

Committee/Council: Environmental and Cultural Committee  
Issue: Fighting Deforestation  
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Position: Co- Chair

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## Introduction

Nowadays, one of the most serious environmental issues that the entire planet is facing is the problem of deforestation. An indisputable fact is that



tremendously large areas of forests are being cut down annually and although 30% of the world's landscape is still covered with forests, the world's rainforests will not exist in a hundred years if deforestation remains at the current rate. The main causes of rainforest destruction are humans and as a result the first question that someone might ask is why do human

beings cut down trees? The demand for wood not only for timber but also for fires and the paper industry are only some of the reasons why wood is needed as a resource and therefore must be cut down. Additionally, forests are eliminated in order to create the necessary space for road construction or even sometimes for the building of houses. However the main reason for deforestation according to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is subsistence agriculture. Precisely speaking, 80% of deforestation is caused by subsistence and commercial agriculture, 14% by logging and the final 5% is caused from the use of wood as fuel. Concerning agriculture, farmers cut down trees in order to create the necessary space in order to plant their crops. Concerning logging, industries destroy forests because they need timber in order to construct paper and wood materials, in general.

However, deforestation can also be done without an intention. For instance, fires caused either by the negligence of humans or naturally and the subsequent

overgrazing, destroy titanic areas of forests and prevent small trees from growing, respectively, and thus are some factors which might lead to unintentional deforestation.



Furthermore, deforestation indirectly causes climate change. Forest's soil on which trees grow is moist, however, without the trees

to block the sun rays, the soil soon dries out. Trees also play a large role in water cycle as they return water vapor back to the atmosphere. Thus, by cutting down trees, the smooth and natural functioning of the water cycle is shacked and some areas which were former forest areas may become deserts. Besides the fact that the soil dries out due to the cutting down of trees, forests also lose an important part of their canopy, which is responsible for blocking the sun rays as mentioned above. This fact may lead to the heating of the soil which may cause the increase of temperature making it difficult for the flora and the fauna to survive. On the other hand, trees also absorb greenhouse gases, such as CO<sub>2</sub>, since they need it for the process of photosynthesis. Deforestation leads to an increase in the greenhouse gases in the environment which inevitably leads to global warming (greenhouse effect).

The quickest, most direct and effective solution to deforestation would apparently be to stop cutting down trees. Although the deforestation rate has slightly decreased compared to the previous decade financial reasons have mainly made the decrease of deforestation extremely hard to achieve.

## Definition of Key-Terms

### Deforestation

The word deforestation is commonly defined as “the clearing or thinning of forests, the cause of which is normally implied to be human activity. [...] Estimates of deforestation traditionally are based on the area of forest cleared for human use,

including removal of the trees for wood products and for croplands and grazing lands. [...]"<sup>1</sup>

### Subsistence farming (agriculture)

It is a "form of farming in which nearly all crops or livestock raised are used to maintain the farmer and the farmer's family, leaving little, if any, surplus for sale [...]"<sup>2</sup>

### Logging (forestry)

The "process of harvesting trees, sawing them into appropriate lengths [...], and transporting them [...] to a sawmill. The different phases of this process vary with local conditions and technology"<sup>3</sup>

### Desertification

Desertification is "the process by which natural or human causes reduce the biological productivity of dry lands [...]. Declines in productivity may be the result of climate change, deforestation, overgrazing, poverty [...]"<sup>4</sup>

### Reforestation

Reforestation is defined as the action of planting young trees in areas in which previously existed a forest which has been destroyed either completely or partly due to natural or human disasters.

## **Background Information**

Forests are extremely important for the existence of millions of people all around the world. Approximately 1 billion people rely on forests for their survival. Specifically, they provide people with clean water, timber, food or even fuel and thus, people all around the world, who live in relatively remote areas, completely rely on the forests' resources in order to survive. Therefore, deforestation endangers

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<sup>1</sup> "Deforestation." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 June 2013.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/155854/deforestation>>.

<sup>2</sup> "Subsistence Farming." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 June 2013.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/search?query=subsistence%20agriculture>>.

<sup>3</sup> "Logging." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 June 2013.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/search?query=logging>>.

<sup>4</sup> "Desertification." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 June 2013.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/search?query=desertification>>.

the lives of millions of people who depend on forests for their livelihood since with the destruction of forests people may no longer be able to survive.

Deforestation is responsible for 35% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in developed countries and 65% in developing ones. Therefore, one may argue that it directly leads to climate change, global warming. The wood industry produces CO<sub>2</sub> which is emitted into the atmosphere and does not take into consideration that by cutting down trees that CO<sub>2</sub> cannot be absorbed, this leading to an increase in the amount of greenhouse gases present in the atmosphere. On the other hand, climate change leads to the destruction of forests as well. The temperature rise leads to the outburst of more fires or extensive periods of drought and lack of rain which will lead to the drying out of rainforests. The preservation of forests (combating deforestation) will utterly lead to combating climate change and global warming, since the amount of greenhouse gases, specifically CO<sub>2</sub> will decrease since trees will absorb it. Therefore, deforestation must initially be fought in order to create solutions for combating climate change.

