

# Forest fires engulf the entire Amazon basin

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Forest fires have consumed millions of hectares in the Amazon basin this year, due to global warming, an extreme two-year drought, and the illegal burning of forests and pastures.

Peru alone has experienced 173 fires in 22 out of its 24 departments. The most affected departments are located in the north of the country, specifically Cajamarca, Amazonas, and San Martín, where the indigenous communities of the Awajún live.

Pucallpa, the most populous city in the Peruvian Amazon, had to shut down its airport due to poor visibility, stranding merchants and tourists.

Even the national park of the snow-capped peak in the Cordillera Blanca, Huascarán, the third highest in the country, has been bathed in smoke.

During the first half of the year, the suffering inflicted by the fires on thousands of Peruvian Amazon region residents, including indigenous peoples, farmers, and ranchers, was only sporadically reported in small articles tucked away in the inside pages of the capital's newspapers. The fires can no longer be brushed aside.

As of now, the fires have resulted in 20 deaths in Peru, with many individuals succumbing to contaminated air inhalation, and over 100 injuries, leading to overburdened conditions in regional hospitals.

This is due in no small part to the delay of the government of President Dina Boluarte in declaring a state of emergency in the 22 regions affected by the fires.

For months, local governors had been reporting fires and requesting an emergency declaration to access the necessary funds to fight the fires, and demonstrations have been held in affected towns to demand aid. Prime Minister Gustavo Adrianzén's response was that "there were no critical reasons" for a widespread emergency declaration.

It wasn't until September 17 that Adrianzén declared a state of emergency, and that in only three departments.

The Awajún people, who live in the northern Amazonian departments of Peru, through the Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (Aidesep), and the Regional Association of Indigenous Peoples of the Central Rainforest (ARPI SC), strongly denounced the Peruvian government's inaction.

As reported in *La República*, they demanded that "the state of emergency be extended to the other regions affected by the

forest fires."

The international press has attempted to attribute Amazonian forest fires to the traditional practice of burning to clear land for agriculture, thereby minimizing the impact of global warming that has exacerbated the two-year drought in the region.

It is important to distinguish between the ancestral burning practices of the Amazonian peoples, and the illegal activities of drug traffickers and others who intentionally set fires to expand their economic activities at the expense of the Amazon's wildlife and flora.

Amazonian peoples have rejected accusations from national and international entities that indigenous peoples are primarily responsible for the fires, stating that such accusations "criminalize our ancestral practices of using and managing fire to create farms."

The crisis is not limited to Peru. Since January, a series of forest fires have been threatening the entire Amazon basin, which is known as the "lungs of the world," due to its extensive forests and vast biodiversity.

Fires have consumed tens of millions of hectares in the Amazon, with Brazil alone accounting for almost seven million hectares razed.

The fires in Brazil have affected an area equivalent to 1.6 percent of the planet's biomass. This is the second consecutive year that the Brazilian rainforest has been ravaged by flames. Last year, the fires consumed 9.2 million hectares. In the first half of this year, there have been 63,189 fire outbreaks in Brazil, double the number recorded in 2023.

Fires in Bolivia are also alarming, and there are widespread concerns in Ecuador, Colombia and Paraguay over the spread of the fires.

In Bolivia, 3.9 million hectares of forests and grasslands have been destroyed, leading to the presence of toxic clouds in major cities such as Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Cobija, Sucre, and La Paz.

In Ecuador, 30,000 hectares have been burned in fires since the beginning of the year. The situation has been worsening, and in the last two weeks alone, approximately 16,000 hectares have burned—just over 50 percent of those burned this year.

According to Reuters, "Ecuador's government has announced the suspension of electricity service for nine hours on Sunday in 12 of the Andean nation's 24 provinces and placed 19 areas on red alert due to a drought that has reduced

the water levels of hydroelectric plants.”

In Colombia, the fires have impacted 10 of the country’s 32 departments, including the Valle del Cauca, a region known for coffee cultivation. Several cities are on red alert due to the fires.

In Paraguay, fires have affected more than 100,000 hectares, predominantly natural forests located in the Chaco region, bordering Bolivia.

Dense clouds of smoke from the fires spreading over vast swaths of territories of South America by gusts of wind are affecting towns and cities throughout the region, posing a threat to the health of inhabitants. It is expected that lung infections will be prevalent, particularly among children and the elderly.

According to IQAir, a Swiss company that monitors air quality, “Sao Paulo has become the most polluted city on the planet.” It adds that, according to the Brazilian Institute for Space Research (INPE), 60 percent of Brazil was affected by smoke from the fires, equivalent to almost 5 million km<sup>2</sup>—500 million hectares.

The smoke from forest fires has prompted the Argentine government to issue an alert for 10 territories in the northern part of the country.

The destruction of crops in the Amazon region is expected to result in higher market prices due to their scarcity. In Peru alone, 30,000 hectares have been lost, which accounts for 50 percent of the total area dedicated to cocoa cultivation.

Crop destruction is anticipated to lead to an increase in prices for potatoes, rice, ulluco—a native crop—and coffee in the coming months. The long-term economic impact may be significant as the destroyed soil has become unproductive.

Additionally, the loss of grasslands in Amazonian countries will impact sheep and pig farming, resulting in higher prices for milk and meat in nearly all South American countries.

Today’s rapid climate change is primarily attributable to the unsustainable use of natural resources driven by unregulated industrialization under capitalism.

NGO Oxfam Intermón, which focuses on “development, humanitarian action, fair trade, and awareness raising to eliminate injustice and poverty,” assesses the primary causes and effects of global warming as follows:

1. The main cause of global warming is the **increase in greenhouse gases** due to excessive industrial activity since the Industrial Revolution.

2. **Burning coal, oil, and natural gas releases harmful substances** into the environment, leading to increased cases of asthma. According to the World Health Organization, there are currently about 300 million people suffering from asthma in the world, and this number will likely increase with the presence of more harmful substances.

3. **Deforestation of jungles and forests** leads to a reduction in the Earth’s ability to convert CO<sub>2</sub> into

oxygen, contributing to air pollution. While forests and jungles still cover about 30% of the Earth’s surface, an area like that of countries like Panama is lost every year.

4. The **excessive use of fertilizers** containing high levels of nitrogen oxide is even more harmful than carbon dioxide.

5. **High waste production** leads to increased levels of methane gas in the environment, as it is generated during the decomposition of materials in landfills.

Oxfam Intermón warns that if preventive measures are not taken to curb climate change’s negative effects, survival of the Earth’s animal species, including humans, is gravely in doubt.

The five points mentioned by Oxfam Intermón are a result of the development of predatory capitalism. To fight global warming, in 2015, 196 countries signed the Paris Agreement.

The agreement came into force on November 4, 2016, and was widely considered a milestone in the multilateral process of addressing climate change: that for the first time, a binding agreement brought all countries together in a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, according to the UN Climate Change authority.

However, achieving such an objective is proving impossible under capitalism, because the capitalist mode of production is at the very root of the problem. The globalized economy exists alongside nation states with conflicting economic interests, which are increasingly driven to conflict and war, rather than cooperation, with US imperialism leading this spiral downward.

The fascistic former president of the US, the current presidential candidate of the Republican party, Donald Trump, announced the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement in November 2019, guaranteeing the failure of the Paris Accords.

To combat global warming and its devastating effects, such as the Amazon fires, requires a shift from a market economy to an economy based on socialized production and a planned economy that produces for human need, including climate viability, rather than profit—that is international socialism.



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