

# Forest Cover

A Global Forest Coalition Newsletter on International Forest Policy

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## About Forest Cover

Welcome to the seventeenth issue of *Forest Cover*, the newsletter of the Global Forest Coalition (GFC). The GFC was established by a group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) to facilitate the informed participation of NGOs and IPOs in intergovernmental meetings related to forests. *Forest Cover* is published four times a year. It features reports on important intergovernmental meetings by different NGOs and IPOs and a calendar of future meetings. The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Global Forest Coalition, its founding members or the editors.

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## ***Ex Silvis: Will the Climate for Action on Climate Change ever Change?***

By Miguel Lovera, coordinator, Global Forest Coalition

Almost one year after the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, nature has clearly demonstrated the consequences of humankind's failure to curb climate change. And how, with the toughest of hurricane seasons in the Caribbean and the driest of dry seasons in the Amazon. If governments don't change their approach now, when will they?

With the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol, developed countries (also known as Annex I Parties) agreed to reduce their collective greenhouse gas emissions to at least 5% less than 1990 levels by 2008-2012.

However, as many would probably concur, this is likely to be way too little way too late.

Some of us – a large group, in fact, numbering hundreds of NGOs and IPOs - wanted to assess what has been done to mitigate climate change and stabilize green house gas levels. We began by looking at the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and discovered Article 4! Happily, this article insists that countries endeavor to stop the complete collapse of the climatic system. And Article 4.1(d) homes in on forests, seeking answers from governments around the world.

Surprisingly – or perhaps not - nothing has been done to comply with this obligation: nothing, nada! Some small actions have been taken under the Kyoto Protocol, but close to nothing on the forest front.

Forests are key to climatic stability. They were also reduced to a third of their original cover by human beings and, despite this, they still harbor up to 70% of the worlds known terrestrial biodiversity. Those that argue that monocultural plantations are forests are definitely oblivious of these facts. A plantation is not comparable to a forest, it is comparable to a corn field that grows very slowly. Those proponents of tree plantations as carbon reservoirs argue that they will carry great benefits for the climate. They also propose planting a few additional million hectares to produce so called “biofuels” to substitute for the use of fossil fuels.

This “silver bullet” approach comes at a very high price, as described in the article by Rully Syumanda in this edition of Forest Cover. All the potential benefits of generating “bioenergy” are outweighed by the environmental impacts of large-scale production of raw materials to supply enough biofuels to replace the oil and gas needs at contemporary consumption rates. This is unsustainable at any rate. If we are serious about replacing fossil fuels, we have to address overconsumption. Only then we would know how much is really needed and how much would fuel unsustainable and unacceptable life styles.

It is truly alarming that climate change, one of the gravest threats to humankind (and biodiversity), is being dealt with in this way. Governments are not even pretending to be looking at their direct obligations in relation to forests under the UN’s Framework Convention on Climate Change. Proposals linking climate change to action on biodiversity have also been scarce.

Forests are composed of up to 70% of all known terrestrial species and are also an effective climate stabilizer – surely they deserve more than the publication of a few papers? Real action - generating 50% of required electricity from wind and solar power, for example, or halting deforestation and the replacement of forests by tree monocultures -

should be the starting point for this action. If this happens, the climate could achieve stability as diverse ecosystems recycle and capture atmospheric carbon.

Anyway, we worry too much. And while we worry there are companies and governments doing their utmost to change the climate we live in, pumping up to the last drop of oil, tapping onto the eternal flatulence of the earth to burn our hopes for a better future.

### **The Reality of Implementing Forest-Related Obligations under the Framework Convention on Climate Change**

*By Assitou Ndinga, Senegal, coordinator Global Forest Coalition independent monitoring process*

Global concern about climate change eventually culminated in a major initiative, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Article 4.1 (d) of which states that: “All Parties, taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities and their specific national and regional development priorities, objectives and circumstances, shall:....Promote sustainable management, and promote and cooperate in the conservation and enhancement, as appropriate, of sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases not controlled by the Montreal Protocol, including biomass, forests and oceans as well as other terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems.”