All in all, deforestation is a topic which has been thoroughly discussed and has been the main theme of discussion in several United Nations conferences. Deforestation is still a huge problem mainly in developing countries but also in some developed ones and the United Nations have not yet come to a mutual agreement as to the actions that member states should take in order to combat this problem.

On the 20th of March 2013 the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon sent his own personal message concerning the establishment of the International Day of Forests on the 21st of March 2013. He stressed the importance of forests for millions of people all around the world and condemned deforestation as an action which destructs the normal operation of Mother Nature. However, he also informed that the situation concerning this huge environmental issue has shown some improvement since deforestation decreased by nearly 20% over the last decade, at a global level. He finally, urged all governments and all sectors of society, in general, to do anything they possibly can in order to combat deforestation and prevent the degradation of forests.

Solutions that have been suggested to deforestation are the increase of gathering of information as far as deforestation is concerned. Gathering information is a very important factor in order to successfully combat deforestation. Information about where deforestation takes place is essential in order to detect where illegal actions take place and be able to effectively combat them. However, the information that governments have is not always up-to-date making the detection of illegal deforestation a quite difficult task. The gathering of information is in most cases very expensive. Many countries, such as Gabon, have spent large amounts of their budget

in getting information and thus detecting deforestation. The problem is that in some cases too much money is spent on detecting deforestation rather than taking action against it since the budget for this sector has in most cases already been spent in gathering information.

Finding the necessary funds for combating deforestation is also quite a serious obstacle. Funds are necessary for the materialization of several projects and methodologies against deforestation. The fact that most countries with serious deforestation issues are developing ones makes matters worse. Member states ought to find a way of raising the necessary funding for the implementation of actions against this problem.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### The UN-REDD program

The UN-REDD (United Nations Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation)<sup>5</sup> is a program which was initiated by the United Nations. Precisely speaking, it was presented to the public in 2008 by the Secretary General of the UN Ban Ki-moon as well as by Jens Stoltenberg, the Prime Minister of Norway. The main goal of the program is to help, mainly developing countries, succeed in the reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. Since its establishment, nine countries have expressed their interest in being assisted by this specific program (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Zambia, Paraguay, Panama, Bolivia and Indonesia).



### Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)

The FCPF has the same main aim as the UN-REDD program (see above), but additionally, aims at fostering conservation, "the sustainable management of forests

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<sup>5</sup> "'REDD' -letter day for forests: United Nations, Norway unite to combat climate change from deforestation, spearheading new programme." *UN News Center*. UN, 24 Sept. 2008. Web. 24 June 2013. <<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/envdev1005.doc.htm>>.

and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks”<sup>6</sup> The above activities are also known as the REDD+ goals.

### Rainforest Alliance

The Rainforest Alliance is a non-governmental organization which was established to ensure the protection of tropical forests, at an international level. Their main aim is to protect forests by combating deforestation and by



ensuring the sustainable livelihood of the people who solely depend on forests. This particular organization strives to combat climate change and deals with poverty, which may lead to the destruction of forests, to preserve wildlife and to keep forests standing, thus fighting deforestation.

### Brazil

Brazil is a country that has made titanic progress concerning deforestation, by improving the quality of information which is being gathered as far as forests and the cutting down of trees is concerned. Specifically, the rate of deforestation in the Amazon forest in Brazil has decreased by approximately 80% from 2004 until 2012. The above reduction in the deforestation rate derived from the fact that the quality of information gathered increased and thus became easily and readily available to people and agencies that could take action against illegal deforestation in the area of the Amazon forest. Therefore, it has been argued that Brazil has succeeded in combating deforestation by taking the above actions and has proven that the efficient and swift gathering of information concerning deforestation is necessary in order for action to be taken.

### Gabon

Gabon’s government, on the other hand, has spent millions of dollars in order to improve the gathering of information concerning deforestation. It invested in accessing information through satellite imagery in order to detect areas that have been illegally or unintentionally deforested and to take action against the above actions.

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<sup>6</sup> "About Us." *Foster Carbon Partnership Facility*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 June 2013. <<http://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/about-us>>.

## Nigeria

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Nigeria currently has the highest rate of deforestation. The main causes of its deforestation apparently are agriculture and illegal logging and as a result the cutting down of trees has led to a high trend of desertification in several areas of the country. Specifically the country has lost more than 50% of its primary forests from 2008 onwards. Nigeria's government has not taken serious action against deforestation and if this situation continuous, in a couple of years more than 90% of West Africa's main rainforests will have been chopped down.

