



Forest Day 3

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The speech given by Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, United Nations Special Envoy on Climate Change

Esteemed delegates,

Let me start by thanking Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) for so clearly focusing on the link between forests and climate change.

Leaders from the whole world assemble here in Copenhagen these days because we need to curb global warming.

All the nations of the world are focused on how to reach an agreement which will effectively limit the share of green house gases in the atmosphere.

To succeed, all countries need to contribute, consistent with their capabilities, and all major sources of emissions must be regulated.

Alarmingly, we are currently destroying forests at a rate that generates 17 percent of our global annual carbon emissions. This accounts for almost a fifth of global man made greenhouse gas emissions. It goes without saying:

If deforestation continues at the current level, there is simply no way we are going to reach our target of keeping the increase in global mean temperature under two degrees Celsius.

By preserving and better managing our forests, global carbon emissions can be significantly and rapidly reduced, at a reasonable cost, while we protect the livelihoods of local communities and indigenous peoples. This will also contribute to maintaining biodiversity, rainfall patterns and soil quality, and help countries adapt to climate change.

“Our Common Future”, the report we published more than 20 years ago, was one of the first international documents that addressed the issue of global warming. Here we pointed to deforestation as a cause of global warming and warned that *“More than 11 million hectares of tropical forests are destroyed per year and this, over 30 years, would amount to an area about the size of India”*.

I’m sorry to say that time has proven us right. According to FAO figures, there has been no observable reduction in the global deforestation rate since 1987. We are still on our way towards destroying an area the size of India by 2017.

On the one hand, the climate crisis can help us save the world's forests.

Yes, paradoxically enough, the climate crisis not only *can*, but indeed *must*, catalyze a salvage operation for the world's forests. If we are to survive, we simply have to stop destroying our biggest terrestrial carbon store, the forests.

Scientists also warn that continued global warming could create a massive forest die-back were forests convert from being massive "sinks" of carbon to becoming a gigantic additional source of carbon emissions.

On the other hand, forests can contribute to solving the climate crisis.

Forests have to play a key role in our fight against climate change. Reports on the potential of forests in climate change mitigation indicate that stopping deforestation and promoting afforestation and reforestation could deliver 30 percent of the cost effective potential. This will be important both to sustain public support over time and to minimize negative effects for the global economy.

There are few areas where the mutual interests between the developed and developing countries are as obvious and tangible as in the negotiations on a mechanism for "Reduced emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, enhancement of carbon stocks, conservation and sustainable management of forests in developing countries", also known under the less breathtaking name "REDD-plus".

Two overarching commitments are needed to get REDD+ "off the ground":

Firstly, the developed nations must commit to compensate the developing nations economically for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and for enhancing the storage of carbon in their forests.

Secondly, the developing nations must commit to produce these reductions in environmentally, socially and economically sustainable ways. This must be done in a transparent and verifiable manner and the rights of the people living off the forests must be respected.

Unlocking the potential of forests to climate change mitigation represents a major opportunity for world leaders to show real responsibility and leadership here in Copenhagen.

There seems to be broad agreement between the parties in the negotiations that REDD+ should be included in the post 2012-climate regime.

However, there is much less agreement on *how* the REDD-mechanism should be designed. We now need progress on this key challenge!

Forests are under threat and time is of the essence. These are some essential decisions that would facilitate urgent action on REDD+

A financing mechanism to cover the up-front costs of developing countries' preparations for REDD, and to pay the developing countries for verified emission reductions from forests.

A phased approach, that allows developing countries in varying circumstances of preparedness for REDD to get involved.

An incentive structure that is performance based and designed to stimulate higher quality monitoring, reporting and verification.

A process to finalize negotiations on the detailed design of the mechanism within a year.

An Informal Working Group on Intermediate Funding of REDD was established by world leaders for the G20-meeting in April this year. According to them the world could achieve a 25% reduction in global deforestation rates by 2015. This would cost 15 to 25 billion Euros, and reduce CO₂-emissions by 7 billion tones between 2010 and 2015.

Such an initiative would deliver far greater mitigation, at far lower cost, than any other proposal that is currently on the table for the coming years. This in itself should inspire the north and the south to come together in identifying workable solutions, and soon! □

If key decisions on REDD+ are included in the outcome of next week's high-level negotiations, the prospects for the worlds' climate and our forests will be immensely improved.