Accordingly, signatories to the UNFCCC committed themselves to implementing the necessary forest-related obligations under this convention. To assess how they implement these obligations the Global Forest Coalition (GFC) sent a standardised questionnaire to representatives of a range of local stakeholder organisations, including relevant government departments, environmental organisations and academic institutions.

The results show that, in many countries, not a great deal has happened. For example, in Ghana<sup>1</sup> and Russia<sup>2</sup>, there is no agency or focal

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<sup>1</sup> Kofie R. and Okrah L., *Ghana report on Independent Monitoring of Forest Related obligations under the UNFCCC*, 2005.

point – in particular, no dedicated staff - in charge of implementation.

Similarly, in South Africa, formal protection of forests falls primarily under the national department of ‘Water Affairs and Forestry’ (DWAFF), but even this department plays no direct role in compliance with UNFCCC. On the ground, provincial government is responsible for forest management in formally protected nature reserves. It can also regulate the use of forest resources from other areas, as well as policing illegal trade in endangered or specially protected plants. Forests that fall within the network of ‘National Park’ protected areas, however, are administered separately, under a department of Environment and Tourism (DEAT). The UNFCCC focal point in South Africa, South Africa’s National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) seems to play no role in improving forest management and protection in the country.

In Germany – according to Baldus and Funck<sup>3</sup> - the entry into force of article 4.1 (d) of the UNFCCC has not triggered any changes in the status of forests under German law or their actual management.

The UNFCCC is ready to be implemented now: what are signatories waiting for?

*The independent monitoring reports on the implementation of Article 4.1(d) of the Framework Convention on Climate Change will be launched at the upcoming Conference of the Parties to the FCCC in December 2005. They will be available at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/gfc>.*

### **Branching Out: Bio “disaster” fuel - Swapping Pristine Forest for Palm Oil Plantation**

*by Rully Syumanda, WALHI, Indonesia*

Natural forest loss in Indonesia has reached crisis point. 2.8 million hectares were felled in 2004, and 3.4 million per year in 2001-2003, meaning that Indonesia probably has the

highest rate of deforestation in the world. Illegal logging is often considered to be the major problem, but in Indonesia the spread of large-scale oil palm plantations is in fact the main cause.

Oil palm plantations have already been extended into High Conservation Value Forest areas, several in water catchment zones and others in forested peat swamps, where the peat may extend to a depth of more than 3 meters (meaning that the area is supposed to be a protected area). Peat swamps affected include Riau and Jambi in Sumatra and areas in Kalimantan. Large-scale land clearing for plantations is also a major cause of the peat-land forest fires that cause most of Indonesia’s smoke haze pollution.

Forest conversion in water catchment areas also causes extensive damage. Where forests have been clear cut, soil and sand is carried down to rivers by the rain, creating sediments that make the rivers increasingly shallow. This in turn leads to flooding, particularly during periods of heavy rain. For example, flooding in Riau in 2003 caused damage amounting to about US\$76 million (the equivalent of 64% of Riau’s Annual Budget in 2002<sup>4</sup>). Flooding in Jambi province in 2004 caused damage totalling US\$22 million. Revenue from palm oil plantations cannot and does not make up for the devastating impacts that these floods have on peoples’ homes and crops.

Removing peat swamps also causes irreversible environmental damage. The large quantities of water caught up in the peat cannot be retained or trapped once the swamps are opened up. Its carbon storage functions are also lost and millions of cubic meters of carbon are released into the air<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, as has happened in Riau, sea water can no longer be kept at bay and invades well water. In the Inderagiri Hilir Regency in Riau, for example, hundreds of households could no longer use their wells after they became polluted with sea water<sup>6</sup>.

