

FORESTS and CLIMATE

Briefing for the G8 meeting, June 2007

Protecting ancient forests is crucial for preserving biodiversity and combating the impacts of climate change. With up to 25% of all greenhouse gas emissions coming almost exclusively from tropical forest clearance, we will only win the battle against climate change if we stop ancient forest destruction as well as cutting other greenhouse gas emissions.

Forests are caught in a vicious cycle: the destruction and degradation of ancient forests contributes to climate change while climate change has a detrimental impact on forests.

Illegal and destructive logging, along with the rapid conversion of tropical rainforests for agro-business, is having a devastating impact on forests, people and the climate.

G8 countries must act immediately to stop the deforestation and degradation of ancient forests globally by 2010. They need to:

- **finance a network of protected ancient forest areas;**
- **finance economic alternatives to logging of ancient forests;**
- **commit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation.**

Briefing, facts and figures:

The destruction of the world's forests is now being recognised as one of the main causes of climate change, second only to the energy sector.

Forests hold almost half of the world's terrestrial carbon¹ - more than any other ecosystem, playing a powerful role in mitigating the growing instability of the climate. When they are destroyed, the carbon they store is released into the atmosphere.

Up to 25% (over 1.5 billion metric tonnes) of all greenhouse gas emissions come almost exclusively from tropical forest clearance — that's more emissions than from road, air, rail and sea transportation combined.

Only one fifth of the world's original forest remains as large tracts of ancient forest² and what remains is being destroyed at an alarming rate.

Amazon: Brazil is the fourth biggest carbon emitter, not because of energy consumption or industry - but mainly because of deforestation. Most of the emissions come from the clearing and burning of the Amazon rainforest. In the last three years more than 6 million hectares of the rainforest has been lost³ – equivalent to more than 6 football fields every minute - to give way to cattle ranching and vast soya monocultures.

Indonesia: The world's third biggest carbon emitter, largely due to clearing and burning tropical rainforests. Indonesia is the world's fastest forest destroyer - an area of rainforest equivalent to 300 football pitches is destroyed every hour - earning it a listing in the

¹ Houghton, R.A. (2005) Tropical deforestation as a source of greenhouse gas emissions. In: Tropical deforestation and climate change Moutinho, P & Schwartzman, S (eds.) IPAM, Belém Brazil & Environmental Defense, Washington DC, USA. Available at www.environmentaldefense.org/documents/4930_TropicalDeforestation_and_ClimateChange.pdf

² World Resources Institute (WRI) (1997) The Last Frontier Forests: Ecosystems and Economies at the Edge. Available at http://pdf.wri.org/last_frontier_forests.pdf

³ PRODES/INPE, Brazilian Institute of Space Research

Guinness Book of Records for 2008. It has already lost 72% of its intact ancient forests and 40% of its forests completely⁴.

This alarming deforestation rate is partly being driven by increasing demand for so-called 'biofuels' produced from palm oil. Heralded as a solution to climate change, the production of palm oil is significantly contributing to climate change because large swaths of Indonesia's rainforests are being cleared to make way for palm oil plantations. Areas being targeted are mainly swamp rainforests, which hold large amounts of carbon in forms of peat. When cleared and burnt they release massive amounts of CO₂ to the atmosphere.

Congo: The carve up of the Congo rainforests is set to increase. Over 50 million hectares of rainforests in Central Africa are already controlled by logging companies – and area the size of Spain.⁵ 30% (15 million hectares) of this is held by logging companies in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)⁶ whose logging contracts were signed illegally after a 2002 moratorium on new contracts or the renewal or extension of existing ones. The DRC risks losing more than 40% of its forests by 2050, releasing up to 34.4 billion tones of CO₂⁷ (roughly equivalent to the UK's CO₂ emissions over the last sixty years.)⁸

While the destruction of ancient forests contributes to climate change, forests are also being destroyed as a result of climate change itself. A rise in temperature of just 2 degrees Celsius could lead to the irrevocable damage of many forest areas and to biodiversity - a recent report highlighted that an increase of 1.5-2.5 degrees Celsius could result in the extinction of 20 to 30 percent of global plant and animal species⁹

Aside from the ecological, social and cultural costs of climate change the economic costs are predicted to be staggering. Economist Sir Nicholas Stern warned in a report for the UK government that climate change could shrink the global economy by as much as 20%. In particular, Stern highlighted that "*curbing deforestation is a highly cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions*" and estimated that between US\$10 billion and 15 billion extra investment per year could cut emissions from deforestation by around a half, which would in turn pay us back economically many times in the future.

As the richest and the largest consuming nations in the world, the G8 countries have a direct responsibility to take leadership in tackling climate change and the forest crisis. They need to:

- provide the necessary funds to help developing countries stop deforestation and forest degradation in intact ancient forests such as the Amazon, Congo Basin and Indonesia , by 2010 and in all forests by 2020.
- actively support an immediate moratoria on industrial activities in intact forest landscapes (including in G8 countries such as the US, Canada and Russia) until land-use and conservation plans have been completed, which should include a global network of protected areas.
- reduce their consumption of timber products from the world's ancient forests

⁴ World Resources Institute (WRI) (1997) The Last Frontier Forests: Ecosystems and Economies at the Edge. Available at http://pdf.wri.org/last_frontier_forests.pdf

⁵ CBFP (2006) Les forêts du bassin du Congo: Etat des forêts 2006. Available at www.cbfp.org/documents/Les_forets_du_Bassin_du_Congo_etat_2006.pdf

⁶ Debroux, L, Hart, T, Kaimowitz, D, Karsenty, A and Topa, G (eds.) (2007) Forests in post-conflict Democratic Republic of Congo: Analysis of a priority agenda. Joint report by teams of the World Bank, CIFOR, CIRAD, AWF, Conseil National des ONG de Développement du Congo, Conservation International, GTF, Ligue Nationale des Pygmées du Congo, Netherlands Development Organisation, Réseau des Partenaires pour l'Environnement au Congo, WCS, Woods Hole Research Center, World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and WWF. Available at www.cifor.cgiar.org/publications/pdf_files/Books/BCIFOR0701.pdf

⁷ Justice, C, Wilkie, D, Zhang, Q, Brunner, J and Donoghue, C (2001) Central African forests, carbon and climate change, Climate Research, 17: 229246.

⁸ WRI (2007) Climate Analysis Indicators Tool (CAIT) Version 4.0. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. Available at <http://cait.wri.org/>

⁹ IPCC (2007) 4th Assessment report Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Available at <http://www.ipcc.ch/SPM13apr07.pdf>

- prohibit illegal timber products by adopting legislation which ensures only socially and environmentally responsible timber and wood products are sold on their markets.