GARN COP30 Position Paper

The Rights of Nature: Advancing a Systems Change for Ecological Governance

Present at COP30 in Belém, in the heart of the Amazon, a living bioregion at the edge of collapse, the world faces a defining choice: to move beyond incremental market-driven fixes that perpetuate ecological destruction, or embrace the deep systemic transformation necessary to restore balance among people and planet. The Rights of Nature (RoN) framework offers this transformation. It challenges the dominant worldview that treats Nature as property and resource, promoting instead advances a paradigm shift that recognizes ecosystems as rights-bearing entities with the inherent right to exist, thrive, and regenerate.

This paradigm is not symbolic; it is a structural revisioning of governance, law and ethics. The Rights of Nature movement calls for a transformation in our economic, legal, and social systems to reflect and respect the inherent value of Nature. The Rights of Nature framework replaces extractive and colonial logics with respect, reciprocity, interdependence, and shared responsibility.

Across more than 40 countries, through both legal advances and and on-the-ground initiatives, the Rights of Nature movement is emerging as a legal and ethical response to planetary collapse - from a Ecuador's Constitutional recognition, to court rulings in Colombia, Spain, New Zealand, among others, Rights of Nature cases and related forms of ecological jurisprudence, are demonstrating their potential to complement and strengthen existing climate and biodiversity strategies. It is time for the international community to join.

At COP30, the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN) - a network of over 600 organizations and thousands of individuals in 80+ countries - calls for a paradigm shift that places Earth Jurisprudence and Indigenous leadership at the center of all decision-making. At COP30, GARN will highlight two emblematic initiatives - the Rights of the Amazon and the Rights of Antarctica. Both regions are globally significant and increasingly vulnerable to climate change. Recognizing their rights would not only reinforce their protection but also reshape how humanity relates to the biosphere, embedding care and responsibility at the center of policy and practice.

GARN denounces the contradictions of a world conference meant to bring real solutions to this polycrisis and protect key ecosystems like the Amazon, while being sponsored by extractive industries such as Vale, one of the largest mining corporations in the world. Such corporate

capture of multilateral spaces undermines climate justice and silences the very communities who defend the forests and rivers at the cost of their lives, communities whose access to this space has also been limited due to all the housing facility problems, and high prices that limit and exclude participation of civil society from around the world.

GARN is also amplifying an urgent warning against *false climate solutions*, particularly warning against the financialization of Nature. Framing ecosystems in monetary terms and expecting markets to correct environmental crises fails to address the root causes of ecological breakdown. It perpetuates the same logic that commodified and destabilized Nature in the first place. Instead, RoN offers a pathway toward governance models that empower communities and center ecological integrity over profit (Barlow, 2024).

Ultimately, the promise of RoN lies in its transformative vision: redefining humanity's relationship with the planet through law, ethics, and governance rooted in interdependence. Woven across COP30's six pillars, this systems change approach can align climate, biodiversity, and human development agendas within a holistic framework that recognizes the inherent rights of all life.

Understanding that humanity is running out of time to change the destructive direction in which we are driving the planet, GARN is organizing a Pre-COP30 Summit to bring Rights of Nature leaders, especially from Indigenous nations from around the world, to lift up the voice of Nature on the global stage.

In the following sections, we outline how Rights of Nature should be meaningfully integrated into COP30 discussions on Energy Transition, Biodiversity, Health, Finance, and Countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). These entry points demonstrate how a Rights of Nature approach can strengthen existing frameworks, address systemic drivers of ecological collapse, and ensure that climate action aligns with the needs and limits of living Earth systems.

False Solutions and the Financialization of Nature: De Commodifying Climate Action

GARN strongly warns against the rise of false climate solutions such as carbon markets, offset schemes, biodiversity credits, and the so-called Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF). These mechanisms deepen the financialization of Nature, turning forests, rivers, and biodiversity into financial assets to be traded by those most responsible for ecological destruction. Far from addressing the root causes of climate breakdown, these schemes reinforce colonial patterns of control, transferring wealth from the Global South to the Global North while legitimizing continued pollution and extraction.

