AIDA STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2023
Executive Summary
Governments in Latin America are beginning to take concerted action to protect their natural environments and address climate change. But they continue to permit extractive development and new carbon-emitting technologies. Business as usual is rapidly diminishing the ability of native habitats to serve as sources of clean water, healthy air, buffers to climate change, and places where carbon can be naturally captured and stored. These are ecosystem services that people everywhere depend on, whether living in rural communities or major cities, whether in Latin America or Europe.

The region’s greatest stressors include mines, dams, hydraulic fracturing (fracking), overfishing, and coastal development. Governments approve these activities often without understanding the risks involved or their legal obligations to protect people and the environment. And these projects are often designed without an adequate process to inform, consult, or invite the participation of affected communities.

Systemic inequities and discrimination allow many projects to proceed despite particularly harsh impacts on people of low socioeconomic status. Indigenous and traditional people, children, women, and elders are most at risk. And fighting against ill-conceived proposals has become a dangerous business: one environmental defender in Latin America is murdered, on average, every ten days.
Latin American communities and organizations are increasingly seeking legal and technical support. Many nations in Latin America do not have environmental law organizations actively defending the public interest. When possible, AIDA fills that gap.

AIDA is the only regional organization of Latin American experts providing free legal and technical support to protect the region’s environment and communities.

Our mission is to strengthen people’s ability to guarantee their individual and collective right to a healthy environment. We do it through the development, implementation, and effective enforcement of national and international law.

The AIDA legal team is composed of Latin American professionals who work in and for Latin America. We select emblematic cases and projects in which expertise in international and comparative law can establish critical precedents. We try new approaches, expanding the application of laws and agreements beyond their usual scope.

We work in close collaboration with grassroots groups, national and regional organizations, government agencies, and international organizations. As trusted partners at every level, we are able to act as a bridge between them, and we can replicate successful strategies across the region. We also work at the nexus of the environment and human rights, bringing international human rights law to bear on environmental matters.
One of AIDA’s core values is strategic alliance. We deeply believe that the systemic changes we must achieve need a movement and will only be possible if many groups and sectors work together. We take on diverse projects that will strategically catalyze change, create or improve the law and legal tools, build understanding of key issues, and bring new perspectives on potential solutions to multiple venues.

AIDA has contributed legal expertise in nearly 20 countries of the Americas, with a focus on the tropical Andes nations, Mexico, and Costa Rica. We will continue our engagement in these areas, and prioritize expansion into Brazil, Central America, and the Southern Cone. AIDA seeks to formalize its presence in the region by registering and expanding our offices in Mexico and most likely Colombia.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Every case AIDA takes incorporates and advances three transversal concepts:

- **Environmental justice**
  Defending the rights of communities in disadvantaged situations―such as children, traditional local communities, and indigenous peoples―at risk from environmental harms.

- **Climate justice**
  Preventing activities that exacerbate climate change while advancing sustainable alternatives that respect the human rights of communities in disadvantaged situations.

- **Environmental governance**
  Strengthening and harnessing the full power of the law and public participation to defend nature and our environment.

Our commitment to these ideals serves as a high-level screen for the projects we select.
1. BRINGING CLEAN ENERGY TO LATIN AMERICA

While nearly one quarter of Latin America’s energy comes from renewable sources, the total energy matrix is still highly dependent on fossil fuels, with 41% derived from oil and its products, and 28% coming from gas. Large hydropower dams that release methane, a potent greenhouse gas, currently produce a third of the region’s electricity.

We envision a Latin America powered by clean, sustainable energy systems that respect environmental and climate integrity and human rights. In this initiative, AIDA will work simultaneously on two tracks:

A. Prevent increased dependence on fossil fuels, particularly gas and coal, and on unsustainable energy from hydropower.
B. Promote viable, clean energy alternatives that create environmental justice and respect human rights.

2. SAFEGUARDING NATURAL SYSTEMS THAT REDUCE AND MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

Terrestrial and marine ecosystems capture carbon emissions. Coral reefs, wetlands, and mangroves provide protection to coastal communities from storms and flooding. Highland forests and wetlands (páramos) capture water from fog and supply it to lowlands. Pollution, overexploitation, and degradation, among other human threats, are reducing the capacity of these natural systems to reduce climate change impacts. Latin American states have international obligations to tackle biodiversity and ecosystems loss. Building on decades of experience, AIDA will work to implement those obligations, to increase protection of these ecosystems so vital for humanity:

A. Carbon sinks
B. Critical freshwater sources
C. Highly productive marine ecosystems
Ten percent of Latin America’s population is indigenous—some 45 million people. Indigenous peoples and local communities have proven themselves the best protectors of forests, rivers, and biodiversity. These communities are also facing threats to their territories, livelihoods, and rights from the extractive, energy, and tourism industries. We envision a region where states and corporations respect indigenous and traditional communities, and pursue development in an inclusive manner that respects human rights.

In this initiative, AIDA will apply international human rights law to defend indigenous rights. Current cases address violations caused by large-scale hydropower and agriculture projects; new work will also address threats posed by mining operations affecting indigenous populations.

4. PROTECTING ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

Latin America is the most dangerous region in the world to be an environmental defender. Seven of the ten most dangerous countries are in this region. In 2016, 60% of documented killings of environmental defenders occurred here. We envision a region where environmentalists can freely express their ideas and defend water, air, land, and biodiversity without fear for their lives or integrity.

In this initiative, AIDA will develop a deeper understanding of the principal threats to the environmental defenders we work with, identify the most important needs, and collaborate with our partners and networks to increase protections.
According to the World Health Organization, air pollution is the leading environmental health risk in the Americas, causing more than 150,000 premature deaths per year, mostly among children and the elderly. Particulate matter (soot) and ozone are among the most dangerous pollutants, and are also linked with climate change. Effective policies and measures to address these emissions can improve the health of the 80% of Latin Americans who live in cities, while also reducing the impacts of climate change.

Depending on the availability of new funding and partnerships with expert organizations, AIDA will advocate for improved regulation of short-lived climate pollutants, such as particulate matter and methane, with an initial focus on Mexico City, Bogotá, and Santiago. We will apply human rights arguments and coordinate legal efforts in multiple cities to advocate for the protection of children and other populations particularly vulnerable to air pollution. We will develop and distribute information and arguments about health impacts, standards, and air-quality-monitoring protocols that can be used in advocacy for improved air-quality controls and human well-being throughout Latin America.

AIDA's team of 25 full- and part-time team members is based in eight American nations, with Co-Executive Directors in Mexico and the United States. AIDA's board of seven is largely composed of respected Latin American environmental attorneys. To meet the need for our services, we must strengthen and grow AIDA. Among other initiatives, we will:

- Add legal team members, as resources are identified, expanding our team to 30 full-time professionals by 2023.
- Add interdisciplinary capacity in communications and science.
- Expand our intern and fellowship programs, including young professionals from indigenous and local communities.
- Expand and diversify our board, adding respected leaders with philanthropic, communications, and regional expertise, as well as representatives of the populations we serve.
- Shore up administrative capacity with an organizational manager, added fundraising expertise, and human resource and IT support.
- Focus on developing funding from major donors.
- Continue to seek larger and longer-term grants from institutional funders.
- Expand streamlined efforts to increase financial support from people throughout the Americas.