

The Forests Now Declaration: “Forests Now in the Fight Against Climate Change”

If we lose the world's forests, we lose the fight against climate change. Human induced climate change is real and upon us. Deforestation in the tropics and sub-tropics contributes between 18 and 25 percent of global carbon emissions, second only to the use of fossil fuels. Policy debates have been dominated by clean energy solutions, yet forests indisputably offer one of the largest opportunities for cost effective and immediate action and must now be treated with equal urgency. Mitigation must continue across all sectors, including additional limits on industrial emissions, but efforts to meet vital reduction targets by 2030 will be negated unless we tackle emissions from forests now.

This is not just about carbon. Tropical forests, their soils and peatlands absorb and store carbon, but they also support half the species of life on Earth. This complex of biodiversity maintains our atmosphere and provides vital ecosystem services upon which all of humanity depends. These services include rainfall generation, regional climate regulation, habitat conservation, watershed protection, and soil stabilisation – at local to global scales. Every person on the planet benefits from these services, but none of us pay for them.

Developing nations are the stewards of the world's tropical forests. They are not responsible for climate change, but its effects will fall heavily on those with the least resources to adapt. Their forests sustain the livelihoods of 1.4 billion of the world's poor, and with no other source of fuel, fodder or income many of them have no choice but to degrade forests to survive. Unless addressed urgently, climate change will lead to decreased agricultural production, increased poverty, forced migration and human conflict. Dealing with forests now will help the poor and address food, energy and environmental security for everyone – increasing the likelihood of meeting the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Forest peoples, communities and governments need real incentives to maintain and grow their forest capital. Deforestation and forest degradation are driven by external demands – for timber, beef, soya and biofuels – which destroy trees for land, raising the stakes of global warming. Yet tropical forests continue to be excluded from carbon markets that could provide the alternative strategies needed. Instead, perverse incentives are in force, encouraging continued conversion and degradation of forests and discouraging their restoration and capacity to contribute to sustainable development. The science is now clear and the technology is available, however conservation alone has proven no match for commerce. There is not enough donor funding available to have the large-scale impact necessary, but new market mechanisms can sustainably provide the additional sources of finance required.

Action on forests now is a win against climate change, a win for vital forest ecosystems, and a win for the whole of humanity.

We therefore call on Governments to:

- 1** Ensure that carbon credits for reduced emissions from deforestation and the protection of standing forests are included in all national and international carbon markets, especially those created by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- 2** Simplify and expand effective carbon market rules, including the Clean Development Mechanism, to encourage reforestation, afforestation and sustainable forest management.
- 3** Include tropical forest and land use carbon credits in the European Union Trading Scheme, while maintaining strong incentives to reduce industrial emissions.
- 4** Encourage early action and new market mechanisms that recognise the value of carbon stocks and forest ecosystem services, and support appropriate voluntary carbon market standards.
- 5** Provide assistance for developing nations to build capacity to fully participate in the carbon markets, and to evaluate the ecosystem services their forests provide.
- 6** Incentivise the regeneration and sustainable use of degraded land and ecosystems, and remove incentives that encourage forest destruction.