October 21, 2026

Matt Shaw
Executive Director
Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Technical Secretariat of the Cities and Regions United for Biodiversity: Coalition Against Illicit Economies

Re: Support for Joint Declaration of the Cities and Regions United for Biodiversity: Coalition Against Illicit Economies

Dear Mr. Shaw,

On behalf of the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force (GCF Task Force), we write in support of the Joint Declaration of the Cities and Regions United for Biodiversity: Coalition Against Illicit Economies that is being introduced today, October 21, through the Coalition's technical secretariat at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), during the 13th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) in Vienna, Austria. We urge Parties to the Convention to acknowledge the environmental and social impacts of organized crime and recognize the vital role that subnational governments have as key actors in the design, implementation, and enforcement of strategies to tackle crimes that affect the environment.

As defined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), environmental crimes include those related to "deforestation and logging, mining, air pollution, noise pollution, soil pollution, water pollution, fishing, waste and wildlife."[1] The World Bank estimates that the impact from crimes associated with illegal logging, fishing, and wildlife trade alone are between $1 trillion and $2 trillion per year.[2] The sheer scale and increasingly transnational reach of these illicit economies are impacting the communities and governments that make up the GCF Task Force network. This makes it much harder to achieve critically important goals of reducing tropical deforestation and degradation, protecting the environment, and developing a more sustainable, new forest economy for our communities. As GI-TOC has found, "transnational organized environmental crime is a major driver of deforestation, soil and water contamination, violence, biodiversity loss and overall environmental degradation around the world."[3]

About the GCF Task Force

The GCF Task Force is the world's only subnational governmental network dedicated to protecting forests, reducing emissions, and enhancing livelihoods across the tropics. Today, the GCF Task Force includes 54 states and provinces from 11 countries that include more than one-third of the world's tropical forests.

[1] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Crimes that Affect the Environment, https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/the-landscape-of-criminalization.html (accessed October 13, 2026).
[2] World Bank (2019), *Illegal Logging, Fishing, and Wildlife Trade: The Costs and How to Combat It*, *available at* https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/1462c00a-6ef5-5964-9805-f31a9b1463ab.
[3] GI-TOC (2023), *Impact of Biodiversity Loss and Environmental Crime on Women from Rural and Indigenous Communities: Evidence from Ecuador, Mexico, Cameroon and Indonesia*, *available at* https://resiliencefund.globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Faith-Ngum-Radha-Barooah-Impact-of-biodiversity-loss-and-environmental-crime-on-women-from-rural-and-indigenous-communities-GI-TOC-October-2023.v3.pdf.

For more than 17 years, the GCF Task Force has played a key role in supporting state and provincial governments as they work to build jurisdictional programs to reduce emissions from deforestation and land use and advance new forest economies.

Today's Joint Declaration is fully aligned with our theory of change, which starts from the premise that subnational governments (states, provinces, regions, departments) are key actors in the global effort to protect forests and fight climate change. These governments are doing much of the hard work associated with climate change mitigation and adaptation and provide important laboratories for policy experimentation. In supporting subnational jurisdictions, the GCF Task Force operates at both political and technical levels: it seeks to harness and support the leadership of committed Governors in the fight against climate change and deforestation, while building the capacity of civil servants and their civil society partners that are so critical in the day-to-day effort to build and maintain successful jurisdictional programs. The GCF Task Force links these efforts with existing and emerging carbon market and other pay-for-performance opportunities, aligns them with national policies and programs, and works with public, private sector and community-level partners, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities. By strengthening the multiple overlapping networks of actors involved in building robust jurisdictional programs for low emissions development, the GCF Task Force plays a vital role in the broader international effort to protect forests, reduce emissions, and enhance livelihoods.

Partnering to Combat Transnational Organized Environmental Crime

In May 2026, the GCF Task Force entered a partnership with GI-TOC and the Coalition Against Illicit Economies. This partnership will strengthen our members' ability to understand, address, and combat criminal networks that are impacting our forests, our people, and our economies. The Joint Declaration's call for explicit acknowledgement of the environmental and social impacts of environmental crime and for the inclusion of subnational governments, civil society, Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the work of the intergovernmental expert working group and in the design of any future protocol on environmental crimes within the UNTOC, is a key step to advancing a much-needed international signal and (hopefully) resources to support our mutual efforts to advance legal, sustainable, and long-term economic alternatives that support our forests and people.

On behalf of our 54 member states, provinces, departments, and regions, we look forward to working with the Coalition, national governments, and other partners to address transnational organized crime in a manner that considers subnational realities and leverages our competencies. If you have any questions, please email us at secretariat@gcftaskforce.org.

Sincerely,

Luis Francisco Ruíz Aguilar
Governor
Department of Caquetá, Colombia
2026 Chair, GCF Task Force

William Boyd
Project Lead
GCF Task Force
Emmett Institute on Climate Change & the Environment
UCLA School of Law