JOINT DECLARATION

Cities and Regions United for Biodiversity: Coalition Against Illicit Economies

We, the Mayors and Regional Governors of the member cities and regions of the Coalition "Cities and Regions United for Biodiversity: Coalition Against Illicit Economies", gathered in Vienna on 21 October 2026, on the occasion of the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,

Recalling the establishment of the Coalition under the leadership of the Mayor's Office of Santiago de Cali, Colombia, during the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16), held in Cali in 2024, as a platform of local and regional governments committed to the protection of biodiversity and the strengthening of environmental governance in the face of illicit economies. It now brings together nineteen member cities and regions from eleven countries, with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) as its Technical Secretariat;

Recognizing that illicit economies, including illegal mining, illicit logging and deforestation, wildlife trafficking, illegal fishing, the dumping of and illicit trafficking in waste, and drug trafficking, are among the main drivers of biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and the erosion of governance worldwide;

Underscoring that cities and regions, as the level of government closest to communities, are often the first to face the social and environmental harms generated by organized crime, and are in a unique position to design and implement territorial responses, mobilize institutions and coordinate resources;

Deeply concerned that the harms caused by these illicit economies degrade ecosystems, undermining the livelihoods, local economies, food security and well-being of the populations that depend on them, falling disproportionately on vulnerable communities, Indigenous peoples and local populations, and further affecting the rule of law and sustainable development;

Noting that, in the member cities and regions of the Coalition, criminal economies cause concrete environmental harm, including soil and land degradation, loss of forests and vegetation, and water pollution, and that even criminal markets not traditionally considered environmental, such as drug trafficking, contribute to such harm in their territories;

Considering here some examples from the coalition's member cities and regions, such as:

- in Guayaquil, Ecuador, illegal wildlife trafficking and waste pollution threaten biodiversity and estuarine ecosystems such as the Estero Salado, in response to which the Municipality promotes wildlife rescue and environmental monitoring and coordination;
- in Cuenca, Ecuador, illegal mining in the parishes of Molleturo and Chaucha creates risks of contamination and degradation of its ecosystems and water sources;
- in Garowe, capital of Puntland State (Somalia), inadequate waste disposal contaminates soil and water, while illegal hunting of wildlife depletes species populations and alters ecosystems, accelerating biodiversity loss and environmental degradation;

- along the coasts from Ecuador to Panama, the expansion of drug-trafficking routes exerts growing pressure on coastal and marine ecosystems; in addition, the illicit capital generated directly finances the trafficking of threatened species, attacking and violating our biodiversity;
- in the Valle del Cauca, Colombia, illegal mining of gold and riverbed material and logging put pressure on protected areas and priority watersheds such as the Dagua and Guabas rivers, generating environmental liabilities and affecting rural, Black and Indigenous communities.
- in the Farallones National Natural Park (comprising four municipalities, of which Buenaventura and Santiago de Cali are part of this coalition), illegal mining, together with illicit trafficking in wildlife and flora, drives the degradation of strategic ecosystems, threatens water security and accelerates biodiversity loss. These illegal economies weaken environmental governance, compromise territorial security and undermine the livelihoods and sustainable development opportunities of communities;
- in the Metropolitan District of Quito, problems have been identified associated with the illegal subdivision of land plots, burning of vegetation cover, deforestation, irregular settlements and alleged land trafficking, as well as the threat of illegal gold mining, the opening of trails and the establishment of informal camps in the Chocó Andino Biosphere Reserve, mainly in the micro-watersheds of the Chirape and Pachijal rivers, in the Pacto parish, which affect the natural heritage and the ecosystems of the District;
- in Maynas, Peru, illegal gold mining using mercury contaminates the Nanay, Napo and Tigre rivers, putting at risk the health and lives of the entire population that consumes the water and fish from those rivers; drug trafficking, illegal mining and illegal logging cause deforestation, among other illegal activities that affect its biodiversity;
- in the canton of Limón, the illegal extraction and cutting of coral, the opening of access routes to the coastline for boats allegedly used to transport drugs, illegal logging and the occupation of the Maritime-Terrestrial Zone, allegedly associated with organized groups linked to illicit economies, threaten the ecological integrity of coastal and forest ecosystems, biodiversity and the planning of the coastal space;
- in the department of Chocó, Colombia, especially in Quibdó, the Atrato River, declared a subject of rights by the Constitutional Court in 2016 through Judgment T-622, is being contaminated by the continuous action of illegal mining. The use of mercury and other pollutants poisons the waters, the removal of soil destroys forests and habitats, and the loss of biodiversity threatens the food security and livelihoods of ethnic communities. In addition, the dispute over control of the territory deepens social conflicts and dynamics of violence, weakening coexistence and peacebuilding;
- in Mykolaiv, Ukraine, extensive war-induced destruction of municipal and water infrastructure has generated critical waste and pollution crises, which are further aggravated by unauthorised sand extraction and illegal waste disposal, threatening the city's green recovery;
- the sheer scale and increasingly transnational reach of these illicit economies are affecting communities and governments across our Coalition and our allied networks, including the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force (GCF Task Force). This makes it much harder to achieve critically important goals, such as reducing tropical deforestation and degradation, protecting the environment and developing a new, more sustainable forest economy for communities;

