



## THE CALI CHARTER

### From Universities for Nature, as part of COP16

The Red Universitaria de Campus Sostenibles (RUCAS) unites universities from Cali and southwestern Colombia. Since November 2019, it has been a voluntary organization focused on exchanging experiences, practices, and knowledge to strengthen campus sustainability, research, teaching, and contribute to sustainable actions and policies at the local, regional, national, and international level.

To promote action by Latin American universities on biodiversity, RUCAS organized a virtual seminar series titled *University and Biodiversity*, held from September and October 2024 as part of the COP16 framework. The seminar featured 36 panelists from 17 universities across 8 countries in the Americas and Europe, discussing the role of their academic institutions in studying, teaching, and acting on biodiversity within their campuses and surrounding areas.

As an outcome of this series, a declaration—The Cali Charter—was prepared by RUCAS members with support from the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN), the Nature Positive Universities (NPU) initiative of the University of Oxford, and the University of Toronto. Signed on October 28, 2024, during COP16 at the University of San Buenaventura in Cali, the Charter calls for universities to focus on biodiversity conservation through 13 outlined principles.

The Charter is a call-to-action that urges universities to move beyond conserving their natural surroundings to conserving their broader local and regional environments, rethink economic growth towards inclusivity and harmony with nature, foster academic-community knowledge dialogue, and conduct local research that incorporates technological tools with local epistemologies.

This charter will guide RUCAS's work and will be available for signing by individuals from universities worldwide on the platforms of the [International Sustainable Campus Network](#) (ISCN) and [Nature Positive Universities](#) (NPU).



**The Charter was signed by the rectors and vice-rectors from the following 12 RUCAS member universities:**

Academia de Dibujo Profesional – Sandra Patricia Valencia Zuluaga, Rector

Fundación Universitaria Católica Lumen Gentium – Pbro. William Antonio Correa Pareja, Rector

Fundación Universitaria San Martín, Cali campus – Patricia López, Director MUZ

Intenalco Educación Superior – Ney Grisales, Rector

Institución Universitaria Antonio José Camacho – Zoraida Palacio Martínez, Academic Vice-rector

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Cali campus – Vicente Durán Casas, Rector

Uniminuto – Patricia Martínez Barrios, Vice-rector General Campuses

Universidad Autónoma de Occidente – Diego Hernández Lozada, Rector

Universidad de San Buenaventura, Cali campus – Fray Sergio Iván Rojas Díaz, Rector

Universidad del Cauca – Deibar René Hurtado Herrera, Rector

Universidad Icesi – José Hernández Bahamón, Academic Director

Universidad La Gran Colombia, Armenia campus – Bibiana Vélez Medina, Rector

**The Charter is further endorsed by the following individuals:**

Victoria Smith – International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN)

Emily Stott – Nature Positive Universities (NPU)

Sandra Patricia Valencia Zuluaga – Asociación Colombiana de Instituciones de Educación Superior (ACIET).

Aurora Vergara – Former Minister of Education of Colombia

Margarita Marino de Botero – Former Member of the World Commission on Environment and Development

Mathis Wachernagel – Global Footprint Network

Claudia Álvarez Aquino – Universidad Veracruzana

Diego Fernando Mejía – Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Palmira campus

Emilio Latorre – Red Universitaria de Campus Sostenible (RUCAS) and ISCN Latinamerican (ISCN-LATAM) Chapter

Presented below is the Cali Charter from Universities for Nature.

# CALI CHARTER FROM UNIVERSITIES FOR NATURE

**WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF COP16 ON BIODIVERSITY, HELD IN SANTIAGO DE CALI, COLOMBIA FROM OCTOBER 21 TO NOVEMBER 1, 2024.**

We, the undersigned rectors and vice-rectors of universities within Red Universitaria de Campus Sostenibles (RUCAS), convened on October 28, 2024, at the University of San Buenaventura in Santiago de Cali.

## **CONSIDERING:**

- The Convention on Biological Diversity and its critical role in reducing biodiversity loss regionally, nationally, and globally through conservation, sustainable use, and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits derived from genetic resources.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 15, which aims to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests sustainably, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and prevent biodiversity loss.
- The objectives and expectations of COP16, held in Cali, Colombia, from October 21 to November 1, 2024, particularly the goals established in the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (COP15). Of particular importance are intergenerational and gender equity, engagement with local communities and Indigenous peoples in decision-making, expansion of protected areas from 17% to 30%, traditional sustainable practices with free and informed consent. Additionally, the Global Framework underscores the essential roles of education, public outreach, and biodiversity research, which are intrinsic functions of universities.
- The proposal of Nature Positive Universities (NPU), promoted by the University of Oxford in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which seeks to implement nature-positive actions on campuses, in supply chains, and within cities and communities. This program is part of the Nature Positive Initiative, launched in October 2023 by 27 global environmental, business, and financial organizations.
- Significant prior commitments and progress achieved globally by universities through meetings and agreements on climate and environmental action, including the Talloires

Presidents' Statement on Climate and Sustainability, Networks Call to Action, and Leaders in Support of the Summit of the Future, among others.

- The University and Biodiversity seminar series, held virtually from September to October 2024 by RUCAS under the COP16 framework, with participation from 17 universities across 8 countries—Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, the United States, Chile, Spain, Brazil, and the United Kingdom—addressing biodiversity management on campuses and their surrounding socio-environmental contexts.
- The importance of envisioning universities in “Harmony with Nature”, aligned with COP16’s theme, as a call to reimagine our relationship with the environment and foster an economic model that does not prioritize overexploitation and pollution.
- The pivotal role of universities in explaining, localizing, and implementing national biodiversity plans, including the Kunming–Montreal Framework’s 23 targets and indicators, within the context of regional and local government plans, programs, and projects.
- The need for universities to promote equitable and inclusive knowledge-building across diverse knowledge systems and create academic spaces for training specialists in field studies that integrate various thematic areas.
- The universities’ commitment to strengthening their organizational structures, teaching, and research to produce precise, localized environmental knowledge, adaptable curricular designs, and actionable strategies tailored to local needs and stakeholders.
- The ongoing collaboration of universities with local, regional, and national governments, communities, and businesses to address local territorial priorities through collective, equitable social models, and interdisciplinary academic spaces.

