

How Earth Day Is Being Co-Opted

We must resist the corporate takeover of the UN's food, biodiversity, and climate agenda.

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The United States is back. Back in the Paris Agreement, and back to faithfully promoting the interests of destructive industries and their allies at the global level under the guise of environmentalism. On Earth Day—a day that has been increasingly co-opted by corporations—President Biden is [hosting](#) a “Leaders’ Summit on the Climate.” But who are these “leaders?”

The Biden Administration’s dubious definition is clear from the fact that a key initiative to be announced at the summit is a [bilateral agreement](#) between Biden and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. The deal would include significant financial support for Brazil’s “efforts” to reduce illegal deforestation.

If there were ever a prize for the most environmentally destructive president in history, Bolsonaro would stand a good chance to win. In just two years, he has succeeded in increasing deforestation rates in Brazil by [47 percent](#), triggering the destruction of 11,088 square kilometers of forests in his country in 2020 alone, primarily by allowing and even incentivizing his friends and allies in the industrial livestock sector and other industries to clear as much forest as they want.

Of course, it is basically up to Bolsonaro and his administration to decide what deforestation is legal or illegal—no matter the fact that Heads of State [agreed](#) in 2015 in the Sustainable Development Goals that all deforestation should be halted, and thus declared illegal, by 2020.

It is no wonder Brazilian Indigenous peoples, civil society organizations, feminist groups, and social movements are [cynical](#) about the proposed deal between the United States and Brazil. In a widely supported letter published on April 6, they denounced the proposed agreement, claiming it is unacceptable to give financial support to a “leader” who is not only destroying his own country, but has also been recommended by Indigenous peoples in Brazil to be prosecuted before the International Criminal Court for [crimes against humanity](#).

Bolsonaro is not the only industry ally the United States is touting as an “environmental leader.” The Biden Administration has shown its commitment to protecting business as

usual in climate policy by actively promoting [carbon offset mechanisms](#) that would allow some of the dirtiest industries in the country to buy cheap carbon offsets for their emissions under the euphemistic term “nature-based solutions.”

Such “solutions” often boil down to [monoculture tree plantations](#), which have been embraced by companies like Shell and Texaco as a way to profit from pulp or bioenergy sales while pretending to “plant trees” for clients who want to greenwash their petroleum emissions.

These carbon offset mechanisms would allow some of the dirtiest industries to make money selling offset credits based on the use of [genetically modified organisms](#), or GMOs, and weed killers that avoid tilling (euphemistically called soil carbon sequestration or even “regenerative agriculture”) or, for example, the use of [biogas](#) produced by intensive livestock farming.

The emissions caused by the production of soy feedstock for the intensive livestock industry, a key cause of deforestation in countries like Brazil, are conveniently forgotten in these scenarios. Also forgotten are the devastating impacts on women, Indigenous peoples, and others who’ve borne the brunt of industrial farming, which is associated with massive health impacts due to agrochemicals, land grabbing, and rural depopulation.

Another “leader” who will undoubtedly show up at the U.S. Leaders’ Summit is Bill Gates, a passionate [promoter](#) of GMOs and other techno-fixes to address the impacts of agro-industry on the climate. Through a series of strategic investments in different U.N. institutions, the former Microsoft CEO and his foundation have positioned themselves as the main benefactor and influencer of a wide variety of interlinked global processes.

The U.N. Food Systems Summit is probably the most controversial of these processes. The idea for the summit came from the business-dominated World Economic Forum. And its pro-business agenda was given a human face with the appointment of Agnes Kalibata, the president of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, as special envoy of the conference.

The alliance is an initiative backed by the Gates Foundation [to promote GMOs](#) and other techno-fixes for agricultural challenges in Africa. Gates himself has invested heavily in companies like Monsanto/Bayer that stand to profit from such “nature-based solutions.”

With the U.N. Food Systems Summit planned for September 2021, the conditions are right for a corporate-driven agenda to push business-friendly “nature-based solutions” onto the “leaders” gathered at these summits. The winners in this scheme would be destroyers like Bolsonaro and Gates, who seek profit at the expense of some of the most precious forests on the planet.

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