

January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Ref: Statement on Fires in Protected Areas**

Addressing local, national and international public opinion:

The Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI) with representation at the UN, together with other Marist institutions in America, co-signatories of this letter, respectfully address public opinion and the local, departmental and national authorities of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

We wish to **express our concern about the continuous fires** that have been occurring in different departments of Bolivia, especially in the Chiquitania area, in the Madidi Park, in the Tunari National Park and in the area surrounding the Alalay Lagoon, and highlight the **danger that they pose to our Common Home and our Mother Earth.**

Let us share some recent figures that illustrate the scale of the problem:

- Bolivia is among those Countries with the highest rate of tropical deforestation in the region and the world. In 2020, Bolivia lost almost 300,000 hectares of tropical forest, the "fourth highest in the world".<sup>1</sup>
- More than 3.4 million hectares of accumulated burned areas were detected in 2021 at the national level during the period January 1 to October 15.<sup>2</sup> Almost 95% of these affected areas belong to the departments of Beni and Santa Cruz.
- According to estimates, the fire, which has been burning for a month now, has so far consumed more than 450 hectares of forest in the protected areas of the Pilon Lajas Biosphere Reserve and Communal Land, putting the Madidi National Park at risk.<sup>3</sup>
- On October 24<sup>th</sup>, a major fire in Tunari National Park burned out around 650 hectares of native kewiña forests, pine and eucalyptus plantations. It also burnt crops belonging to the communities of Andrada, Tirani, Pacoya and Ornonipampa.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Bolivia among the countries with major deforestation in the region and the world":

<https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/pais/20211105/bolivia-paises-mayor-deforestacion-bosques-region-mundo> Published 5 November 2021 using figures from Global Forest Watch.

<sup>2</sup> "Assessment of burned areas in Bolivia": <http://incendios.fan-bo.org/Satrifo/areas-quemadas-oct-2021/> Monitoring and early warning for forest fire risk (SATRIFO). October 2021.

<sup>3</sup> "Fire spreads in Pilon Lajas and threatens the Madidi area":

<https://www.eldiario.net/portal/2021/11/03/fuego-se-propaga-en-pilon-lajas-y-amenaza-al-madidi/> Published 3 November 2021.

<sup>4</sup> "Environmental attack damaged kewiñas and warnings that Tunari is being parcelled out":

<https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/cochabamba/20211026/atentado-ambiental-dano-kewinas-alertan-que-parcelan-tunari> Published 26 October 2021

- On October 26<sup>th</sup>, another destructive fire around the Alalay lagoon in the city of Cochabamba caused an environmental disaster. Approximately 40 hectares were consumed in nine hours, destroying the nesting area of a wide range of non-migratory and migratory birds, the most affected species being: night herons, cattle egrets, gulls and ducks; the ashes compromised water quality and the fire razed reed beds and grasslands. The enormous damage left behind was visible: scorched nests, the charred remains of rabbits, reptiles and other animals.<sup>5</sup> It is worth mentioning that the Alalay lagoon is home to more than 60 species of birds, both native and migratory. It was also home to fish such as the platincho, which disappeared in 2016.

In recent years events on this fundamental issue - such as the COP26 Climate Summit held in Glasgow, Scotland - have taken place and diplomatic solutions to the problem are being sought. More than 100 global leaders have committed to ending deforestation by 2030 by signing a Joint Declaration.<sup>6</sup> We are concerned that the Bolivian state is not a signatory to this document, which is **why it is so urgent** to bring attention to the current situation in Bolivia.

In the aftermath of this global event, we **strongly support** the Declaration<sup>7</sup> signed by 40,000 young people, who demand change from decision-makers, recognising that young people are the generation most threatened by climate change and valuing the important role they play around the world in raising awareness and providing innovative solutions on how to address this issue. We seek thus to ensure their continued participation, recalling that they are still under-represented in the consultation processes and implementation of policies and initiatives related to the issue.

We also agree with the statements of Alok Sharma, President of COP26: *"Everywhere I have been in the world, I have been impressed by the passion and commitment of young people to climate action. The voices of young people must be heard and reflected in these negotiations here at the COP. The actions and scrutiny of young people are key to keeping 1.5 alive and creating a future of zero emissions"*.<sup>8</sup> The theme of Integral Ecology and Care for the Common Home is important for the Marist Institute. In Bolivia we **seek to integrate spaces of formation and action** within the educational program of our works, hence our interest in **supporting means of reflection and critical dialogue** wherever our social co-responsibility requires it.

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<sup>5</sup> "Fire in Alalay causes environmental disaster and devastation of 40 hectares": <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/cochabamba/20211028/incendio-alalay-causa-desastre-ambiental-devasta-40-hectareas> Published 28 October 2021

<sup>6</sup> Declaration by Glasgow Leaders on Forests and Land Use: <https://ukcop26.org/glasgow-leaders-declaration-on-forests-and-land-use/> November 2021

<sup>7</sup> YOUTH4CLIMATE MANIFESTO: [https://www.mite.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio\\_immagini/Y4C\\_COP-PRECOP/Youth4Climate%20Manifesto%20%281%29.pdf](https://www.mite.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio_immagini/Y4C_COP-PRECOP/Youth4Climate%20Manifesto%20%281%29.pdf) November 2021

<sup>8</sup> Young people descend on COP26 and Glasgow to demand action on climate change: <https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/11/1499642> Published 5 November 2021

Without elaborating further, we thank you in advance for your attention and for whatever actions the State, departmental and municipal governments and civil society can propose to address this problem. We send you our warmest greetings.

Yours sincerely,

Secretariat of Solidarity

*Red Corazón Solidario*

*Grupo temático Ecología Integral y Cuidado de la Casa Común*

*Sector Marista Bolivia*

*Consejo Consultivo Estudiantil Marista*

*Equipo de Solidaridad Marista Bolivia*

*Fundación Marista para la Solidaridad Internacional (FMSI)*

Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)

