

INTERNATIONAL CITIZEN DECLARATION AGAINST A GLOBAL FOREST CONVENTION

Because we are first and foremost concerned about the fate of the world's forests and the people who depend on forests for their subsistence and survival, the undersigned citizens' organizations hereby declare our firm opposition to the negotiation of a global forest convention at this time. We call on world leaders to reject a convention, and instead to pursue an alternative strategy to safeguard the world's forests from further decline.

Our organizations, representing millions of people worldwide, believe that a forest convention negotiated at this time not only will fail to effectively safeguard the world's forests, but could actually threaten them. We believe negotiation of such a premature convention:

*** ENSHRINING WEAK STANDARDS**

will only be able to achieve political consensus on the weakest, lowest-common-denominator commitments, and could formalize unacceptably weak forest management standards, thereby giving a global 'green light' to unsustainable forest practices and crippling several existing, and stronger, forest initiatives;

*** FAVORING COMMERCIAL TRADE INTERESTS**

will be dominated and driven by powerful timber and commercial trade interests, and fail to address the predatory and unethical behavior of an increasing number of trans-national industrial timber corporations;

*** UNDERMINING THE BIODIVERSITY CONVENTION**

will undermine the role of the historic Convention on Biological Diversity and other existing, yet largely unfulfilled, international and regional environmental

agreements and initiatives;

*** AVOIDING THE REAL ISSUES**

will ignore or avoid some of the world's most critical and controversial forest problems, many of which lie outside the traditional 'forest' sector, and will fail to effectively address the chronic underlying causes of forest loss and degradation;

*** THREATENING CITIZEN INITIATIVES**

will risk undermining important non-governmental initiatives (e.g., the independent certification of forest management and forest products), and could undermine the ability of indigenous peoples and traditional rural communities to help decide the fate of their own forests; and

*** DELAYING DECISIVE ACTION**

will stall or block action on a wide range of critical forest problems during years of lengthy debate, negotiation, and ratification -- a waste of scarce time and resources that could be better applied to solving real forest problems and implementing existing agreements.

There is no clear evidence that a global forest convention is either necessary or desirable. Despite repeated calls by citizen groups for such a study, a thorough assessment of existing forest-related agreements and institutions has never been undertaken to determine what, if anything, is missing that could only be addressed by a new global convention.

The overriding interest of our organizations is not in documents and protracted debate, but in solutions and results. The vehicle is not the goal. Unfortunately, some convention proponents seem far more interested in the 'idea' of a convention, or in proclaiming their support for a convention, rather than in what it would contain or whether it would actually solve forest problems.

Furthermore, until more governments implement their existing commitments to protect forests and use them sustainably, it is difficult to have any confidence that they will effectively implement a new convention, whatever its contents.

In our view, to suggest at this time that a forest convention would help safeguard the world's forests is, at best, naive, and would seriously mislead the public. At worst it would betray many well-intentioned heads-of-state and other political leaders who may be seeking an effective response to public demand for more sustainable forest management.

AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY

A much more effective response to that public demand would make full use of existing international agreements and mechanisms to take timely action; would take a strategic, problem-solving approach to eliminating the underlying causes of global forest decline; and would build broader international consensus through a variety of regional, bilateral and focused multilateral agreements. The most important components of such a strategy would include:

- Reforming agriculture, trade, development, land tenure and macro-economic policies that undermine sustainable forest management, and addressing the impact of forest product consumption patterns.
- Prohibiting trade-distorting policies, particularly subsidies, that undermine sustainable forest management.
- Expanding the use of democratic principles and processes to further empower civil society to implement sustainable forest management, and securing the lands and customary rights of indigenous and other traditional peoples.

- Thoroughly assessing existing forest-related agreements, institutions and programs; and establishing an effective international mechanism to coordinate, regularly monitor and report on their implementation, to increase their efficiency, and to eliminate redundancies and wasted resources.
- Curtailing the trade in illegally harvested forest products.
- Setting strong and equitable forest concession standards for trans-national corporations.
- Ensuring the protection of the world's forest biodiversity by, among other means, filling the gaps in the global network of protected forest areas.

Finally, we must emphasize that we make this declaration only after careful consideration. We acknowledge that multilateral policy instruments of the right kind at the right time can play an important role in promoting sustainable development. Nevertheless, until the aforementioned conditions change, our organizations will remain opposed to the negotiation of a global forest convention.

