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HIGH HOPES FOR FORESTS MAY BE SHATTERED IN COPENHAGEN ***REDD Text Needs Major Revisions to Produce Workable Treaty***

Copenhagen – Talk that an agreement to address deforestation will be the silver lining at Copenhagen hangs under a cloud as climate change negotiations open today. Wide expectations that the United Nations initiative to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation in developing countries (REDD) could be one of its few tangible outcomes are shadowed by inadequate language in the REDD negotiating text¹ and alarmingly low ambitions for reducing fossil fuel emissions at the talks, according to forest and climate experts of the Ecosystems Climate Alliance (ECA).

“We must save forests to save the climate, but saving forests alone will not prevent dangerous climate change,” said Bill Barclay of Rainforest Action Network, one of ten NGOs which constitute ECA. “REDD only works as part of a comprehensive climate deal at Copenhagen that both reduces fossil fuel emissions and protects the world’s remaining tropical forests.”

The heavily-bracketed REDD text which emerged from the November talks in Barcelona and will serve as basis for negotiations in Copenhagen still contains:

- no explicit language that will ensure an objective of protecting intact natural forests;
- no provisions to monitor vital social, environmental and governance safeguards in developing countries;
- no text addressing the social and economic forces which drive demand for forest products and result in continued forest destruction;
- no accounting of the massive emissions from peat soils;
- inadequate protection for the rights of Indigenous peoples; and
- inadequate safeguards for the conservation of biological diversity.

“We’re seeing excitement in the media about forest protection in the climate treaty,” said Dr. Rosalind Reeve of Global Witness. “If the U.N. implements a treaty without the rules and monitoring needed to combat weak governance and corruption in REDD-eligible countries, however, REDD will be a disaster.”

Charismatic but controversial, REDD has become a popular idea but is plagued by potential problems on the ground. To be successful, REDD must actually save forests, which means strong safeguard language and an overall climate change treaty that avoids massive die-off of forests due to warming temperatures – a tipping point widely agreed to be probable if temperatures climb two degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels.

Many options appear conceivable for a REDD agreement and ECA stresses that the ground may shift quickly. Portions of the current text may be inserted into a proposed COP15 agreement, variously rumored to be the “Shared Vision” document from Barcelona, or a document said to be circulating among Annex 1 (developed) countries, or others yet unknown. A non-binding, “political” agreement, however, will likely contain only a short section on REDD and refer to a separate, subsidiary decision.

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ECA is also tracking the first-week meetings of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA) which provides methodological guidance for activities relating to REDD. SBSTA will consider a draft decision from June meetings in Bonn, Germany which will affect any potential REDD treaty.

REDD monies are projected to help developing countries protect their remaining intact natural forests and reduce the approximately 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions caused by deforestation, forest degradation and peatland destruction. Estimated sums required to implement REDD are €15-25 billion² from 2010-15 to support preparatory activities and proxy-based results (assuming 25% REDD implementation), and €7-14 billion³ per year by 2020 for fully measured, reported and verified emissions reductions and removals (assuming 50 percent REDD implementation). But some experts challenge those figures as far too low to achieve the projected levels of emissions reductions.

Meanwhile, disarray prevails on forest management accounting for developed countries (known as LULUCF for “Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry”) in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations (AWG-KP). Countries have put forward various loopholes that will allow each to pick and choose their own reference level year, effectively allowing them to erase increases in greenhouse gas emissions from forest management in their accounting.

“Countries view REDD and LULUCF as loopholes to avoid reducing emissions rather than seriously addressing problems with forest protection,” said Sean Cadman of The Wilderness Society. “At Copenhagen, we need more focus on protecting forests and less focus on protecting logging profits.”

Although some type of agreement on REDD may be a Copenhagen outcome, without explicit commitment to protecting forests and rules to enforce vital safeguards as key priorities, and accompanying deep emissions reduction targets, it will threaten rather than preserve the integrity of the world’s remaining natural forests and ecosystems.

¹ Section III.C. of Document 14 (Annex), pages 91-97 (formerly Non-Paper No. 39)

² £13.6-22.7 billion; \$22.4-37.3 billion

³ £6.4-12.7 billion; \$10.4-20.9 billion

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The Ecosystems Climate Alliance (ECA) (www.ecosystemsclimate.org) is an alliance of environment and social NGOs committed to keeping natural terrestrial ecosystems intact and their carbon out of the atmosphere, in an equitable and transparent way that respects the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. ECA comprises Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), Global Witness, Humane Society International, Rainforest Action Network, Rainforest Foundation Norway, The Rainforest Foundation U.K., Wetlands International, The Wilderness Society, Nepenthes, and the Australian Orangutan Project.