

# Forest Cover

A Global Forest Coalition Newsletter on International Forest Policy

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## About Forest Cover

Welcome to the fourth issue of Forest Cover, the newsletter of the Global Forest Coalition (GFC). This coalition was established by a group of 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. For free subscriptions, please contact Simone Lovera at: [lovera1@conexion.com.py](mailto:llovera1@conexion.com.py)

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## ***Ex Silvis: No Way Plantations are Forests!***

*By Miguel Lovera, Coordinator, Global Forest Coalition*

The development of the expanded program of work on forest biodiversity of the Biodiversity Convention progressed substantially at the seventh session of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the Convention in November. However, foresters still seem to be running the show. The biodiversity experts haven't yet been able to overcome the politics which defines forests as any kind of land with any kind of trees.

NGOs had hoped the SBSTTA would explain to the expert group on climate change and biodiversity, as well as climate negotiators, the importance of defining forests in logical and ecosystemic terms. Instead, the SBSTTA did nothing more than recommend that a review of standard forest definitions be part of an expanded work program to be undertaken in cooperation with the UN Forum on Forests and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

Meanwhile, UNFF itself is planning to spend substantial time at its next meeting in March 2002 promoting so-called "planted forests". Yet the claim that forests can be simply

“planted” is false. This false conception has done untold environmental damage since the onset of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the emphasis on material output as a means to achieving economic goals started to dominate economic thinking.

Defining forests hazily as any land surface containing trees advances this falsehood. This definition has now replaced the concept that underlay the primordial mandate of the forestry profession: to be custodians of the forests of the nobles. Their mandate encompassed all components of forests.

Yet at present, to use the word “forestry” is to refer almost exclusively to timber production and plantations. In a few decades, especially during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, foresters abandoned their original duties and became agriculturalists. Their earlier understanding of complex living systems was reduced to a near-trivial story of commercial production. Although Jorge Luis Borges would argue that in the most trivial facts of life can be found the history of the universe, it is a fact of life that cloning trees doesn't epitomize the history of forestry.

This wouldn't be such a problem for the environment or for humans except for what they do to nature in the name of what they call “forests”. When foresters apply their vision of what “forests” are to nature, it gets degraded and simplified from ecosystems to monocultures. It is regrettable to see all this destruction undertaken by professionals who claim to be the best-trained to deal with forests' needs.

Societies all around the world have been affected by the resulting controversy. Unable to deal with the fanaticism which isolates forestry from the realities of forests, they have found it very difficult to engage in a debate about the issue. The gravest thing about this process is that, as with other chapters of the “Green Revolution”, modern forestry relies on wholesale subsidies, mainly public, paid by many of us that surely don't want to contribute to it!

## **Is the Convention on Biological Diversity up to the Task?**

*By Lambert Okrah, The Institute of Cultural Affairs-Ghana*

### **Biological Diversity**

The unprecedented rate of biological diversity loss is threatening the very survival of humanity. As a result, the governments of the world, during the UN World Summit in Rio nine years ago, decided to adopt the legally binding Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to guide their extraction, development, resuscitation and conservation of biological resources. .

Only such a bold move could have made a difference. Yet the text of the agreement is colored more by nationalistic than global interests. The agreement has also been handicapped by the refusal of the United States of America to ratify it, and even those countries that have endorsed it have not done much to implement it.

### **Forests**

Of special importance in the bid to conserve the world's biological resources is forest biological diversity. However, many foresters have contended that the CBD is oblivious to some of the challenges that confront forests. Partly for that reason, in 1995, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development set up the Ad Hoc Open Ended Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF).

As “comprehensive” actions regarding the future of forests were deliberated in numerous meetings around the world, the CBD appeared at first to confine itself to waiting for advice from the IPF and its successor, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests. Even now that a permanent United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) has emerged to replace the IPF and IFF, with a secretariat in New York, it is not very clear whether it is the CBD or the UNFF that will play the leading role on forests.

## **SBSTTA 7**

From 12-16 November 2001, delegates of the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) met in Montreal, Canada for its seventh session. The SBSTTA is supposed to provide scientific advice to the Parties to the CBD to help them make informed decisions.