We urge governments to give serious consideration to the concerns we have expressed in this declaration. As the multilateral forest policy debate continues, our organizations stand ready to engage in full and open dialogue with policy-makers both within and outside of government to explore the most effective way forward.

This declaration is an expression of the views of the following organizations:

AFRICA

African Forest Action Network (AFAN)
Forest Action Network - Kenya
Green Earth Organization - Ghana

ASIA & RUSSIA

Citizens Alliance for Saving the Atmosphere and the Earth (CASA)-

Japan

Consumers Union of Japan

Far Eastern Information Center - Russia

Friends of the Earth-Japan

Friends of Siberian Forests - Russia

Indonesian Green Nature Foundation

Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment

Indonesian Tropical Institute

Japan Rainforest Protection Lawyers' League (JARPLL)

Japan Tropical Forest Action Network (JATAN)

Peoples' Forum 2001 Japan

Plasma Foundation - Indonesia

Sarawak Campaign Committee - Japan

Socio-Ecological Union - Russia

Telapak Indonesia Foundation

Utan Group - Japan

WALHI / Friends of the Earth-Indonesia

EUROPE

AK Regenwald Aschaffenburg - Germany

ARA (Working Group on Rainforests and Biodiversity) - Germany

Amici della Terra Italia - Friends of the Earth Italy

Bruno-Manser-Fonds - Switzerland

Coalition for Environment and Development - Finland

Friends of the Earth-England, Wales & Northern Ireland - U.K.

Friends of the Earth-Finland

Irish Woodworkers for Africa - Ireland

Netherlands Committee for the IUCN

Pro REGENWALD - Germany

Robin Wood e.V. - Germany

Reforest the Earth - U.K.

Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) - Netherlands

LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

ALTER VIDA - Paraguay

Amazon NGO Network (GTA - Grupo de Trabalho Amazonico) - Brazil

Centro Interdisciplinario de Estudios Comunitarios (CIEC) -

Bolivia

Comite Nacional Pro-Defensa de la Fauna y Flora (CODEFF) - Chile

Consejo Civil Mexicano para la Silvicultura Sostenible A.C. -

Mexico

Friends of the Earth Amazonia Program - Brazil

Fundacion Ecotropico - Colombia

Fundacion Natura - Ecuador

Fundacion Peruana para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza - Peru

Grupo de Estudios Ambientales A.C. - Mexico

Instituto AMBIO - Costa Rica

Instituto Sul Mineiro de Estudo e Preservacao da Natureza -

Brazil

Movimiento Ambientalista Nicaraguense (MAN) - Nicaragua

Sociedad Peruana de Derecho Ambiental (SPDA) - Peru

NORTH AMERICA

Alberta ENGO Forest Caucus - Canada

The Arctic to Amazonia Alliance - U.S.

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Edmonton Chapter

Center for International Environmental Law - U.S.

Cochrane Ecological Institute - Canada

Cultural Survival Canada

Defenders of Wildlife - U.S.

Environmental Defense Fund - U.S.

Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs - U.S.

Friends of the Athabasca Environmental Association - Canada

Friends of the Christmas Mountains - Canada

Friends of the Earth-U.S.

Good Wood Alliance - U.S.

Humber Environment Action Group - Canada

Manitoba Future Forest Alliance - Canada

Manitoba Naturalists Society - Canada

National Wildlife Federation - U.S.

Natural Resources Defense Council - U.S.

Northwatch - Canada

Nova Scotia Environment and Development Coalition - Canada

Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society - Canada

Pacific Environment and Resources Center - U.S.

Rainforest Action Network - U.S.

Sierra Club - U.S.

Sierra Club of Canada

Smith Environmental Association - Canada

Voice of the Earth Society - Canada

Western Ancient Forest Campaign - U.S.

OCEANIA

NFN Southern Hemisphere - Australia

Rainforest Information Centre - Australia

INTERNATIONAL

Friends of the Earth International

Greenpeace International

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) International

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[online] 1997/2/15 forests.org [retrieved on 2004/1/10]

<URL:<http://forests.org/archive/general/notreaty.htm>>

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**OVER EIGHTY ORGANIZATIONS FROM SIX CONTINENTS ANNOUNCE
OPPOSITION TO GLOBAL FOREST CONVENTION**

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**The following declaration was released today at a press
conference in New York on the eve of the fourth and final session
of the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Forests:**