



Remarks by Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen at an Inter-American Development Bank Meeting of Amazon Basin Finance, Economy, and Environment Ministers

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As Prepared for Delivery

Ilan, thank you to you and your colleagues for organizing this convening and to ministers from the Amazon Basin for the warm welcome. I would like to especially thank Brazil's Minister of Environment and Climate Change Marina Silva for hosting us today and for her leadership. I am very glad that the climate COP in Belém next year is in her capable hands. And I am glad to also be joined today by Colombia's Minister of Environment and Social Development Susana Muhamad, who will host the biodiversity COP later this year in Cali.

It was in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit here in Brazil that the conventions on climate change and on biodiversity were adopted. We have made significant progress since then, including channeling billions of dollars into protecting the biodiversity of the Amazon. But, despite our efforts, the Amazon today is approaching a dangerous tipping point. It is fortuitous that these next conferences are occurring close to each other in time and space. It makes this a crucial moment to bring a greater focus to protecting the Amazon as a critical global center of biodiversity and an essential carbon sink and to underscore the urgency of addressing biodiversity loss, climate change, and related issues such as food and water security in an integrated manner.

We all recognize that halting and reversing nature and biodiversity loss is an economic imperative, including for the nearly 50 million people who live in the Amazon and whose lives and livelihoods depend on the Amazon's ecosystems and their services. This includes the Indigenous communities that have sustainably managed lands in the region for generations and from whom we have much to learn.

Finance ministers have crucial roles to play in this work—of course in partnership with environment and development ministers. We need to help communities and businesses chart

pathways to grow economies and create good jobs in a manner that sustainably uses natural resources and contributes to the health of ecosystems. We need to work with the financial sector to help institutions understand the economic value that ecosystems provide. And we need to make sure that our own public investments integrate nature preservation.

Treasury has worked with countries across the region to support these goals. For example, last year, we reached an agreement with Peru that redirects \$20 million of its debt to the United States to a conservation trust fund that will be used by Peruvian non-governmental organizations to support parks, protected areas, and Indigenous communities in the Amazon. We have similar agreements with Brazil and Colombia, as well as with 11 other countries, that in total have protected more than 68 million acres of tropical forests.

Our work with ministers in the region also includes many other efforts. This ranges from participating in the Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action, which is building the capacity of our ministries to support transitions toward economies that support nature, to the strong partnership to conclude the recent reform of the Inter-American Development Bank and to recapitalize IDB Invest so that it is equipped to contribute to our nature and climate goals.

Now we are together encouraging the multilateral development banks to take forward critical work to help countries conserve and restore their ecosystems and transition industries toward pathways that support this goal. MDBs should catalyze new business models to mobilize investments that support nature and biodiversity. They should be go-to resources for governments working to develop enabling environments and achieve policy coherence to facilitate these investments. MDBs should also mainstream nature and biodiversity considerations into their programming across sectors so that they can best support governments in accomplishing development and environment objectives. The IDB's recently approved natural capital and biodiversity mainstreaming action plan provides an excellent example of how to do this.

We are also supporting the multilateral climate and environment funds to help countries reverse nature and biodiversity loss while strengthening their economies and advancing climate action. Treasury is glad to have helped deliver, along with Brazil and many other partners, the largest ever replenishment of the Global Environment Facility in 2022, at \$5.3 billion—with a significant focus on biodiversity. Projects range from helping Suriname develop port infrastructure while preserving its coastal and marine biodiversity to programming across the Amazon region that supports sustainable landscapes. And we have been working

with Brazil during its G20 Presidency to make sure financing through the climate funds is effectively deployed and easy to access in order to maximize the impact of our resources.

Amazonia Forever is another key initiative. Indeed, more than 30 years after the Rio Earth Summit, I believe Amazonia Forever showcases that we are in a new moment in the fight against climate change and loss of nature and biodiversity. Finance ministries in the region are not only embracing but are also driving the agenda. And every country represented here has important insights to share from the work you are pursuing. For example, Guyana and Bolivia are preparing to sell high integrity carbon credits through the LEAF Coalition. Colombia is investing in green corridors for cities. In Medellín this has reduced local average temperatures by up to 2 degrees Celsius, according to the city government. Amazonia Forever is a critical platform to facilitate regional coordination and exchange on what works and what doesn't. We are pleased to see projects being developed, like a program to expand credit to bio-businesses in the Ecuadorian Amazon that leverages a grant from the Green Climate Fund. And the framework you approved today is a step toward Amazonia Forever showing concrete results in facilitating investments that achieve our economic and nature and biodiversity goals.

The IDB is also a vital partner, offering not just financing but also new tools that are embraced by the region.

As we look ahead, we will continue acting on our shared understanding that a thriving Amazon is critical for long-term economic prosperity. We have strong political will, sound technical work and programming, and a shared commitment to collective action that will drive progress.

Thank you again for the invitation here today. I very much look forward to the discussion and to our work ahead.

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