Converting forest to oil palm plantations also requires changing the soil’s PH value (its acidity or alkalinity). The cheapest way to do

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<sup>2</sup> Laletin A., *Russian Federation report on Independent Monitoring of Forest Related obligations under the UNFCCC*, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Baldus M. and Funck J., *Independent Monitoring of Forest Related obligations under the UNFCCC in Germany*, 2005.

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<sup>4</sup> Banjir Salah Siapa, WALHI Riau and Riau Spatial Planning Alliance, 2004

<sup>5</sup> Norad, 1995

<sup>6</sup> Riau Pos Daily News, 23 February 2002

this is by burning the forest. Between 2000 and 2005, more than 200 palm oil companies are thought to have burned forests as part of their concessions.

The palm oil business in Indonesia is also rife with land tenure conflicts, and is frequently associated with the use of military and police force. In 2004, for example, a private security company from America, SHIELD, murdered three people in East Tambusai Village, Rokan Hulu regency, Riau Province, following a conflict between the business PT Surya Dumai and people demanding their land back<sup>7</sup>.

Between 1988 and 2002, 479 people were reported as victims of torture and tens of people were killed in conflicts over land. For many living in areas where plantation companies are granted concessions the outlooks are bleak: lower salaries and no rights. Oil palm plantations may create thousand of jobs and local and national economic revenue, but they can also tip communities into poverty.

Palm oil is used in a wide variety of products and is also increasingly used as a biofuel. But relying on palm oil so heavily will force all of us to convert more natural forest to oil palm plantation. Population growth means that more and more fuel will be required yet less land will be available. There's not enough land to feed our energy habits as it is and it's ridiculous to say that palm oil is a sustainable product or fuel.

Draft European plans to use palm oil as a fuel have to be stopped. Such a policy would be a disaster for countries like Indonesia. Europe and others should focus on saving energy and developing truly sustainable energy sources, instead of turning to the people and remaining forests of Kalimantan and Sumatra to solve their energy problems for them.

It's time the North stopped imposing the consequences of its consumption on the ecology and livelihoods of the South. It's time to end this colonialism.

### **Reviewing Progress in the CBD Forest Program**

*By Vladimir Bocharnicov, RAIPON, Russia and Miguel Lovera, Global Forest Coalition*

The third Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) met in Bonn, 25-29 July 2005, to review the implementation of the Programme of Work (PoW) on Forest Biological Diversity. The main goals of the meeting were to prepare recommendations for the eleventh session of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD SBSTTA-11), including:

- Development of a format for forest biodiversity sections in the Third National Report on the implementation of the Convention
- Preparation of questionnaires to international organizations and members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)
- Technical input to the review process
- Technical input to the review of implementation of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas,
- Scientific and technical information on successes, challenges and obstacles to implementation of the Program of Work
- Information on the effects of the scientific and technical measures taken and tools used in implementing the Programme of Work

In relation to the need to involve Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) and local communities in the preparation of national reports, NGO representatives referred to the report of the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples to the United Nations Forum on Forests-4 (UNFF4). They focused in particular on the Russian report on traditional forest related knowledge (TFRK) (see [http://www.international-alliance.org/tfrk\\_expert\\_meeting.htm](http://www.international-alliance.org/tfrk_expert_meeting.htm)). This work illustrates Indigenous Peoples' skills in monitoring and assessing the extent and nature of environmental change. This knowledge could be very valuable in implementing the CBD's objectives, as RAIPON pointed out. However, governmental experts from Brazil and Cuba both objected to the idea of direct interventions by Indigenous Peoples, arguing that this should only take place within the context of the national reporting processes. The CBD Secretariat was also asked to prepare more comprehensive national questionnaires that would more effectively tap into the

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<sup>7</sup> WALHI Riau, 2004

capabilities of non-official sectors.