In the midst of all this, we need to remember that forests are more than carbon sinks.

Some 1.6 billion people – almost 20 percent of the world population – rely heavily on forests for their livelihoods. More than 2 billion people, a third of the world's population, use biomass fuels, mainly firewood, to cook and heat their homes. Billions rely on traditional medicines harvested from the forests. In some 60 developing countries, hunting and fishing on forested land supplies over a fifth of protein requirements.

The world's forests contribute billions – if not trillions – of dollars to the global economy through biodiversity, soil conservation and flood control. Nearly 60 percent of all global water run off comes from forests. More than half of all our species of animals and plants are found in tropical forests.

These multiple values and functions of the world's forests have important implications for any discussions on the role of forests within climate change mitigation. Addressing climate change offers a wide range of potential added benefits. However, there are major risks if such mitigation efforts are poorly designed and implemented.

While we have to act fast, we also must ensure the environmental integrity as well as respect for human rights and social and environmental safeguards.

As we leave Copenhagen, we need to be prepared to urgently initiate large scale, global action on REDD Plus!

I can hardly think of any better transition between the 2009 UN Year of Climate Change and the 2010 UN Year of Biodiversity than the establishment of a REDD+ mechanism that helps us halt the loss of forests in developing countries.

It can also be an immensely important contribution to the social and economic development of many developing nations.

Guyana is a case in point, a country the size of Great Britain, and one of South-Americas poorest nations. More than 75 percent of Guyana is covered by large intact tropical forests. Under the leadership of President Bharrat Jagdeo, a national "Low Carbon Development Strategy" has been worked out.

Guyana will seek economic and social development for its people without going the "traditional route" of deforestation and increased consumption of fossil energy. Finance for this low carbon development is sought from a REDD+ mechanism, among others. Reductions in forest emissions will be reinvested in activities that will spur economic and social development in an environmentally friendly manner, while adapting to climate change.

Improved protection and management of forests is also important for adaptation to the effects of climate change. Intact or well-managed forests have greater resilience towards the effects of a changing climate. Keeping or enhancing this resilience is an investment in securing vital ecosystem services such as energy and water supply.

An effective deal on reduced deforestation and sustainable land-use will also help raise agricultural productivity, contributing to increased food security in tropical countries.

The need for social and environmental safeguards

Forests play an important role in the fight against poverty by constituting a safety net. Sustainable development means we are not only focusing on climate change mitigation for the benefit of future generations. Life and opportunities for present generations are also of the essence.

While respecting rights and involving the affected stakeholders in the design and implementation of REDD+ is a moral, and to some extent also formal, obligation, this is *in fact* also the only way to make REDD work. Unless REDD is designed and implemented in ways that gain the support of the affected population, the results will not last. We depend on its wise design and implementation.

REDD+ is a mechanism for transfer of funds from developed to developing nations.

Any national REDD+ strategy should address governance issues, including corruption. Full transparency in all transfers of funds into the REDD+ participating countries, as well as transparency on all allocations of these funds within the countries would be a contribution to this end. Involvement and participation of civil society in the implementation of national

REDD+ strategies is an important aspect also in this context.

Safeguards are also needed to ensure that a REDD+ mechanism does not create incentives for converting natural forests to monoculture plantations.

We need to learn quickly

REDD+ is a new and ambitious concept. There are definitely many useful experiences to draw from previous efforts in reducing deforestation, improving forest management and participatory processes for management of natural resources, which can help us avoid repeating old mistakes.

However, REDD is also in many ways a "terra incognita". The mechanism has the potential to change the economic logic and social circumstances that contribute to rapid destruction of tropical forests.

It is imperative that we learn quickly as we explore this new and ambitious concept.

CIFOR and other research institutes as well as non-governmental organizations will have important roles to play in documenting and disseminating lessons learned. I am sure you will fill this role with excellence.

Forest and climate issues have never been higher on the political agenda than today. Judging from the size of this audience, and the extensive number of deliberations to take place here today, there is clearly significant attention to these issues also in the scientific communities and among civil society organizations. There is reason to be optimistic.

So let us sum up: We know what to do. We know what it takes to do it. We can save the world's remaining tropical forests, and help save the climate.

Let us all help our leaders make the right decisions over the coming crucial days.

Thank you.

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