Forest biodiversity was one of the main topics on the agenda. Before the meeting, the CBD had put together an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Forest Biological Diversity to advise the SBSTTA, with membership from a number of interest groups.

The report the Ad Hoc group submitted was far superior to what often emerges from such groupings. Regrettably, by the time of SBSTTA 7, the Secretariat and Bureau had given birth to two other reports of lower quality. Fortunately, neither report was treated as much more than a mere supplement to the Ad Hoc Group's original document. This was a major victory for SBSTTA.

What was perhaps more worrisome was the presence of certain foresters who had created problems earlier during IPF IFF and UNFF deliberations. Their influence in Montreal led to code words such as "forest development", which to them implies industrial plantations, being increasingly bandied about.

This clearly goes against the mandate of the CBD, which is one of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. When the convention talks about human intervention as a means of regeneration of forest biological diversity it carefully confines itself to words like "rehabilitation", "restoration" and "recovery", not "establishment of industrial mono-cultures". One of its objectives, in fact, is to help return degraded areas such as those associated with industrial plantations to an earlier form. (For the continuing influence of plantation promoters at UNFF, see also the editorial by Miguel Lovera).

Given such controversies, it is not surprising that SBSTTA 7 endorsed the proposal by the

governments of Ghana and the Netherlands to hold an expert workshop on forests to discuss contested issues emanating from the CBD, IPF, IFF and UNFF, among others.

## **Ghana Workshop**

Many in the NGO community think this expert workshop — to be hosted by Ghana from 28-30 January, 2002 and financed by the Netherlands — will be crucial.

The workshop proposes to look at the important issue of human impact on forest biodiversity and will bring together experts from Forest and Environment Ministries, NGOs, academia and research institutions. The workshop will be open, but it is hoped participation can be limited to an optimum number that can guarantee positive outcomes. Thus a maximum of about 80 participants is being planned for. Out of this number only about 35 will be sponsored, and no more than 20 participants will be from Ghana, in order to avoid domination by any one party. The selection and invitation of participants appears, however, to be in the hands of the CBD secretariat.

## **Concerns**

Some NGOs are concerned that the workshop will be used by foresters to entrench a counterproductive agenda at the CBD under the guise of "harmonizing" the CBD with the UNFF. After all, many actions recommended by the IPF and IFF, the UNFF's predecessors, actively undermine both the spirit and the letter of the Convention on Biological Diversity. However, the Ghanaian government has stated that it is determined to use the workshop as it is intended, to clarify the extent of human impacts on forest biodiversity. This, it hopes, will guide the work of both CBD and UNFF.

Yet even if this agenda can be secured, who is going to ensure that any conclusions are complied with? It is easy to get funding for a workshop and come out with positive suggestions. What is more difficult is to get the funding and the people to implement them.

One effective action might be for the CBD to send a clear message to UNFF informing it which of its proposed activities, if taken, would undermine the Convention.

### **Indigenous Peoples, Protected Areas, Participation and Traditional Knowledge**

*by Sandy Gauntlett, International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Studies, New Zealand*

The recognition of Indigenous Peoples' pre-contact land rights and access has always been a priority issue for Indigenous Peoples attending international meetings. These land rights impact on many of the issues surrounding the Convention on Biological Diversity in ways that are not understood (or not accepted) by some people we regard as colleagues.

The issue of whose land rights should be considered is a question not well-understood by some of our colleagues. Thus we commonly hear phrases like, "We must recognize the land and access rights of Indigenous Peoples living in forests."

While I have no dispute with this statement, it does not go far enough and is colonialist in mentality in that it implicitly disenfranchises, by failing to mention them, Indigenous Peoples who have been forced (by social, environmental or economic circumstances) to move *out* of their traditional lands and territories – including forests -- into urban areas. It divides Indigenous Peoples into sub-categories that we ourselves do not recognize.

Our point in making the blanket demand for recognition of the land and territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples is that you do not solve the inequities afflicting one group of people by perpetuating injustices against another group. We are Indigenous Peoples and we will not be pitted against each other in our struggle for justice.