The logic of carbon offsetting is inherently flawed: it allows emitters to continue destroying ecosystems elsewhere under the illusion of compensation. As Maude Barlow (2024) argues, the commodification of Nature transforms the living Earth into speculative capital, perpetuating inequality and eroding the sacred relationship between people and ecosystems.

This is precisely why we must foreground COP30 as a moment of accountability for finance architecture. The Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) is a cautionary example of a market-based false fix that privatizes rights and monetizes ecosystems. It undermines Indigenous and local governance and relies on a financially engineered path that ignores root causes and rights-based protections (Lang, 2025). It is important to note that we cannot assume uniform positions across Brazil's Indigenous Peoples, afro-descendants, and local communities—nor that all North/South labor groups are aligned on Rights of Nature, false solutions, or climate finance. State commitments must therefore not be treated as endorsements or as a guarantee that the preferred course of action will align across these diverse constituencies; we do not stand for big pledges that will be executed through false solutions or other mechanisms that undermine Peoples and Nature's rights. Instead, GARN insists on explicit Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, community-led stewardship, transparent reporting, and grant-based funding over profit-driven instruments as well as policies that prioritize ecological integrity and the regeneration of life systems over financial profit. We require inclusive, multi-stakeholder engagement, clear project pipelines with safeguards before endorsing COP30 pledges, and a rejection of financing that could fuel false solutions. The preferred path is rights-based, community-led implementation with transparent accountability.

The failure of the current climate finance architecture continues to be a central barrier to achieving the Paris Agreement and delivering climate justice. Despite long-standing pledges, financial flows remain insufficient, unpredictable, and heavily debt-based, further perpetuating inequalities. Climate-vulnerable nations are too often forced into cycles of borrowing to respond to climate disasters they did not cause, while wealthy nations delay or repackage commitments.

Likewise, the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) to mobilize at least $300 billion annually by 2035 for developing countries must deliver scaled-up and grant-based resources that reflect historical responsibility in alignment with adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damage priorities.

Beyond quantity and delivery mechanisms, finance must also transform in quality. Integrating the Rights of Nature into economic figures, metrics, and accountability frameworks is essential to move beyond GDP growth or carbon efficiency as the sole measures of success. Current accounting systems externalize ecosystem health, treating Nature as a resource rather than a rights-bearing entity. A RoN-aligned framework would ensure that financial flows and investments strengthen ecosystems' integrity and recognize their intrinsic value. For example, climate finance projects could be evaluated not only on tons of carbon that are reduced but

also on the extent to which water bodies, forests, soils, etc., thrive as living entities with inherent and recognised rights.

This shift requires accountability mechanisms that prevent greenwashing and ensure funds do not contribute to ecological harm. Embedding RoN into finance architecture creates a pathway toward an economy that regenerates ecosystems and honours Indigenous knowledge, while also safeguarding the web of life for future generations.

Integrating the Rights of Nature Across COP30 Themes:

Energy Transition: Beyond extractivism

GARN supports an accelerated fossil-fuel phase-out and rapid scaling of renewable energy: decarbonisation is necessary to safeguard ecosystems and the rights of humans and non-human Nature. Renewables are now the most cost-competitive source of new electricity generation, but also a foundation for justice, economic opportunity, and security. We welcome calls to "double energy efficiency and triple renewables" coupled with a just-transition roadmap, as urged by the UN Secretary-General, but insist that **"just transition" must be reframed through a Rights-of-Nature lens so it does not reproduce extractive and colonial patterns**. The harms of continued fossil-fuel dependence are well documented, rising greenhouse impacts, ecosystem collapse and public-health and human-rights harms, making a rapid phase-out imperative. However, equally evident are the social and ecological risks from the extraction for critical minerals: documented governance, labour and environmental pressures around cobalt in the DRC, lithium in the Lithium-Triangle, and nickel in the Philippines illustrate how weakly regulated supply chains can undermine water resources, biodiversity, community well-being, and both Indigenous and Nature's rights. Renewable development has at times also damaged fragile ecosystems and community territories when projects proceed without consultation.

