

COP15

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Actor and activist James Cromwell called on world leaders to “Stop the Human Asteroid” in the talks at COP15 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada on December 15, 2022. | Photo Credit: AP

As countries iron out a deal to protect nature at the COP15 biodiversity conference here, a petition backed by 3.2 million citizens worldwide has called for a more ambitious target of at least 50% conservation and protection of lands and oceans by 2030.

Most of the 196 countries meeting in Montreal, including India, have backed a 30% figure for protecting lands and oceans. However, a final agreement is due to be completed on December 19.

"We are already well beyond 30 per cent conservation of the planet, if only our governments recognise the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities over their territories, lands and waters," Oscar Soria, Campaign Director, Avaaz said in a press briefing here.

"They are de facto the ones conserving biodiversity. Now's the time to strive for a higher target, of half the Earth. Any other number will put vital forests in jeopardy, and are clearly not enough to kickstart the necessary revolution to rebuild our relationship with nature," Mr. Soria said.

However, Basile van Havre, Co-Chair for the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Post-2020 Open Ended Working Group, believes that the Parties should not give themselves goals that are not achievable.

"Definitely the science is pretty clear, 30 per cent (target) is a minimum so the way I am looking at it, this will take a massive effort from where we are to reach 30 per cent. Let us not give ourselves goals that we can not achieve in 8 years," Mr. van Havre said.

Advocates of the science-based Half target, led by prominent biodiversity NGOs, argue that the 30 by 30 target, conceived in the drafting negotiation process between 2019 and early 2020, is now an outdated figure based on the latest understanding of science and technology.

They warn that the national pledges from countries to protect 30% of their own territories by 2030 are now opening a “vulnerability policy loop” in the negotiations which would allow

catastrophic destruction in biodiversity-rich nations.

The petition has been backed by NGOs including Wild, One Earth, and Grounded.

A group of award-winning international artistes has also endorsed the petition calling to protect half the planet and make it a safe space for biodiversity.

Among the group of signatories are William Shatner, Olivia Colman, Sophie Turner, Jack Black, Joaquin Phoenix, Andie MacDowell, Frances Fisher, and James Cromwell.

“Human activities have been driving the proliferation of threats such as climate change, habitat loss, pollution, over-exploitation, and epidemics,” Cromwell, American actor and activist, said.

“As a result of our own actions, the accelerated biodiversity loss is not only causing species to become extinct faster than at any time,” he added.

Early reports indicate a cumbersome and contentious process at COP15, bogged down by disagreement, reflected in hundreds of items in square brackets — i.e. yet to be agreed.

The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework will be the first global framework on biodiversity adopted since the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in 2010.

In 2010 at COP10 in Nagoya, Japan, the governments set out to meet the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets by 2020, including that natural habitat loss would be halved and plans for sustainable consumption and production would be implemented.

According to a 2020 CBD report, none of these targets have been fully met.

The planet is experiencing its largest loss of life since the dinosaur era ended: one million plant and animal species are now threatened with extinction, according to a U.N. report.

Most countries in Asia have failed to achieve a global minimum target of protecting at least 17% of land by 2020, according to a recent study based on data from 40 countries.

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