The issue of recognition of Indigenous Peoples' territories in relation to protected

areas is not a simple question of recognizing Indigenous boundaries, although that is a part of the struggle. Rather it is a complex strategy that asks for recognition of traditional territories, recognition of the contribution that Indigenous Territories have made to the preservation of biodiversity and recognition of the traditional knowledge and methodologies of Indigenous Peoples in respect of the protection of biodiversity.

The imposition of protected areas that cut across Indigenous Peoples' Territories is both colonialist and narrow in its outlook. After decades and centuries of plundering our resources, the descendants of our colonizers now decide to protect our lands from us, rather than with us.

Adequate and meaningful participation is perhaps the best understood of the issues facing Indigenous Peoples, and that may well be because NGOs have themselves faced a struggle for recognition. However, the difference between Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) and NGOs is the issue of sovereignty. As Indigenous Peoples, we are a part of a struggle for recognition of our sovereign rights as, to use the words of the Maori language, *Tangata Whenua* (first peoples of the land). The implications of that struggle for representation within all levels of decision-making are obvious, and we have consistently asked for the right to select our representatives based on traditional divisions rather than imposed colonial assumptions.

Take the example of participation of Indigenous Peoples from Northern nations. While funding is provided for IPO participation, many donor governments stipulate that the money be spent on ensuring representation from Southern nations. The assumption is that the governments of the North will fund participation of their own Indigenous Peoples. While in some instances this has been the case, there is a danger that the governments in question will as a result try to arrogate to themselves the power to handpick the Indigenous representatives they want, rather than relying on the kind of self-

selection process that prevails in Southern countries. In no way is this meant as a criticism of those Indigenous Peoples who have represented Northern nations. Rather, it is meant as an indictment on the process itself and the lack of safeguards from political influence.

### **Traditional Knowledge**

While there is wide recognition of the value of incorporating traditional knowledge into colonial mechanisms, there is less widespread recognition of the need for respect and protection of that knowledge. The current debate surrounding genetic engineering going on in many parts of the world is a classic example of the lack of respect for traditional values and knowledge. Indigenous Peoples have consistently expressed strong reservations about (in particular) the cross-species experimentation going on because of the implications for our belief systems of that research. Yet, in most cases, the research has been allowed to continue without adequate discussion of the social, spiritual and cultural repercussions of those projects.

### **Sinking in Marrakech**

*By Yuri Onodera, Friends of the Earth-Japan*

While forests were a big sticking point at the Bonn climate negotiations earlier this year, they were not so prominent at the Marrakech talks concluded on 9 November. Yet several agreements were reached at the meeting – known officially as the Seventh Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Framework Convention on Climate Change – on the use of trees as so-called carbon “sinks”.

### **Annual Sinks Inventory**

A contentious issue regarding “sink” accounting is whether or not annual greenhouse gas inventories required of industrial countries must include “sink” activities. With Russian methodologies put in question, many experts have predicted that Russia will not be able to fulfill the technical prerequisites it needs to market carbon credits from so-called “flexible mechanisms” including “sinks”.

Yet suspending Russia from carbon trading would prevent Japan from buying credits from one of its largest potential suppliers. This is a matter of special concern to the East Asian nation since, given its considerable emission growth in recent years, it is likely to miss its reduction target. Unsurprisingly, an unholy Japanese-Russian alliance in Marrakech railed against making technical reliability in carbon accounting legally binding. According to the decision finally reached, “sinks” inventories have to be submitted annually, but their contents will not have any implications for their capability to participate in carbon trading. .

### **CDM “Sink” Projects**

In Bonn, countries agreed to allow one of the Kyoto institutions – the Clean Development Mechanism, which allows Northern countries to invest in carbon-conserving projects in Southern countries in exchange for emission credits that provide a permission to pollute -- to include afforestation and reforestation projects.

