

Forests Day at COP23 Highlights Climate Action, Opportunities

Governments, Indigenous Peoples, and private sector showcase progress on forests, call for increased ambition

Bonn, Germany, 12 November 2017 – Forest action is centre stage today at the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action's (MPGCA) Forests Day at the COP23 climate talks, with the launch of an Ecuadorean initiative to reduce 15 million tonnes of CO2 emissions, a new commitment to deforestation-free commodities by Walmart, and a confirmation of the key role of forests in collectively addressing climate change.

"Fiji is delighted to see the important role of forests in sustainable development and climate change mitigation and adaptation. These ecosystems are high on the agenda for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) because we are among the most vulnerable nations to the impacts of climate change. While important progress has been made in protecting these ecosystems to enhance our resilience to a changing climate, we need all countries to make forest protection and rehabilitation and the financing of all forest ecosystems a priority. In particular, we need to create real incentives to attract both public and private finance to delivering nature based solutions," says H.E. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Fiji's Minister for Economy and Climate Change.

Ecuador's program, launched by María Victoria Chiriboga, Ecuador's Under Secretary of Climate Change, and Walmart's new commitment, presented by Laura Phillips, Walmart's Senior Vice President of Sustainability, will be complemented by a showcase of ambitious climate actions underway in the forest sector.

Kevin Rabinovitch, Global Vice President of Sustainability at Mars Inc., will introduce the company's new policy to reduce their carbon footprint 27% by 2025 and 67% by 2050 by systematically tackling deforestation throughout their value chain. Lee White, Director of Gabon's National Park Service, will describe their efforts to halt an illegal logging operation that will prevent the emission of 20 million tonnes of CO2 emissions. In addition, a host of non-state actors, from

Indigenous Peoples to faith-based groups, underscore the urgency of increasing ambition on forests.

High-level panel speakers include Frank Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji; Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC; and Jerry Brown, Governor of California, who will end the day with a call for urgent, scaled-up forest protection as a major component of the solution to climate change.

“Our planet’s forests are being decimated at an alarming rate. Putting a stop to this destruction is crucial to tackling climate change, reducing poverty and feeding a growing global population, in line with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. Nature-based solutions such as protecting and restoring forests can contribute over one-third of the total climate change mitigation required by 2030 to keep temperature rise below 2C. More decisive, collective action is now needed to seize this opportunity,” says **Inger Andersen, Director General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**, who chairs today’s Forests Day sessions as the “Voice” of the day.

Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, Head, WWF’s global Climate and Energy programme, says, *‘Forests play a huge role in our efforts to tackle climate change – the science behind their contributions is clear. Protecting forests will ensure they continue to absorb emissions from the atmosphere, protect biodiversity, and provide livelihoods for forest-dependent peoples. I believe strong collaboration and urgent and ambitious action between State and non-State actors will be a positive influence on the forces driving forest loss.’*

These commitments to forests are vital. **The math shows that halting climate change is impossible without forests, and in 2016 the world lost forests equal to the size of New Zealand.** Combined with phasing out fossil fuels and a transition to clean energy, reducing emissions from forests is critical. The emissions reductions that can be achieved by ending deforestation and the additional carbon that can be sequestered from the atmosphere through improved forest management and reforestation are vital to prevent global temperature increases of more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Forests also provide services that are essential for humans to thrive, adapt, and achieve climate-resilient societies. These include important non-carbon climate benefits: sustaining livelihoods, providing water and food security, and regulating global rainfall patterns. This also makes forests essential for the success of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), providing a window of opportunity for a “triple win” of eliminating deforestation, boosting agricultural productivity, and reducing poverty.

For many countries – especially small island states and those in climate vulnerable landscapes – increased global climate action is a matter of survival. The level of urgency is critical, as is the need to scale up action to protect and enhance global forest cover.

This is a challenge – one that governments, Indigenous Peoples, the private sector, and many other stakeholders are rising to meet. More support is needed from all sectors to end deforestation and restore the health of the world’s forests. Our climate can’t wait any longer.

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