These interventions generated a rich discussion, resulting in a series of recommendations concerning analyses of national reports, including (but not limited to):

- major global and regional benefits and problems in implementing the Program of Work
- most implemented goals and/or objectives
- least implemented goals and/or objectives
- goals and/or objectives that were not implemented at all;
- conclusions on a regional basis;
- conclusions on a global basis;
- suggestions for improvement to the forest Program of Work and ways forward; and
- lessons learnt / best practice.

A representative from the FAO's Forestry Department demonstrated the Collaborative Partnership on Forests' efforts to streamline reporting methodologies (more information on this can be found at the CPF web page [www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar](http://www.fao.org/forestry/cpf-mar).) It was agreed that the reporting process could be improved by implementing joint information networks which reach out to all the actors targeted with improved questionnaires. NGO representatives also proposed that background analyses and maps – which could be periodically updated – should be included in the national reports.

On the second day, the group considered the *“Provision of information on the effects of the types of scientific and technical measures taken and tools used in implementing the programme of work”*. It was agreed that this information should be extracted primarily from the forest biodiversity section of the Third National Reports.

However, although much of this information is already available in the Secretariat's national reports, NGOs and IPOs believe that there are gaps and limitations in the type and quality of information gathered by governments and 'conventional' institutions. As a result, some of the qualitative changes affecting forests are overlooked. For example, rates of forest loss are given as gross figures for areas affected or cleared, which is useful information. However, the underlying causes and their spatial distribution, or the presence of genetically-engineered organisms, are seldom reported on.

This is a serious oversight as it limits the ability to pin-point problems and design appropriate policies and solutions.

There was a strong call from NGOs and IPOs emphasizing that the CBD Conference of the Parties should:

- encourage Parties to include Indigenous Peoples and local communities and other relevant stakeholders in the preparation of their national reports (ensuring appropriate financial support)
- carry out peer review processes once the information from the forest biodiversity section of the Third National Report has been both analyzed and synthesized.

It was also suggested by NGOs and IPOs that web-based Geographical Information Systems (GIS) technology should be used to analyze national reports. This is both feasible and would be an effective approach. Curiously, however, the expert from Finland did not think a more profound analysis of the National Reports necessary.

The third and fourth days were devoted to the elaboration of indicators for each of the targets set out in the PoW, leading to a matrix containing the targets, indicators and sources of data and information.

In conclusion, AHTEG carried out a quite remarkable amount of work. It reviewed numerous documents and publications concerning reporting on forest related obligations, and also created a series of indicators to measure implementation of the CBD's Program of Work on Forest Biological Diversity. However, it was obvious that some experts carried extra-scientific mandates for the meeting and privileged issues of 'national interest' over objectivity and common sense.

For more information, visit: [www.biodiv.org](http://www.biodiv.org).

### **Trees and the WTO – Crop or Forest?**

by Sandy Gauntlett, Pacific Indigenous Peoples Environment Coalition, Aotearoa/New Zealand

Liberalisation of the forest sector has reappeared near the top of the World Trade Organisation's negotiating agenda, as part of

the non-agricultural market access (NAMA) negotiations. Canada, Hong Kong, China, New Zealand, Thailand and the United States are collectively pushing for complete liberalisation of the sector. And complete means complete - zero tariffs, and if they have their way precious few 'non-tariff measures' either (which could include removing a wide range of standards and regulations). Laughably, these countries claim that "tariff liberalization would increase forests' intrinsic value and foster long-term planning focused on sustainability, providing substantial commercial, social and environmental benefits". But what would such changes really mean for Indigenous and local communities?

There is little doubt, for example, that large-scale agro-timber monocultures have already played a devastating role in the marginalisation of Indigenous Peoples in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Before colonisation, Aotearoa was about 85% forested. After 800 to 1000 years of Maori colonisation the country still had about 60% forest cover. Yet after just 150 years of European colonisation, forest cover declined to about 23% and remains at that level today (largely because it is protected by law).

