



Law of Mother Earth and Integral Development passed 2012 OCT–NOV.

The MAS government has passed the world's first law that gives rights to the environment. According to President Evo Morales, the Law of Mother Earth will allow people to live 'in harmony' with the natural world, and further underlines Bolivia's radical position on the environment in international fora. The government hopes the legislation will form the basis for a more sustainable model of development, and forms part of its broader policy for 'living well' (*vivir bien*). However, above all the law seeks to balance extractive activities with the needs of the environment.

The law covers a wide range of topics including pollution, the equitable use of water and land ownership. It describes the country's natural resources as 'sacred blessings from Mother Earth' rather than commodities, and also stresses both social and climate justice. Under the terms of the legislation the state will seek to 'eliminate the concentration of land' and address 'regional social inequalities'. The law establishes a new public body, the Plurinational Authority for Mother Earth, which will oversee the development and implementation of policies related to the environment and climate change. Significantly, crimes against the environment will not be subject to the statute of limitations.

The law also forbids the use of genetically modified seeds in Bolivia, a move strongly criticised by agricultural producers in the eastern lowlands. The Eastern Bolivian Chamber of Farming (Cámara Agropecuaria del Oriente) argued that the restrictions on GM crops put food production in the country at risk, and may lead to price increases. Producers of soy, Bolivia's third biggest export, also urged the government to amend the legislation, as the industry is strongly dependent on GM seeds. Meanwhile, indigenous organisations CONAMAQ and CIDOB argued the law was passed without sufficient consultation with their members. Other critics of the law argued that it does not go far enough in challenging the current development model based on resource extraction, and that it fails to place the rights of nature on an equal footing with human rights.

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