

Biodiversity and the root causes of deforestation

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Friends of the Earth International

MEDIA ADVISORY

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GREAT LAND GRAB THREAT AT U.N. CLIMATE TALKS IN GHANA

ACCRA (GHANA), 19 August 2008 – Delegates attending the United Nations climate talks in Accra on 21st – 27th August will focus on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries (REDD) but environmental campaigners are warning against the inclusion of forests in carbon markets.

Friends of the Earth International warns that the inclusion of forests in carbon markets enables developed countries to avoid real carbon emissions reductions at home.

Further, any proposal that increases the value of forests may trigger a rapid increase in land rights' abuses due to a rapid expansion of state and / or corporate control over forests without regard to the customary or territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent communities.

Campaigners believe that the negotiations are focusing excessively on finance and not on the root causes of deforestation, such as our consumption of biofuels, meat and timber products.

Belmond Tchoumba, Friends of the Earth International coordinator of the Forest and Biodiversity Programme said: "If the value of their forests increases, they may face governments and corporations willing to go to extreme lengths to wrest their forests away from them. Delegates are focusing primarily on finance but to stop deforestation, land rights must be centre stage. Yet these UN climate talks shamefully continue to take place without any meaningful participation by Indigenous Peoples."

Despite the fact that Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent communities have been protecting forests for millennia, they often have no formal land title. Many have been forcibly and even violently evicted from their territories.

60 million Indigenous Peoples are dependent on forests for their livelihoods, food and medicines. These people have already been severely impacted by deforestation, in particular to grow crops and agrofuels for export.

Friends of the Earth International is strongly opposing the inclusion of forests in carbon trading initiatives as this “offsetting” promotes business-as-usual pollution in industrialised countries and diverts attention from real measures to tackle climate change.

Kate Horner, International Climate Campaigner, Friends of the Earth US said: “Any agreement on forests must tackle the root causes of deforestation, including halting agrofuels targets, timber products, meat consumption and expanding agricultural production. Northern countries must radically reduce unsustainable consumption instead of trying to buy their way out of emission reduction obligations through offsetting.”

Forests are a key component of the earth’s carbon and hydrological cycles and are now recognised as being fundamental to our efforts to stop runaway climate change. Some 18% of the world’s man-made greenhouse gas emissions come from what is referred to as the “land use change and forestry” sector (IPCC, 2007). Yet forests themselves are being impacted by climate change and may be losing their ability to regulate the planet’s climate. Critically, if global temperatures increase more than 2 degrees centigrade, tropical forests could switch from acting as carbon sinks, to being net sources of carbon emissions.

Campaigners are demanding that Northern governments take the lead in radically reducing their emissions and meet their obligations for financial transfers to the South, based on climate debt, for mitigation and adaptation that are independent from and additional to emission reduction obligations.

This would include finance and technology that would support developing countries’ just transitions towards low carbon economies.

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