Overall, the impact on the Maori community's way of life has been devastating, in part because of the way in which it changed their relationship with the forests. This is partly because of a shift in diet. Before European colonisation, Maori people depended on both the forest and the seas for their daily diet, which included birds and seafood. After colonisation, however, people tended to migrate to urban areas for work (where seafood is more expensive and birds largely protected). Their traditional diet has thus been replaced by a dependency on dairy products and a consequent increase in obesity rates. Couple this with the disproportionately large numbers of Maori working with agrochemicals and organochlorines in the timber industry and the fact that life expectancy amongst the Maori is about 8 to 10 years less than their European counterparts becomes understandable.

There are social impacts as well as health impacts. People's movement away from the forests and consequent urbanisation has come at a significant cost. For many Maori, their daily lives no longer bring them into contact with the Marae, the sacred open meeting area.

Some are thus losing their sense of belonging and culture, and this is evident in national statistics. Maori people represent about 15% of Aotearoa/New Zealand's population, yet they make up around 51% of the prison population, and about 80% of the gang populations involved in illegal drug trafficking and other criminal activity.

The further removal of tariff restrictions on all timber products, without distinction, would leave natural forests in all countries even more exposed to plunder than at present. This must be obvious to any government official familiar with forest-related negotiations, yet wealthy nations (encouraged by the timber industry, especially those represented in the Santa Catalina group) seem to be prepared to overlook this inconvenient side effect when negotiating in the WTO. Is this an indication of their lack of concern for other countries' forests? Or - worse still - is it indicative of their intent to loot those forest resources whilst (in theory at least) protecting their own?

In New Zealand - one of the main proponents of forests products liberalisation - it is highly likely that the focus will be on agricultural timber products provided by tree monocultures rather than Indigenous forest products (since the majority of Indigenous forests in New Zealand are already protected by law). Countries without large-scale plantations, however, might have quite different priorities to New Zealand. I would therefore like to suggest that we aim to split the unity of promoting countries by focusing on pushing for a differentiation in their proposal.

If tariffs on agro-timber products from plantations and tariffs on natural products were clearly separated, it would be much easier to generate public awareness of and opposition to increased liberalisation in relation to natural forest resources. Given current sensitivities, and developed nations' negotiators' interest in preserving their political careers, there might be some momentum to drop (or at least block) the natural forests part of the proposal.

The drawback is that this could enrage those developing country partners that do not have large scale agro-timber areas. Indeed, they might see it as an attempt by wealthier countries to ensure that their own products get easier access in comparison to those poorer

nations relying on exports of products from natural forests. However, any split in the unity of these nations should be encouraged – it gives us a chance of defeating this proposal.

In the WTO we see yet another commercially-focused negotiation that promotes old-style colonisation with little thought for the real impacts on people and the environment that they rely upon. To defeat it we are going to have to play the game the way they do - divide and conquer. Make no mistake about it - we are engaged in a battle for the survival of humanity in all of its diversity.

*For more information, please visit:*  
<http://www.wto.org>

### **Reports on Other Forest-related Meetings**

#### **...And Poverty Won**

More than 170 Heads of State came together in New York, 14-16 September 2005, to speed up implementation of the eight anti-poverty Millennium Development Goals agreed in 2000. Regrettably, they completely failed to make any real headway, creating a crisis of confidence and thereby further endangering the process itself.

The eight Goals, intended to be met by 2015, include halving the number of people suffering extreme poverty and malnutrition, achieving universal primary education, reducing child mortality rates by two thirds, reversing the loss of environmental resources and halving the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. The focus on resources includes reducing deforestation, which the UN recognizes as being of critical importance to the rural poor.

Yet, the new US Permanent Representative to the UN, John Bolton, along with other developed country representatives, succeeded in watering down any outcomes that might have led to a reversal in the net financial flows of around US\$ 230 billion per year from the poor Southern countries to the rich industrialized ones (made up from debt repayments and exploitative trade patterns).

Or, as a former Head of State once put it: "We fought a war against poverty -- and poverty won."