For GARN, a just transition must therefore centre ecological integrity and the intrinsic rights of rivers, forests, species, visible and non-visible beings alongside human communities. This requires binding obligations to respect Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), recognise Rights of Nature in law and policy, avoid projects in areas of high ecological value, and reduce material demand through circular and sufficiency approaches. Only then can the energy transition be truly just.

Biodiversity: from Control to Coexistence

At the core of the unfolding biodiversity and other socio-environmental crises lies the Western worldview that detaches humans from more-than-human beings. When scientific approaches

think of Nature in materialistic and mechanical terms, it not only strips Nature of its sentience, agency, and responsiveness (Riskin, 2016) but, consequently, exempts moral responsibility towards Nature, since we are exploiting *things* rather than *sentient beings*. In this way, these detached anthropocentric forms of science 'serve capitalism very well by making the exploitation of Nature morally acceptable' (Milton, 2002, p. 53). The Rights of Nature movement explicitly counteracts this by addressing more-than-human entities and ecosystems as legal subjects worthy of protection beyond their utilised, exploited, or otherwise economically valuable form (Cullinan, 2011; Acosta, 2014; Tanăsescu, 2022). It does not suffice to protect biodiversity as a mere resource or asset, as it falls short of accounting for the intrinsic value, agentic capacity, and not yet fully understood or appreciated roles of species or ecosystems that still exist beyond the parts that society deems important. In the dominant global economic system and legal paradigm, Nature is treated as property, and as a result, biodiversity becomes increasingly fragmented, unstable, and ultimately, prone to collapse. While environmental law often seeks to regulate exploitation, RoN calls for a paradigm shift: from control to coexistence, from extraction to reciprocity, from Nature as object to Nature as subject. This paradigm finds resonance in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which recognises diverse worldviews, including Rights of Nature, as essential for implementation (CBD, 2022a). Target 14, for instance, calls for integrating biodiversity's multiple values - including its inherent value - into national policies and decision-making (CBD, 2022b). In this way, RoN offers the ethical and legal foundation to achieve the GBF's vision of living in harmony with Nature by 2050.

Rights of the Amazon and Rights of Antarctica

The Rights of the Amazon initiative recognizes this unique biome as a living entity that sustains global equilibrium. Building on the GBF's recognition of diverse worldviews, the Rights of the Amazon initiative highlights the world's largest rainforest as a living entity that sustains planetary balance. Indigenous leadership is central: the peoples of the Amazon have long defended the territories, waters, and species, advancing legal and moral claims that the forest itself holds rights to exist, regenerate, and be restored. Their leadership ensures that stewardship is rooted in ancestral knowledge and reciprocity rather than exploitation. At the same time, the Amazon Rainforest's transboundary importance underscores its global role. Extending across nine countries, the rainforest regulates climate, stores carbon, and harbours irreplaceable biodiversity. Recognition of the Amazon's rights thus transcends national jurisdiction, requiring collective responsibility. Embedding these rights in law strengthens both local Indigenous struggles and global frameworks for ecological justice, ensuring the Amazon's voice shapes decisions that affect its survival.

Similar to the Amazon, Antarctica also stands as a vital Earth system where critical climate tipping points become visible, with earth-wide effects. Its melting ice sheets and disrupted ocean currents already threaten sea-level stability, weather systems, and carbon sinks

worldwide. Without urgent protection, these shifts could trigger irreversible planetary harm. Enshrining the rights of Antarctica in international law affirms humanity's duty of care and establishes a governance model that reflects its intrinsic value as a critical regulator of Earth's climate. In response, the Antarctic Rights Initiative seeks recognition of the continent as an autonomous entity with inherent rights. As a global commons, Antarctica belongs not to individual states but to the Earth community. Current governance under the Antarctic Treaty System has prevented militarisation and resource extraction, yet it fails to address the accelerating impacts of climate change. Recognising Antarctica's rights would ensure that decisions affecting the region prioritise its well-being over narrow geopolitical and economic interests.