“Sink” projects will also be allowed to benefit from a simplified project approval procedure, even though this procedure was originally meant to apply only to small-scale renewable and efficiency CDM projects. Inclusion of cheap “sink” projects undermines the potential of these relatively high-cost, yet more worthwhile, projects. Hastily developed criteria and rules for “sink” projects could risk negative social and environmental impacts upon local communities and their environment.

### **Terms of Reference for “Sink” Projects**

According to the Bonn agreement, COP 9 is to adopt the definitions of and modalities of “sink” project activities carried out under the CDM. Due to opposition from the US, Canada and Australia, COP 7 failed to develop Terms of Reference which would give the IPCC and other bodies a mandate to examine the impacts of “sink” activities.

Action on this question was postponed until the next subsidiary meeting in June 2002, prior to which an expert workshop will be organized. It is crucial that definitions and modalities of “sinks” be based on sound science and are not pre-judged by the prompt-start “sink” projects under the CDM.

### **Public participation**

Concerned about the big push for carbon “sink” projects, NGOs have launched Sink Watch and CDM Watch in order to develop local groups' capacity to monitor and draw attention to the negative impacts brought about by these forthcoming projects.

Officially, the public will be allowed to comment on carbon “sink” projects. Yet opportunities for doing so are inadequate even compared to those available for ordinary World Bank projects. At COP 7, those opportunities were further reduced through clauses introduced by Russia, Australia and Canada. Nonetheless, these are still considerable opportunities left to use to improve or fight socially or environmentally hazardous projects involving “sinks”, including plantations of genetically-modified trees.

The Marrakech agreement is contained in UN document no. FCCC/CP/2001/CRP.17. For more information, please visit <http://www.unfccc.de>.

### **Micro-Grants Facility on Underlying Causes Launched**

*By Simone Lovera, Global Secretariat, Underlying Causes Initiative*

The Underlying Causes Initiative was established in 1997 by a large group of NGOs, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations, UN Organizations and Governments to analyze and address the underlying causes of forest loss at the global, regional and national levels. It originally focused on organizing global and regional workshops as part of the intersessional process of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests. The results of these workshops were widely

disseminated, both at the IFF and at the meetings of the Biodiversity Convention.

Recently, with support from the French Government, the Initiative has set up a micro-grants facility to support the analysis of the underlying causes of forest loss at the national level. Small grants of up to US\$5000 are available for national NGOs, Indigenous Peoples Organizations and others interested in organizing workshops to analyze the underlying causes of forest loss in their countries. Workshops should involve representatives from all relevant governmental and non-governmental sectors and help develop, in a participatory manner, ways of addressing the underlying causes of forest loss. They should also involve media and politicians, and a strategy should be developed to disseminate results of the workshops widely.

For more information on the criteria and outline for project proposals please contact the Global Secretariat of the Underlying Causes Initiative, attn. Simone Lovera at: [lovera1@conexion.com.py](mailto:lovera1@conexion.com.py)

### **Report on Other Forest-Related Meetings**

#### **International Tropical Timber Council Announces New Action Plan**

The International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC), which met from 29 October to 3 November in Yokohama, Japan, has launched a new action plan for the International Tropical Timber Organization.

The plan sets six major goals for the period 2002 – 2006, on issues varying from promoting tropical timber from sustainably managed sources to supporting activities to secure the tropical forest estate and increased market transparency.

The ITTC also launched a number of new activities to combat illegal trade of timber. For more information please visit: <http://www.itto.or.jp>.

## **Doha and the Everything-but-Development Round**

You want to organize a high-level meeting without having to worry about demonstrations or other expressions of public opinion disturbing the gathering? Welcome to Doha, Qatar!

The Middle-Eastern host country of the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) didn't even need to bother repressing street demonstrations. The visa restrictions for the meeting – the first after Seattle, where 50,000 demonstrators supported Southern countries in their opposition to a new trade round – made sure that there were hardly any in the first place. Globalization and free movement of goods may have been on the agenda, but no more than 650 international representatives of civil society were allowed to cross the Qatari border.

