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Impending Collapse of Climate Talks Fails World's Forests and People

Copenhagen - The impending collapse of UN climate change talks has dashed hopes that the Copenhagen process could provide real solutions to protect the world's forests and reduce the approximately 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions that come from deforestation and forest degradation, said the Ecosystems Climate Alliance today.

The sections of the proposed treaty intended to address deforestation in developing and developed countries (known as REDD and LULUCF, respectively) have been frozen as nations fail to agree on concrete measures to halt climate change, while a document leaked today indicates a roll-back from the mandate established two years ago in Bali.

"The failure to agree on a system to fund and regulate the protection of the world's forests means that business as usual logging and forest conversion will continue," said Stephen Leonard of the Australian Orangutan Project. "The absence of a treaty means that forest destruction will continue unabated, forest dependent people's rights will not be protected and endangered species will continue down the path to extinction."

Even if a deal to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD) had been agreed upon, the lack of commitment to deep fossil fuel emissions in a legally binding climate change agreement continues to threaten the world's forests. If global temperatures rise above 2 degrees Celsius, most scientists predict that tropical forests will be profoundly affected, experiencing extreme droughts, increased forest fires and other catastrophic weather events.

"Without strong action to reduce fossil fuel emissions now, the world's forests have no hope of survival," said Bill Barclay of Rainforest Action Network. "The collapse of the Copenhagen talks would be a tragic lost opportunity to save the forests and the climate."

Hesitant progress made in recent days on the REDD negotiations was stymied late last night as talks were halted with many key issues outstanding, including the agreement on a global target to reduce deforestation.

According to the three-page draft text published by The Guardian today, negotiations will continue into 2010, but it is uncertain whether the draft agreement on REDD negotiated here will be used as the basis for those negotiations. Moreover, the weak paragraph on forests in the draft text represents a backward step in comparison to the Bali Action Plan mandate, which prioritized the protection of forests over the preservation of logging interests.

"For two years we have had to fight every step of the way to achieve the best REDD deal possible," said Dr. Rosalind Reeve of Global Witness. "Now REDD is being held hostage in a political game with the planet being played out by our leaders as the world watches."

Other processes intended to address the rapid destruction of the world's tropical forests, including the UN-REDD initiative and the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, will continue but without the safeguards in a global REDD agreement. This patchwork approach runs the risk of simply shuffling deforestation from one location to another, failing to reduce overall emissions from deforestation.

“Our work here isn’t over. The failure of Copenhagen is no excuse for developed countries to continue their reckless overconsumption of the world’s forests. The solution to this problem doesn’t rest only with developing countries: it rests with us,” said Andrea Johnson of U.S.-based Environmental Investigation Agency.

Lack of agreement on a final treaty to account for forest emissions in developed countries may be a reprieve, however, as talks on LULUCF (the part of the Kyoto Protocol intended to regulate emissions from land-use, land-use change and forestry in Annex 1 countries) seemed headed for disaster. Creative accounting rules, popularly known as logging loopholes, threatened to undermine emissions reductions targets from countries like Canada, the European Union, Japan and New Zealand.

“A shameless effort by the global logging industry reached its arm deeply into these negotiations to hide forest emissions in developed countries,” said Virginia Young of the Wilderness Society. “We will now go home to campaign to have Annex 1 country forests protected from rapacious and unsustainable logging.”

Forests are vital for biodiversity, fresh water, and as sources of food and medicine for untold millions of people worldwide. The lack of a global agreement means that the world is failing to stop business as usual deforestation, responsible for the loss of an acre of forest every second.

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The [Ecosystems Climate Alliance](#) (ECA) 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 and The Wilderness Society, Nepenthes, and the Australian Orangutan Project.