

Human Rights Watch

Indigenous Peoples' Rights

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Biden Should Back Bill to Address US Role in Global Deforestation

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A bill to prevent agricultural goods grown on illegally deforested land from entering the US market will be introduced in the US Congress, Senator Brian Schatz [announced](#) today. Beef, palm oil, soy, cocoa, and their derivatives are found in products that US consumers buy every day. They are all commodities associated with rights abuses and the destruction of forests ecosystems that absorb and store carbon and that are vital to mitigating climate change.

The law would require US businesses to take steps to verify that the commodities they import did not originate from illegally deforested land, including forested land cleared in violation of legal protections for the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities.

Senator Schatz's announcement that he will introduce the bill comes as Human Rights Watch and 28 other civil society organizations released an open [letter](#) calling on the administration of President Joe Biden and Congress to tackle the US footprint on the world's forests and emphasizing the importance of regulating commodities supply chains. Voluntary initiatives and corporate commitments haven't done enough to curb deforestation over the past decade, the letter said. Government leadership and regulatory frameworks are needed to drive systemic change.

Human Rights Watch research has shown how several of the commodities that drive deforestation are linked to egregious rights violations.

In Indonesia, the establishment and expansion of [oil palm plantations](#) has adversely affected Indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, livelihoods, and culture. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, oil palm plantations are [rife with labor rights abuses](#). In Brazil, violent criminal networks drive [illegal deforestation in the Amazon](#), and threaten and kill defenders who stand in their way. Fires are often set in the rainforest to [clear](#) land for cattle-grazing and agriculture, [poisoning](#) the air millions of people breathe. Altogether, these countries hold about half of the world's rainforests.

The bill would be a major step in the right direction for climate action by requiring businesses to ensure their operations do not fuel the destruction of crucial ecosystems. It is also a major step in protecting US consumers from unwittingly contributing to human rights abuses and environmental degradation through their shopping bags. The Biden administration should build support for it.

European Development Banks Link to Abuses in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Palm Oil Industry

Health Impacts of Deforestation-Related Fires in the Brazilian Amazon

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