This open ban on manifestations of public discontent was mirrored by the lack of democracy during the WTO meeting itself. Southern countries were completely marginalized. Their comments on draft negotiation texts were neglected, so-called consensus texts reflected the position of the US government alone, and only carefully-selected "Friends of Free Trade" were appointed facilitators of main negotiation groups. The results were then pushed down the throats of the South in small "green room"-style meetings.

India stood out as one country opposing this highly undemocratic and neo-colonial style of decision-making. Thanks to its vehement opposition, international investment, government procurement and other so-called "Singapore issues" will not be included in the WTO negotiations before an explicit consensus has been reached on the modalities of these negotiations at the Fifth Ministerial Conference. This implies that in theory, each Southern country is able to block the negotiations on these contentious issues.

However, the South lost out on most other issues. Industrialized countries may have claimed that this new set of trade negotiations was to become a "development round", but the fact is that no negotiations will be launched on issues that "developing countries" actually pushed for, such as: the needs of small economies and least developed countries and the relationship between trade, debt and finance.

Doha did launch negotiations on issues like non-agriculture products; rules on anti-dumping and subsidies; and a set of environmental issues, including the relationship between Multilateral Environmental Agreements like the Biodiversity Convention and the WTO. This might look like good news for sustainable development. But the text on dumping, an activity that has led to the disruption of numerous sustainable agricultural economies as it leads to unfair competition, is extremely vague and does not even set a concrete deadline for the phase-out of these inequitable practices. And many people fear that the environmental negotiations will lead to an expansion of the dominance of the WTO over environmental agreements instead of vice versa.

Meanwhile, the "Everything-but-Development-Round", as it has been baptized by NGOs, is bad news for forests. Further cuts in tariffs on timber will lead to more commercial logging. Eco-labels and other non-tariff measures are under increasing pressure. And further trade liberalization in the agricultural sector will lead to more forest conversion for large-scale export-oriented agriculture.

With negotiations on international investment and a restriction on sustainable government procurement policies hanging like a sword of Damocles above the trade negotiations in the coming years, all efforts should focus on ensuring developing countries feel strong enough to say no to a comprehensive new trade round two years from now.

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

### Calendar of Forest-Related Meetings

For more information please visit:  
<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages>.

- Second Prepcom for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), 28 January - 8 February 2002, New York.
- Third Prepcom for the WSSD, 25 March - 5 April 2002, New York
- Fourth Prepcom for the WSSD, 27 May - 7 June 2002, Indonesia
- \*\* World Summit on Sustainable Development, 24 August - 2 September 2002, Johannesburg, South Africa. The regional preparatory meetings will decide the main agenda items for the WSSD, but they will undoubtedly include international environmental governance, the impacts of globalization, and poverty reduction. For more information, please visit: <http://www.un.org/rio+10/>.
- World Social Forum, 31 January – 5 February, 2001, Porto Alegre, Brazil. This forum has grown to be one of the most important annual gatherings of civil society alliances. Its agenda features globalization, human rights, cultural diversity and strengthening social justice and participatory democracy. For more information please visit: <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>.
- Meeting of the Ad Hoc Intersessional Working Group on Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biodiversity, 4 – 8 February 2002, Montreal. The working group will continue its deliberations on the need to protect and share equitably the benefits of traditional knowledge. For more information please visit: <http://www.biodiv.org>.

- \*\* Second Session on the UN Forum on Forests, 4 – 15 March 2002, San Jose, Costa Rica. Forest conservation will be one of the main themes of this meeting. For more information please visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/forests>.
- UN International Conference on Financing for Development, 18 – 22 March 2002, Monterrey, Mexico. Despite vehement opposition by the US, some innovative proposals like a global carbon tax are still among the issues to be discussed at this high-level meeting. For more information please visit: <http://www.un.org/esa/ffd>.
- Sixth Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 8 – 19 April 2002, The Hague, The Netherlands. One of the main agenda items for this meeting is the adoption of an expanded medium-term work program on forest biodiversity. See also the articles by Sandy Gauntlett and Lambert Okrah. For more information please visit: <http://www.biodiv.org>.

(\*\* meetings at which GFC can facilitate Southern NGO/IPO participation)

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