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Delegates at biodiversity COP17 should follow the lead of Global South women

Valentina Figuera Martínez (Global Forest Coalition, GFC)

As global leaders continue COP17 negotiations, it is difficult to ignore how women's oppression is deeply intertwined with the exploitation of ecosystems. After almost two decades of pledges, biodiversity action remains underfunded, forest loss continues to be a growing threat, socio-ecological transitions are a low priority, and ecosystems are spiraling toward collapse.

But we should also ask a more basic question: **What can we learn from the people who are already protecting biodiversity in their territories?**

After hearing over the last several months from communities from the Global South about human rights violations and ecosystem destruction they confront, it is important to remind everyone of an incontrovertible fact: As long as parties fail to address the systemic drivers of biodiversity destruction - especially in the Global South - and continue using domestic policies to expand extractivist sectors while broadening status quo dependency, these failures will persist.

One of the most contentious topics is biodiversity finance. Biodiversity offsets and credits, debt-for-nature swaps, and nature-based solutions are just some of the flawed market-based instruments presented to mobilize finance toward Global South countries, mainly through private finance. Despite all the widely known controversies, poor performance and human rights abuses, they are increasingly dominating attention while urgent priorities - including allocation of direct resources for community-led conservation actions and giving communities full decision-making power in finance institutional structures - remain unaddressed.

Market-based schemes should be ruled out. They instrumentalize greenwashing and allow brokers, developers, intermediaries and large NGOs to extract funding that

should be benefiting communities.

Women and youth are making a difference

Real solutions to the biodiversity and climate crises may be an ancestral farming system rooted in traditional knowledge, or a community defending its territory from extractivist industries. They may be women organizing to protect forests, strengthen food sovereignty, or build more equitable forms of community autonomy.

All these community-led initiatives remind us that the value of ancestral knowledge, community autonomy, and access to decision-making power cannot be replaced by money or "innovative schemes." Real community-led solutions cannot be separated from the political dimensions of life and stay only on the technocratic side, focusing on reformist approaches to delay urgent systemic changes. They cannot be "scaled up" like the top-down generic schemes presented in negotiations.

Real women-led solutions are unique, as every complex ecosystem is, and demand putting power in the hands of environmental defenders. The *Gender-Just Real Solutions Map for Territories and Communities*, an interactive collaborative mapping tool co-designed with global grassroots organizations and NGOs, is a learning path to find answers to a complex crisis. One thing is clear: We must support localized actions which are genuinely community-led solutions that uphold rights, autonomy, socio-ecological transitions and create conditions to fight social inequalities.

The question for COP17 is not whether these solutions exist. They do.

The question is whether parties are prepared to recognize them, resource them, and most importantly, listen to the people who are already putting them into practice.

Armenian CSO Statement on Amulsar Mining Project

Statement by “Ecolur” Informational NGO on behalf of additional signatories

Just one week before COP17, the Armenian government took part in the ceremonial launching of the Amulsar gold mining project that directly violates the CBD and the Bern Convention, and is a setback to achieving most of the KMGBF targets.

The Amulsar project is characterized by the scale of its impact and poses far-reaching environmental and social risks. The gold content in the ore is only 0.78 grams per tonne, necessitating the use of a cyanide-based extraction process. The volume of overburden - waste rock containing a complex mixture of heavy metals - is estimated to be between 250 and 300 million tonnes.

The entire project infrastructure is situated in the heart of Armenia's water sources system, in an area characterized by rich biodiversity. According to WWF Armenia publication, the area provides habitat for more than 25 animal species and at least two plant species listed in the *Red Data Book of Armenia* and protected under both national and international law. The project boundaries lie between 5 and 13 kilometers from the world-renowned balneological resort of Jermuk.

Operating an open-pit mine at Amulsar sets Armenia back from achieving most of the targets of the KMGBF.

Targets 1 and 4 are not being met. Amulsar is characterized by rich biodiversity that requires protection. The project's activities - including blasting, the operation of heavy machinery, and the dumping of tonnes of waste rock and tailings - pose a serious threat to local biodiversity and risk the loss of animal and plant species.

Armenia is failing to meet Target 3, as the boundaries of the planned Jermuk National Park have been revised to exclude areas allocated to the Amulsar mining project. Furthermore, the Jermuk and Gorayk sites, previously proposed as candidate sites for the Emerald Network, are planned to be removed, despite meeting the criteria for designation under the *Bern Convention*. These changes exclude areas affected by or allocated to the Amulsar project, undermining efforts to protect biodiversity and comply with the Convention.

Target 7 is not being met, given the environmental risks posed by the project, including acid mine drainage, poisoning water and land with heavy metals.

Targets 8, 14, and 18(b) are likewise at risk of being undermined by the threats outlined above.

The EIAs for the Amulsar mining project and respective conclusions are seriously deficient, and the demands to conduct a new EIA have been rejected by the government of Armenia.

Target 19 calls for mobilizing funding from all sources for biodiversity conservation. In the case of the Amulsar mining project, the biodiversity offset scheme financed by the lending banks, simply enabled the legitimization of an illegal project.

The Armenian government has also violated Target 22 establishes public participation in decision-making, while many people opposing the project have faced SLAPPS, and target 23, which aims to ensure gender equality.

Yerevan Biodiversity Challenge

Become a citizen scientist and take action for nature

We work together to take pictures of the biodiversity of Yerevan. All you need is a smartphone or a camera and an iNaturalist account, and your curiosity. People of all ages and skill levels can contribute. Every picture you take and upload till 1 November becomes a species occurrence record. Collectively, those records add to our knowledge of the biodiversity of Yerevan and the world.

