffic to the US, illegal exportation of timber to the US, and of being involved in corruption and criminal groups, and all sort of other crimes related to environmental crimes. So, we had in Brazil, months ago, the environmental minister involved in promoting illegal activities and environmental crimes in Brazil.

That's the scenario you're facing right now. And this government is absolutely comfortable with this situation. This government didn't even show any plan until now to face the deforestation scenario in the Amazon. That's our reality. We don't have in Brazil any plan to face or to try to combat deforestation and criminals operating in the Amazon. They are operating absolutely freely, supported by the government.

AcTVism: 5. Which are the consequences of deforestation and how do they affect both nature and humans?

MA: So deforestation in the Amazon will affect all of those around the world. First of all, because the Amazon stores a huge amount of carbon, once this carbon is released by deforestation, this carbon will affect - in a negative way, of course - the climate change agenda and will promote even more global warming. And so, just to give you an idea, in the Amazon, we have the equivalent of 10 years of global greenhouse emission. It's stored in the Amazon. So if we lose this forest, we're going to be losing the prospect of keeping the average temperature in the world below 1.5 degrees. So the Amazon is absolutely important in terms of climate change targets and in terms of the Paris agreement implementation. The second (effect) of losing the Amazon, is about the indigenous population. Some of the indigenous people live in the Amazon. They are absolutely linked to the forests, they need their forests to keep this population alive. And so there isn't any difference between indigenous population and their ways of living in the forest, their lives and the lives of the forest are absolutely the same. There isn't any perspective for these local and traditional populations.

And at last (finally), I would say deforestation in the Amazon will affect the climate balance in Brazil. Amazon is responsible for the spread of the climate over the country, and over the continent, even in other countries, not just Brazil. And the rains are absolutely important to keep the agriculture in Brazil, and to maintain the hydro dams in Brazil, for instance, which are responsible for more than a half of the electricity subsidising the entire Brazil as a country. And so, changing the forest balance, changing the forest and environmental services, we are changing the capacity of Brazil as a country to produce food for the rest of the world. So, the Amazon is absolutely necessary for climate balance around the world, and in Latin America. When you see deforestation, when we see forest fires in the Amazon, we as humanity, we as humans, are losing one very important, absolutely important biome in the world, to our activities and our lifestyle.

AcTVism: 6. Is there a linkage between the deforestation of the Amazon and the recent extreme climate events worldwide?

MA: So this recent report by the IPCC showed that, specifically in the Amazon region, we're going to face dry seasons, more severe dry seasons, even more in the Amazon. So these dry seasons are going to be longer and going to be more severe in the Amazon. In this perspective, dry seasons will bring to the Amazon a new risk in terms of losing important trees, losing biodiversity and losing the capacity to keep the forest extent right now. And so losing the capacity to absorb the carbon, for instance, of the atmosphere, will make this Amazon region and the Amazon as far as another kind of biome. We call that "savannisation" - it means the Amazon as a rainforest will become another kind of forest, not the forest as we know it right now. It means the Amazon will lose the capacity to store the carbon, and will lose the capacity to absorb carbon from the atmosphere. It will make the forest go through a very terrible situation, a tipping point.

That's the reality of the Amazon, the Amazon has a limit. The Amazon has one tipping point, and we cannot keep away from this tipping point between 20 and 25% of deforestation in the Amazon. Somewhere between 20 and 25% of deforestation, some scientists are saying that there is this tipping point of the forest. We have right now 18% deforestation in the Amazon. So we are at the limit of this tipping point. We are right now entering this tipping point limit. And that's absolutely a very serious situation, bringing consequences, not just to Brazil, but to the rest of the world.

AcTVism: 7 What role do Western governments, transnational institutions and corporations play in the deforestation?

MA: So first of all, Bolsonaro is a denier, Bolsonaro denies deforestation, Bolsonaro denies forest fires in the Amazon, and Bolsonaro denies climate change, as Bolsonaro is denying the pandemic and COVID-19 in Brazil. Denial which costs lives and costs the climate, it costs the forest, it costs a lot for humanity. We have a lot of irresponsibility in terms of historical deforestation happening in the Amazon (due to) the government, but also due to companies and other governments and other leaders around the world. A part of food production, which causes deforestation in the Amazon, the food is exported to other countries, to European countries, to US, for instance, and China as well. China imports a huge amount of soya beans produced in the Amazon. And some of these soya beans are related to deforestation, or are promoting deforestation in the Amazon.

Cattle are another example. The large part of deforestation in the Amazon is a consequence of the cattle industry in the region. Around 60% of the Amazon deforestation is linked to cattle farmers in the Amazon. So, if someone around the world is buying one piece of meat coming from Brazil, produced in Brazil, produced in the Amazon. If this piece of meat doesn't have enough proof that it was not involved in the Amazon, you are unfortunately exposed to financing deforestation in the Amazon.

So measures and having guarantees, (it is necessary to develop) tools to guarantee that this product coming from the Amazon is not involved in deforestation. To promote those industries, those activities in the Amazon that are helping us to protect the forests and to deny, to isolate, and to combat those other activities that are promoting deforestation. That's

absolutely important for other countries, and companies around the world, it is very important to support these kinds of tools and these kinds of measures to share and to split (separate) who in reality is promoting deforestation and who is promoting a sustainable economy and saving the forest.

AcTVism: 8. What can people watching this interview do, which will have a meaningful impact on the Amazon?

MA: First of all, pressuring stakeholders, pressuring leaders around the world, not just about the Amazon, but also about the climate agenda as a whole. In terms of the Amazon, having this pressure on the Brazilian government is absolutely essential. Not just the Brazilian government, the federal government, but also the Brazilian Congress, the Brazilian companies, the Brazilian Supreme Court - all of them need to be involved in the project to halt deforestation in the Amazon.

Companies around the world, customers around the world, leaders around the world, need to send a clear message to the Brazilian government: we will not support any more deforestation in the Amazon. Any product involved in deforestation in the Amazon will not have space anywhere in the world to be commercialized or are to be sold. That's absolutely a clear and necessary message to be passed by anyone, but even more leaders and stakeholders around the world. Another very important issue is supporting the Brazilian government leaders in Brazil who are standing up for the forests, who are standing against deforestation. Even more, local populations and local governments who have and can present clear plans with clear commitments against deforestation.

And finally, supporting indigenous people, indigenous communities are the guardians of the forests, are the guardians of the climate. And right now they are at huge risk, even more nowadays under Bolsonaro's government. So supporting them, giving them space, given them voice, supporting their voices is absolutely important to denounce what's happening in Brazil, to denounce the Brazilian government, and also to show to the rest of the world we are standing with them, with the indigenous people, the indigenous and local communities who are the real forest guardians

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