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1989	Creation of Rainforest Alliance
9 May 1992	UNFCCC was opened for signatures
1994	Establishment of UNCCD
October 2000	Creation of UN Forum for Forests (UNFF)
2008	Development of UN-REDD program
21 March 2013	Establishment of International Day of Forests

### Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

#### United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)<sup>7</sup>

The UNFCCC is a convention on climate change and has nearly a universal membership, nowadays. Specifically all countries, besides the United States of America have ratified the convention while 84 have also signed it. The convention

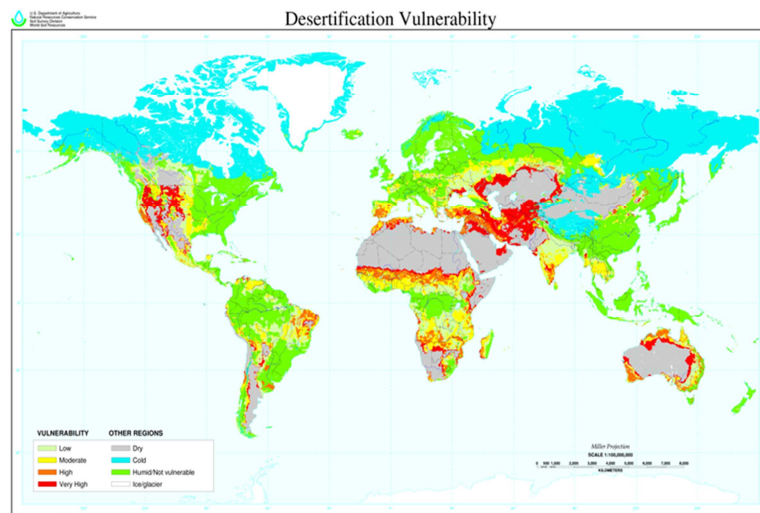
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<sup>7</sup> For more information please visit the following online site : <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>

sets international efforts in order to combat climate change. Since deforestation is responsible for approximately 35% of the overall carbon dioxide emissions it is responsible for causing climate change and therefore, the UNFCCC also aims at fighting deforestation.

### United Nations Convention to combat desertification (UNCCD)<sup>8</sup>

UNCCD is a convention which aims at combating desertification in countries that face serious droughts or extensive deforestation which apparently may lead to desertification. Those countries are mainly African countries. Concerning its membership, all UN countries, except South Sudan, are members of this convention, whereas



Canada has withdrawn from the UNCCD. The main aim of the convention is to substantially decrease the negative effects of droughts in specific areas in order for desertification to be prevented. The convention also addresses the problem of deforestation since it can lead to desertification and thus also aims at decreasing the rate of deforestation, to some extent. The map above indicates the areas which are mostly vulnerable to desertification.

### **Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**

Besides the attempts to combat deforestation mentioned above, such as the creation of NGO'S the actions that countries have taken individually as well as the UN-REDD program and the establishment of conventions related to deforestation, an attempt that ought to be pinpointed is the following. In 2000 the UN forum on forests (UNFF) was created. Its establishment was a result of the resolution 2000/35<sup>9</sup> of the Economic and Social Council which requested the creation of a body which would encourage the sustainable development of forests and the managements of forests which already had been partially destroyed. In fact all members of the UN

<sup>8</sup> For more information please visit the following online site:

<http://www.unccd.int/en/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> In order to view the whole resolution please visit the following online site:

[http://www.un.org/esa/forests/pdf/2000\\_35\\_E.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/forests/pdf/2000_35_E.pdf)

are also members of this forum, but also specialized agencies are members of it. Its objectives are to accommodate agreements as far as forests are concerned, encourage governments to take immediate action, promote cooperation between countries and coordinate forest-related aspects. Additionally, it assists member states to develop a particular programme concerning the conservation and sustainability of forests and reinforce the cooperation of the United Nations and national mechanisms and organizations.

## **Possible Solutions**

All in all, deforestation can be combated through the cooperation and collaboration of all member states since global problems, require global action to be taken in order for them to be resolved. In the first place, reforestation can be a possible solution in some cases as the planting of young, new trees would, to an extent, restore the damage that has already been caused by deforestation. However, an obstacle may be the fact that reforestation requires quite a large time span in order for the trees to grow and thus for a forest to be restored. Another solution is to simply reduce the rate of deforestation by detecting and preventing illegal deforestation. The above presupposes that effective gathering of information concerning deforestation has taken place and this might in several cases be an obstacle since countries, especially developing ones may lack the financial support to both detect and then take action against deforestation. However, this can be resolved as well if an organization, the member states or even the United Nations, itself, provides the necessary funding for such projects. The development of a program for sustainable management of forest could also be considered a solution. If governments create a program in which the amount of trees cut down in each forest does not destroy the forest but allow tree regrowth, sustainable management of forest will possibly be achieved.

As deforestation is directly linked to climate change a possible solution that might resolve the problem of climate change could be the protection of forests that have a relatively high carbon uptake, such as the Amazon forest. Other actions that can be taken in order to restore the damage caused by deforestation or protect the inhabitants that rely on forests for their livelihood are the maintaining of water quality which comes from forests, the restoration of degraded land and the adaptation of measures against floods or other natural disasters that can derive from the deficiency of trees in certain areas.

Action should be taken immediately and all member states ought to cooperate in order for effective solutions to be found to successfully combat deforestation.

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