Further recognizing that the link between organized crime and its environmental and social impacts remains insufficiently visible in national and multilateral policies, and that the knowledge, evidence and

experience of subnational governments constitute an essential and underused resource for effective action;

Bearing in mind that the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties offers a unique opportunity to position the nexus between transnational organized crime and environmental harm on the multilateral agenda, and to strengthen the participation of local and regional governments with States, United Nations bodies and other relevant stakeholders,

We,

1. Declare our shared conviction that there can be no effective protection of biodiversity without confronting the illicit economies and the organized crime that drives its destruction, nor an effective response to organized crime without recognizing and addressing its environmental and social dimensions;

2. Recognize, and seek to make visible, the role played by cities and regions, often with limited tools and resources, in responding to the impacts of illicit economies on biodiversity, communities and local governance;

3. Commit to strengthening cooperation, collective learning and joint action among the members of the Coalition, including through tools to monitor, quantitatively and qualitatively, the influence of organized crime at the local level and generate information on the environmental harm it causes, the exchange of experiences and good practices, and the strengthening of local institutional capacities and partnerships;

4. Resolve to integrate environmental protection, governance and security into our local and regional policies and planning instruments, placing the protection of ecosystems at the center of our responses to organized crime;

5. Support a harm-based, holistic and whole-of-society approach to crimes that affect the environment, combining environmental protection, governance, development and security, and addressing corruption as a key enabler of these crimes;

6. Call for the meaningful inclusion of local and regional governments, together with civil society, Indigenous peoples and local communities, in the work of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, its Conference of the Parties and all its subsidiary bodies, including in the design of any future protocol to respond to crimes that affect the environment;

7. Urge the States Parties to the Convention and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to continue recognizing the environmental and social impacts of organized crime, and to include and support the participation of local and regional governments in the implementation of the Convention and in the work of the Conference of the Parties and all its subsidiary bodies;

8. Invite national governments, international and regional organizations, donors, civil society, the private sector and academia to collaborate with subnational actions against the illicit economies that threaten biodiversity and communities;

9. Reaffirm our determination to speak with one voice in international and multilateral forums, and to continue building a global network of cities and regions united for biodiversity;

10. Decide to keep this Declaration open to the accession of other cities and regions that share its purposes.

Signed by the member cities and regions:

1. Santiago de Cali, Colombia
2. Buenaventura, Colombia
3. Quibdó, Colombia
4. Valle del Cauca, Colombia
5. Guayaquil, Ecuador
6. Cuenca, Ecuador
7. Manta, Ecuador
8. Quito, Ecuador
9. Panama City, Panama
10. Maynas Province (Iquitos), Peru
11. Limón, Costa Rica
12. Mykolaiv, Ukraine
13. Općina Stari Grad Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
14. Cacheu Region, Guinea-Bissau
15. Garowe, Somalia