

131 Protecting the Sápmi Forest: safeguarding biodiversity and Indigenous livelihoods

RECALLING that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognises that respect for Indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices is vital for sustainable and equitable development, as well as for the effective management of the environment;

RECOGNISING that the Boreal Forest, covering roughly 60% of Scandinavia's land area and extending across three countries (Norway, Sweden and Finland) is one of the world's most extensive forested regions, serving as part of the Boreal Forest carbon sink which stores more carbon than all the world's tropical forests, thus playing a critical role in regulating the long-term effects of climate change;

EMPHASISING that Sápmi, the homeland of the Sámi people, is intrinsically linked to the health of the Boreal Forest, as the Sámi culture, traditional subsistence practices, and livelihoods depend on the survival of Arctic reindeer and their old-growth forest habitats;

ACKNOWLEDGING the essential role of Sámi traditional knowledge and practices in maintaining the ecological health and resilience of the Boreal Forest, as highlighted in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) policy brief, which identifies Indigenous peoples as key stakeholders in managing boreal ecosystems sustainably;

DEEPLY CONCERNED that Sweden's old-growth Boreal Forests are being lost at an alarming rate of 1.4% annually, with 70% lost over the past 60 years – a degradation rate exceeding that of the Amazon rainforest – endangering biodiversity, carbon sequestration and climate resilience; and

ALARMED that the decline of old-growth forests and lichen-abundant areas threatens reindeer food security and the cultural survival of Sámi communities, exacerbating climate vulnerability and undermining Indigenous livelihoods;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. CALLS ON the Director General to support actions to protect Boreal Forests in the Sápmi region, recognise the leadership of Sámi peoples, and uphold their right to free, prior and informed consent in all decisions affecting their lands;
2. CALLS ON IUCN to work with the Sámi people to widely educate on threats to the boreal forests and urge zero loss of old-growth boreal forests and a ban on clear-cutting these areas;
3. CALLS ON all relevant authorities to collaborate directly with the Sámi people in land-use planning, as well as in design and implementation of restoration projects and sustainable forestry practices that prioritise reindeer habitats, lichen growth and biodiversity conservation;
4. CALLS ON conservation organisations and donor agencies to allocate funding and technical support for Sámi-led efforts to restore and protect degraded Boreal Forests, emphasising long-term habitat restoration over consumption-driven replanting efforts, in alignment with the recommendations of the UNECE policy brief;
5. URGES IUCN Member organisations, governments, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions and the private sector to promote public education and awareness campaigns highlighting the significance of the Boreal Forest and the cultural and ecological contributions of the Sámi people; and
6. URGES the integration of Sámi traditional knowledge into conservation education programmes to foster respect for Indigenous practices among younger generations and conservation professionals.