

Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad
Avenue Charles de Gaulle, N'Djamena, Chad

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

Forest Conservation in the Fight Against Climate Change

**Testimony before
House Foreign Affairs Committee**

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My name is Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim. I am the founder and President of the Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad (AFPAT).

I want to thank Chairman Meeks, Ranking Member McCaul, and the Members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee for the opportunity to discuss the importance of U.S. leadership in nature conservation and investing in natural climate solutions. I am joining you today from the Ivory Coast in Africa, where I am speaking at a convention to combat desertification. This climate driven crisis continues to accelerate the mass extinction of biodiversity and is trapping a whole continent in poverty.

This is relevant for today's discussion because it is places like this where U.S. leadership in conservation is most needed. I welcome the chance to share my perspective, as an Indigenous person, on the critical need for investments in conservation worldwide including through the AMAZON21 Act.

I speak to you today as a conservationist, and as a community leader who implements concrete projects to help my people.

I was born in an indigenous community named M'bororo, a nomadic pastoralist community whose livelihood depended on its cows to produce milk and meat. For centuries we have been practicing the seasonal herding of livestock to fresh grazing grounds in the Sahel region following the rhythm of the season.

Living in harmony with nature is a common principle shared by all indigenous communities worldwide: in Africa, in the Amazon, in the Arctic, in the Pacific Islands, and everywhere around the globe.

Although today they make up only 5 percent of the global population, indigenous peoples effectively manage more than a quarter of all land on Earth, sustaining many of its healthiest ecosystems, which are vital to the earth's ability to absorb and store CO₂. We contribute to protect about 80 percent of global biodiversity.

As our communities rely on their natural environment, our way of life and culture are built around sustainably managing and sharing nature's resources. We protect our territories because our survival depends on it. Nature is our marketplace; it is where we find food, raw material for construction, and plants for traditional medicine.

Therefore, lands where indigenous peoples have forest rights, including government protection of those rights, have better conservation practices, lower instances of deforestation and lower carbon emissions than surrounding areas.

It is for instance demonstrated that our milk production is zero carbon, as our practices contribute to storing higher levels of carbon than our cattle's emissions. Also, forests managed in partnership with Indigenous peoples are critical for global climate

mitigation, as they contain at least 24% of the total carbon stored above-ground in tropical forests.¹

Today we all are facing the consequences of climate change in America and in every corner of the planet.

Tropical forests, from the Congo to the Amazon basin, are known as the lungs of the planet. They increasingly face extreme fires and pressure from agri-food industries, which endanger the ecosystems that provide indigenous peoples and the world with critical resources.

We need U.S. leadership to partner with indigenous peoples and local communities to stop illegal logging, mining, poaching, and wildlife trafficking driven by criminal networks. This in turn will support local development and ecosystem protection.

Investing in nature as a solution can help countries achieve the sustainable development goals by tackling multiple challenges at the same time, like food and water security, human health, and climate change.

Climate and biodiversity experts have demonstrated that about one third of the cost-effective carbon emissions reductions can come from stopping deforestation, better land management and restoring degraded lands.

Indigenous peoples are well placed to help to design these solutions. We can use our traditional knowledge to identify crops and varieties that are resistant to drought to improve food security. We can protect mangroves that prevent sea level raise and contribute to store carbon.

To implement this agenda of action and investment in nature, we need economic and technical support, as well as full recognition and respect of our rights mentioned in the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. These investments are crucial for enabling developing countries and indigenous communities to sustain plant and wildlife species, secure livelihoods, and mitigate climate change.

There simply is no pathway to a safe climate and biodiversity protection which does not involve significant investments and upscaling of natural climate solutions. Investments like those called for in the AMAZON21 Act are essential for a sustainable future. I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ Frechette, A.; Reyntar, K.; Saini, S.; Walker, W. Toward a Global Baseline of Carbon Storage in Collective Lands: An updated analysis of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' contributions to climate change mitigation. Washington, DC: RRI.