



global witness

PRESIDENT JAGDEO'S VISIT TO LONDON WEDNESDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2009

Global Witness is hosting an in-depth discussion with the President of the Republic of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo, in London on Wednesday 18th November 2009, from 3 to 5pm.

The focus of the discussion will be the opportunities and risks presented by a UN deal on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) and its potential to deliver significant environmental and economic benefits to Guyana, its forests and its people.

There will be short presentations from the President and the Chairperson of the National Toshios Council (leader of indigenous peoples' groups) as well as Global Witness and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), followed by an open Question and Answer session in which all guests will have the opportunity to participate.

If you wish to join us and bring your experience and knowledge to bear on the debate please contact Katherine Thomson kthomson@globalwitness.org. This is an invitation-only event and space is limited. The meeting is not at Global Witness. A map and directions to the meeting venue will be provided to those making a reservation.

Background on REDD

The world is witnessing an unprecedented interest in forests in light of widespread recognition that their protection and regeneration is essential to addressing climate change. Negotiations for a mechanism to provide incentives for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD) were initiated with the [Bali Action Plan](#) agreed by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2007.

While it is looking less likely that a new legally binding agreement to address climate change will be concluded in Copenhagen, an agreement on REDD is looking increasingly likely. A well constructed REDD agreement has the potential to protect forests on a global scale – a goal that has eluded policy makers, the timber industry and campaigners for decades. However, a poorly constructed REDD agreement which allows 'business as usual', provides perverse incentives, or fails to provide for effective monitoring could prove disastrous for the world's forests and the people that live in and depend upon them. Business as usual is not a viable option if we are to win the battle against climate change.

Three years ago, President Jagdeo expressed willingness to place the country's forest estate under protection. Since Bali, Guyana has been at the forefront of developing REDD and is likely to be the first country with a "REDD readiness proposal" approved under the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility.

Guyana's position on REDD

Guyana lies at the heart of the Guiana Shield, one of the last four intact rainforests in the world. The forested areas of Guyana make up over 85% of its total land area, some 18 million hectares. Guyana also has amongst the highest levels of biodiversity of any country in the world, with approximately 8,000 plant species, half of which are endemic. The forests contain more than a thousand tree species. At the same time, in 2005 floods wiped out the equivalent of 60% of the country's GDP.

For this reason the President has put Guyana at the forefront of debates on how to tackle climate-change through paying to keep tropical forests standing. In June 2009 Guyana's Office of the President published a draft [Low Carbon Development Strategy](#) – the first country to do so. This started a discussion in Guyana and internationally on the tension between protecting rainforests and pursuing economic development. A three month process of [consultation / information dissemination](#) was recently completed, and Guyana is now working on a revised strategy.

Guyana's potential as a REDD ready country attracted the attention of the [Norway International Climate and Forest Initiative](#) and Norway and Guyana signed a cooperation agreement on 9 November 2009. It represents a pilot REDD mechanism whereby Norway will provide financial support to Guyana in proportion to Guyana's success in limiting emissions. President Jagdeo stated at the launch, "We want to avoid the high-carbon development trajectory that today's developed world followed." Norway has committed US\$30 million in 2010 and stated its assistance to Guyana could reach US\$250 million by 2015.

Global Witness's position / areas for discussion

Global Witness has been actively engaged in the REDD negotiations as part of our work on forest governance and climate change, and submitted [our comments to Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy](#) last month.

We are also finalising a report informing the development of a monitoring system for REDD in all countries, based on lessons learned from existing systems, particularly Independent Forest Monitoring and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Billions of dollars are expected to flow into forest-rich nations, many of which suffer from weak governance, a key underlying driver of deforestation and forest degradation. The risks of elite capture, carbon fraud, involvement of organised crime, inequitable distribution and even conflict are high.

For REDD to work, Global Witness believes countries need to build sound and equitable national implementing mechanisms through multi-stakeholder processes and gain the confidence of investors. Essential to this is a monitoring system that is broad, transparent, inclusive and able to provide early warning to detect and correct failures. Moreover, enforcement agencies need to become engaged in the negotiations to ensure a practical and enforceable outcome.

Other concerns are that, given the complexity of the rules, the opportunities for "gaming", and the positions of some countries actively engaged in the negotiations, REDD finance may not reduce deforestation and forest degradation but could in the end subsidise large-scale logging operations and lead to perverse outcomes such as conversion of natural forests to plantations. Moreover, provisions to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and forest dependent communities and ensure their engagement in the design and implementation in REDD in all participant countries are not yet resolved.

The meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss these and other issues with the President of a country at the forefront of implementing a low carbon approach to development, and one which has already received the backing of international donors.

Other participants

The meeting is open to NGOs, academics, government officials and parliamentarians. Global Witness is also inviting some of our main supporters. Some members of the media will also be present and the event may be recorded.

Tentative format

The meeting aims to provide a forum for a free exchange of ideas and views on the role of forests and other land-use policy decisions which are critical to mitigating climate change, through the following presentation:

- Introduction
- Presentation by President Jagdeo of Guyana
- Presentation by Chairperson of the National Toshias Council of Guyana
- Response from Dr Rosalind Reeve, head of forests at Global Witness
- Presentation by IIED on the consultation process for Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy
- Questions and Answers
- Concluding remarks by the meeting chairperson