We will be hosting a workshop in the Green Zone on 26

October from 17:30-19:00, to learn more and explore the surrounding area.

This initiative is supported by the
CITIZEN SCIENCE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP.

Full details can be found at
<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/yerevan-cop17-biodiversity-challenge>



Elephants are notoriously difficult to overlook. Yet some of the biggest problems standing in the way of biodiversity action have proved remarkably easy to avoid. This week, ECO is introducing a small herd from the new report **We Need to Talk About the Elephants in the Room**, exploring uncomfortable questions around finance, power, equity, rights and false solutions that Parties cannot afford to leave unanswered. Keep an eye out for a different elephant in each ECO issue this week.



Elephant in the spotlight:

Financing Biodiversity Destruction Remains Legal, Profitable and Weakly Governed

Tom Picken (RAN)

Some of the most important decisions about biodiversity finance at COP17 may not be about biodiversity finance at all. Much of the money driving biodiversity destruction flows through perfectly legal, often highly profitable activities, frequently supported by harmful incentives. These flows remain largely unchecked by the rules governing banks, investors and other businesses.

Consider the scale of the problem. Globally, private financial flows harmful to biodiversity outweigh positive private finance by an astonishing 213 to one. For every dollar of private finance supporting biodiversity, more than 200 dollars are helping to destroy it, according to a breakdown of UNEP figures.

The first Global Review of the KMGBF makes for uncomfortable reading. Targets 14 and 18, which address the alignment of financial flows and reform of harmful incentives, are among those where implementation is most lagging. There is also little evidence that governments are systematically tracking whether financial flows are becoming less harmful to biodiversity.

In the final week of COP17, Parties have an opportunity to respond to these findings through two important decisions.

The Global Review decision should explicitly acknowledge the need to address the economic and financial systems driving biodiversity loss, including aligning financial flows with the Framework's goals. It should also retain mea-

ningful language on identifying, eliminating, phasing out or reforming harmful subsidies and incentives.

Reforms must also be fair, reflect countries' differing responsibilities and capacities, be supported by developed countries meeting their international financing commitments, and respect the rights and needs of affected communities.

Meanwhile, negotiations on mainstreaming biodiversity offer a chance to get more practical. The draft text offers a route to integrating biodiversity into government budgets, fiscal policies, regulations and sectoral planning. These are decisions for finance ministries, regulators and other economic authorities, not just environment ministries. Financial institutions, too, need to be held accountable for their impacts on nature, rather than being left to self-police or focus solely on the financial risks biodiversity loss poses to their businesses.

Nearly four years after adopting the *Global Biodiversity Framework*, governments have devoted remarkably little attention to what aligning financial flows with its goals actually requires. The first Global Review has exposed just how little progress has been made.

Parties should leave Yerevan having made clear that tackling harmful finance is central to implementing the Framework, with an expectation that governments will begin addressing the policies, incentives and weak regulations that allow biodiversity destruction to remain legal and profitable.

The opinions, commentaries, and articles printed in ECO are the sole opinion of the individual authors or organisations, unless otherwise expressed.

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In memoriam

Christine von Weizsäcker

1944-2026

With deep sorrow we share with you that our dear friend and colleague, Christine von Weizsäcker, passed away on Friday last week.

For decades, since the adoption of the Convention itself, Christine has been an unwavering presence at many CBD meetings.

She would always be sitting as an observer at the back of the room - but doing so much more than just observing. She would listen carefully, and, whenever needed, she would raise her voice and intervene with constructive suggestions on a way forward, or with a sharp analysis of the issue, or with a reminder of rules or decisions already taken that newer negotiators may not have been aware of.

She was so good at connecting people and creating unlikely alliances. She worked with many colleagues from civil society organisations around the world, with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, with women and with youth. She mentored many of us. She also worked with many delegates and staff members of the Secretariat. She was not 'just another participant' - she was a fantastic colleague and a beloved friend.

She was a never ending source of advice on how to formulate something, on which text to look out for, on the meaning behind the text - a truly institutional repository of knowledge and wisdom. But she was not only concerned with text, she was especially concerned with the people that the text would affect, and with the values behind the text.

And she was also the human warmth that carried us through so many meetings, through hungry late nights and moments of despair in grey conference rooms.

She was a true friend, and through her values-based commitments and never-ending kindness and generosity, she has prepared her forever place in our hearts.

The Convention will not be the same without her. Her loss leaves a big hole in the fabric of the world. We miss her dearly.

Let us honour her memory by continuing her work, by caring for this world and all the peoples in it.

If you would like to share your thoughts and memories with the CBD community and her family: A book of condolences is available at the NGO hub (Level 1, opposite Contact Group 1).



old knowledge like the buried roots of trees

here sun beats down
on scorched earth,
too dry for plant and animal,
no tree in sight,
become a desert ...

yet deep in the parched ground
where farmers once raised beef to sell abroad
then left the land they'd ruined,
the roots of trees they felled remain,
invisible, waiting to grow again -

for, it seems, however many times
the trees themselves
are felled, their generous roots still live,
and, if allowed, will shoot again,
give shade and water, food, life and hope.

they often say old knowledge
is of the past, outdated, mere superstition
they claim their science is precious, infallible,
sole path to the future -

but what do the roots say?

we will be trees once more
they will whisper to the listening stars:
to have a future, you must hear the past;

the soil of insight
must be enriched through time -

with living roots
still deep in earth
we wait our time
to return.

Helena Paul