*For more information, please visit:*  
[www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=30311](http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=30311)

### **Bleeding the Convention of the Poor to Death**

The seventh Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification took place 17-28 October in Nairobi, Kenya. Sadly, this meeting was a perfect illustration of the fact that the leaders of the world's richest countries, meeting at the G-8 Summit in Scotland in July and at the UN's 2005 World Summit in September, had no real intention of combating poverty and further impoverishment. Their bombastic speeches were nothing but empty words.

Whilst it is generally recognized that the Convention to Combat Desertification is the Rio Convention most targeted towards meeting the needs of the poor, rich donor countries refused - once again - to provide the financial resources needed to implement the Convention effectively. Or should we say (as a frustrated negotiator put it) donors have a vested interest in "bleeding the convention to death".

This attitude caused yet another deadlock in the discussions about how to speed up the implementation of the Convention. It left the many affected countries with little hope that the Convention will ever develop into an effective instrument to halt the continued degradation of dryland forests and other dryland ecosystems that the world's poorest communities so desperately depend on.

*For more information, please visit:*  
<http://www.unccd.int>

### **Renewed Pressure to Commodify Forest Values under the ITTA**

The thirty-ninth session of the International Tropical Timber Council took place from 7 to 12 November in Yokohama, Japan. While reasonably successful in conducting its normal business, the meeting was overshadowed by the uncertain future of the International Tropical Timber Agreement, which expires on 31 December 2006. The ITTC meeting formed an opportunity for informal consultations on

outstanding issues related to the negotiations on the successor agreement to the ITTA.

Particularly worrying was a renewed push by a number of countries to include environmental services in this commodity agreement. Many NGOs and IPOs oppose such inclusion as it will lead to the further commodification of forest values, which will have detrimental impacts on Indigenous Peoples and other peoples that depend on these forest values for their livelihoods.

*For more information, please visit: <http://www.ito.or.jp> or <http://www.unctad.org>*

### **Calendar of Forest-Related Meetings**

*More information on these and other intergovernmental meetings can be found at: <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages>*

- The Europe and North Asia Forest Law Enforcement and Governance Ministerial Meeting will take place 22-25 November in St Petersburg, Russia.
- The 11th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biodiversity will take place from 28 November to 2 December in Montreal, Canada. See also the article by Vladimir Bocharnicov and Miguel Lovera. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.biodiv.org/meetings>*
- The first Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol and eleventh Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change will take place from 28 November to 9 December in Montreal, Canada. See also the *Ex Silvis* by Miguel Lovera, and the articles by Assitou Ndinga and Rully Syumanda. *For more information, please visit: <http://unfccc.int>*
- The 6th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization will take place 13-18 December in Hong Kong. See also the article by Sandy Gauntlett. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.wto.org>*
- The fourth meeting of the working group on Article 8j on traditional knowledge of the Convention on Biodiversity will take place

from 23 to 27 January 2006 in Granada, Spain. It will be succeeded by the fourth meeting of the working group on Access and Benefit Sharing of the Convention on Biodiversity, which will take place from 30 January to 3 February. The meetings will include negotiations on an international regime on biopiracy. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.biodiv.org>*

- The fourth session of the UN Conference for the Negotiation of a Successor Agreement to the International Tropical Timber Agreement will take place from 16-20 January 2006 in Geneva, Switzerland. *For more information please visit: <http://www.unctad.org>*
- The sixth meeting of the UN Forum on Forests will take place from 13-24 February in New York, USA. The meeting will try to find solutions for the many unresolved questions regarding the future of the UN Forum on Forests. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/forests>*
- The 8<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will take place from 20-31 March 2006 in Curitiba, Brazil. The meeting will discuss a broad agenda, including the international regime on biopiracy, a report of the working group to review the implementation of the forest work program of the Convention, and the Business and Biodiversity initiative. *For more information, please visit: <http://www.biodiv.org>*

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