Brazil weakens Amazon protections days after COP30



Under the law, deforested properties or land cleared without a license can be retroactively legalized without restoring the land or ecological conditions, which rewards illegal deforestation. Larger projects, like irrigation, dams, and sanitation works, as well as roads and energy infrastructure, can proceed with minimal environmental scrutiny, risking more forest fragmentation and habitat destruction. And the licensing changes narrow who must be recognized and consulted during reviews, which could exclude communities without formal land titles.

A human rights issue

It’s alarming that the legislature overrode the vetoes, said Astrid Puentes Riaño, the United Nations special rapporteur on the human right to a healthy environment. As it stands now, the law may violate Brazil’s international environmental commitments, she added.

“What is at stake is [whether] Brazil, as a country, is able to effectively protect the environment, including all their fundamental resources,” she said.

She noted that Brazil is not facing this problem alone.

“I think that we, unfortunately, are seeing a wave of regressions globally toward weakened environmental impact assessments, because they’re seen as obstacles for development and investment,” she said.

But cutting reviews when science clearly shows that the planet is facing a “triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and toxic contamination” is a huge step in the wrong direction.

“Environmental impact assessments are not a checklist in a supermarket,” she said. “They are an essential element for states to prevent environmental, climate, human rights, and social impacts.”

She emphasized that weakening environmental review isn’t a technocratic tweak or political win for one side. It undermines the foundations of public health, Indigenous rights, and climate safety.

“This is not about politics, it’s about survival,” she said. “Some of these impacts on water, on air, on biodiversity, on people’s health, are irreversible. These are not things you can fix later.”

Climate backlash is scientifically unfounded

The fight over Brazil’s environmental licensing law can be seen as a microcosm of global climate policy tensions, with governments performatively signaling climate ambition at international meetings, such as COP30, while doubling down on

economic nationalism by claiming there is no money for climate action at home and instead financing measures to boost development and growth.

https://arstechnica.com/science/2025/12/days-after-cop30-brazil-weakened-amazon-safeguards/