## WE DECLARE:

1. **Recognizing the Intrinsic Value of Biodiversity:** We affirm that biodiversity holds an inherent value, independent of its usefulness to humans. This intrinsic value is rooted in the right of all forms of life to exist and thrive, as well as in their essential role in maintaining the integrity and resilience of socio-ecosystems. It is crucial to respect and protect biodiversity in its entirety, recognizing that its worth extends beyond the benefits it provides to humanity and lies fundamentally in its existence and vital role in the web of life.
2. **Acknowledging the Interdependence of Humanity and Nature:** We recognize biodiversity as a cornerstone of socio-ecological systems, vital to ecosystem functionality and the myriad forms of life that interact within them. Nature is indispensable to society, not only as a source of food, water, medicine, and clean air but also as a foundation for quality of life

and cultural identity. The loss of biodiversity undermines ecosystem integrity, endangers human health (physical, mental, and spiritual), threatens global food security, and diminishes cultural richness and the well-being of all species, both human and non-human.

3. **The Role and Responsibility of Universities:** Universities, as centers for knowledge creation and professional training, bear an ethical and social responsibility to champion and lead initiatives that protect and restore biodiversity. They must serve as exemplars by integrating biodiversity principles into their physical spaces, daily practices, and institutional structures. This commitment should align with their core values and permeate all spheres of influence, positively impacting students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. Universities have a duty to model sustainability and environmental awareness, ensuring their actions reflect conservation goals and respect for biodiversity.
4. **Linking Biodiversity and Climate Change:** We acknowledge the interconnectedness of biodiversity loss and climate change. Recognizing that the climate is a shared resource for all, we emphasize the importance of protecting all forms of life to maintain ecological balance. Nature-Based Solutions offer pathways to sustainable development, enhancing community well-being and addressing the challenges of climate change mitigation and adaptation. Universities must prioritize research and dissemination of these interconnections, using their campuses and surrounding areas as living laboratories for study and action.
5. **Re-evaluating Unsustainable Economic and Consumption Models:** We recognize the urgent need to develop new models of progress and consumption. Universities have a responsibility to critically reflect on the meaning of economic growth, collective well-being, and the satisfaction of basic needs through an intergenerational and interspecies solidarity framework. These models must prioritize biodiversity protection and the equilibrium of socio-ecosystems.
6. **Promoting the Concept of Sustainable Campuses:** We endorse the idea of campuses as “sustainable classrooms,” spaces designed to foster emotional well-being, reflection, and engagement with nature and sustainability. Universities must rethink their physical infrastructure to enhance pedagogical processes, cultivate environmental awareness, and advance knowledge, research, and the implementation of clean energy, waste management, water and sanitation systems, and healthy living practices.
7. **Integrating Biodiversity into University Activities:** As RUCAS members and representatives of our respective universities, we commit to embedding biodiversity protection and restoration into all dimensions of university activities. This will include adopting the framework of the Nature Positive Initiative, which promotes cooperation among conservation organizations, Indigenous groups, and business networks to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. Within this global initiative, the Nature Positive Universities (NPU) framework offers tools to set baselines, define goals, implement actions, and track progress.

The framework encompasses campus operations, education, research, responsible procurement, and community engagement, adapted to our specific resources and ambitions.

8. **Establishing Regional Leadership:** We express our intention to become a regional hub for biodiversity action, collaborating with local and global initiatives such as IUCN, IPBES, UNEP, NPU, ISCN, and others. This collaboration aims to foster regional and global cooperation for biodiversity conservation and sustainability.
9. **Seeking Support and Resources:** We call upon NPU and ISCN to support our efforts by providing resources, guidance, and collaboration opportunities to achieve our biodiversity objectives.
10. **Creating a Reference Hub for Biodiversity Strategies:** RUCAS will, in partnership with national and international organizations, establish a reference hub for biodiversity conservation strategies. This hub will involve representatives from all university sectors (academic, administrative, and student bodies) and collaborate with international groups, particularly NPU and ISCN.
11. **Focusing on Regional Biodiversity:** We pledge to prioritize the conservation of biodiversity in our region, including rivers, wetlands, aquifers, nearby cloud forests, and national parks such as Los Farallones de Cali. Special attention will be given to bird species, recognizing their vital role in biodiversity. Universities will play an active role in researching, protecting, and defending species and ecosystems that support human society and connect with avian populations. We will promote ecological connectivity and wildlife corridors using university and school campuses in Cali and the surrounding areas.
12. **Building Local Partnerships:** To advance these efforts, we will establish partnerships with local actors such as NGOs, conservation organizations, businesses, and government entities. We also encourage others to replicate this model of regional cooperation for biodiversity.
13. **Calling for Global Collaboration:** We invite university leaders, academics, and students to join us in declaring the importance of biodiversity and committing to action on this critical issue. We encourage individuals to show their support by adding their names and institutional affiliations to be showcased on the platforms of ISCN and NPU.

RUCAS, ISCN, and NPU will promote and monitor this declaration and its signatories, ensuring it reaches universities worldwide.

Issued in Santiago de Cali, Colombia, on October 28, 2024.