Health: interdependence between human and ecological rights

The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is the legal and moral foundation for planetary health: intact living systems are preconditions for human dignity, nutrition, and public health. The UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly have recognised this right, creating an obligation on States and institutions to prevent environmental harms that undermine health and life (UN OHCHR, 2022).

From a Rights-of-Nature perspective, GARN affirms that human rights and the rights of rivers, forests, species and soils are indivisible. Protecting people's health therefore requires legal and policy frameworks that recognise Nature's intrinsic rights. Scientific syntheses linking ecosystem decline, pollution, and climate disruption to mounting disease burdens underline the urgency of this duty. *(UNEP - UN Environment Programme)*

Recognising the rights of rivers or pollinators is not symbolic: legal recognition of ecosystems, for example, Spain's Law granting legal personality to the Mar Menor lagoon, and IPBES findings on pollinators show that safeguarding non-human rights materially protects people's right to a healthy environment. Although legal recognition of ecosystems (e.g., river, lagoon, marine or terrestrial ecosystems) is a powerful governance shift, systematic, attributable public-health metrics showing improvements after recognition are still limited since these types of responses unfold over years to decades.

At COP30, GARN calls for binding instruments and coherence across climate, biodiversity and health tracks that explicitly interlink the human right to a healthy environment with legal recognition of Nature's rights.

NDCs: Reimagining National Commitments

The UN Secretary-General set September 2025 as the deadline for all Parties to submit new or updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which would define the level of

ambition entering COP30 in Belém. This deadline was critical: it offered a moment to ensure that NDCs respond not only to the climate emergency but also to the systemic crises of biodiversity loss, social inequality, and threats to the rights of present and future generations. The NDC Equity Tracker highlights persistent imbalances between historical responsibility, capacity, and proposed action. Wealthy, high-emitting countries continue to fall short of their fair share of reductions and finance, while frontline nations are asked to do more with less. This inequity undermines trust and weakens collective progress.

Integrating the Rights of Nature into NDCs provides a transformative pathway forward. By recognizing ecosystems as rights-bearing entities, governments can ground climate action in ecological integrity rather than extractive growth models. RoN integration into national climate plans ensures that adaptation and mitigation measures strengthen the living systems upon which human survival depends, while also advancing Indigenous worldviews and community stewardship.

Finally, GARN calls for a Universal NDC Youth Clause requiring all Parties to consult meaningfully with youth in the design, implementation, and monitoring of their NDCs. Young people are disproportionately affected by climate inaction, yet remain sidelined in decision-making. Embedding youth participation as a binding clause in all NDCs is a necessary step toward genuine intergenerational justice and regenerative climate governance.

Conclusion: Towards a Rights-Based Future for the Planet

GARN's message at COP30 is clear: we cannot solve an ecological crisis with the same economic system that caused it, one that views nature as an object to exploit when she is alive, has inherent rights and needs to be protected and respected. Belém, at the heart of the Amazon, symbolizes both the urgency and the possibility of a new era. The Rights of Nature is not an add-on to existing frameworks; it is a new foundation for climate and ecological governance. GARN urges COP30 delegates to move beyond technocratic negotiations and recognize the moral imperative of systemic change.

This COP must become the turning point where humanity redefines progress, not through markets or metrics, but through respect for the web of life that sustains us. The Rights of Nature offers a path toward decolonial, regenerative, and relational governance that honors the Earth as a living community, not a commodity. Without the Rights of Nature, there can be no climate justice. Without justice, there can be no future.

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