

NEW YORK DECLARATION ON FORESTS PROGRESS ASSESSMENT

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NEW REPORT: Increasing and Devastating: Forest Loss Spikes Despite Five-Year-Old Pledge by Companies, Countries to Halve Deforestation by 2020

*Despite Climate Benefits of Natural Forest Protection and Restoration, Little
Progress Has Been Made to Meet 2020 Target of Restoring 150 Million Hectares*

Berlin //New York City (12 September 2019)—Five years after a landmark pledge to cut the rate of natural forest loss by half and restore 150 million hectares of land by 2020, the global state of forests has dramatically worsened, reveals a new report released in the lead-up to the 2019 United Nations Climate Summit.

The findings show that since hundreds of governments and companies endorsed the [New York Declaration on Forests](#) (NYDF) at the 2014 UN Climate Summit, the annual rate of tree cover loss has increased 43%, reaching over 26 million hectares per year—an area the size of the United Kingdom. Tropical forests—currently up in smoke in the Amazon and the Congo Basin—have taken the biggest hit, accounting for over 90% of global deforestation between 2001 and 2015. Particularly concerning is the loss of pristine and irreplaceable primary tropical forests, which are home to valuable carbon sinks and the greatest biodiversity on the planet. The rate of loss of tropical primary forests is also up by over 40%, equal to 4.3 million hectares per year.

“Since the NYDF was launched five years ago, deforestation has not only continued—it has actually accelerated,” said Charlotte Streck, co-founder and director of Climate Focus, a think tank that led a coalition of 25 organizations—the NYDF Assessment Partners—in authoring the report, *Protecting and Restoring Forests: A Story of Large Commitments Yet Limited Progress*. “We must redouble efforts to stop forest loss, especially in primary tropical forests, and restore as many forests as possible before the irreversible impacts of losing trees further threatens our climate and food security.” The report analyzes the latest research on forest protection and restoration efforts and presents new data on the scale, location and status of forest landscape restoration projects already underway worldwide.

Though some endorsers of the NYDF, including El Salvador, Ethiopia and Mexico, have made strides in planting trees, less than 20% of the pledge’s overall restoration goals have been met, the report finds. And though a surge of new trees has cropped up on farms and pastures, providing income, food and protection from extreme weather, efforts to regrow natural forest areas, which offer far more carbon as well as biodiversity benefits, have only seen slow progress.

“The report makes very clear that restoring natural forests can’t compensate for the loss of primary forests,” Streck said. “It can take decades to centuries for forests to recover their full

carbon-absorbing and weather-regulating capabilities. We must restore forests in addition to protecting them. Progress in both is necessary—and, in fact, complementary.”

Forest Loss Rages On

According to the report, the countries with the highest forest loss in the last five years include four Amazon Basin countries: Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia and Peru. In June 2019 alone, deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon increased 88% compared to the same month last year. There are also troubling new hotspots of increasing forest loss in West Africa and the Congo Basin—the Democratic Republic of Congo has more than doubled its deforestation in the last five years. In Asia, most forest is lost in Indonesia, Malaysia and Cambodia. However, the report shows there have been positive trends in the region.

Indonesia is the only bright spot on the deforestation map, the study showed. Political action combined with favorable weather over the last two years helped stop the widespread burning of peatlands and scale back forest destruction. While annual fires continue to threaten public health and the climate, President Joko Widodo’s permanent ban on the development of peatlands and primary forests is a good step forward.

Since the NYDF was endorsed, the largest driver of deforestation has been forest clearance for agriculture, including the industrial scale production of commodities like beef, soy and palm oil. The inability of companies engaged in forest-risk commodities to meet commitments to remove deforestation from their supply chains contributes to the forest crisis. Also part of the problem is limited improvements in forest governance, including strengthening forest protection laws, enforcement in producer countries and adoption of demand-side regulation from consumer countries.

Exacerbating these business and government shortcomings is a major gap in funding for forests. The report finds that forest finance does not match forests’ potential to contribute to climate targets. Investments in stopping deforestation in tropical countries comprise less than 1.5%—only US\$3.2 billion—of the US\$256 billion committed by multilateral institutions and developed country donors since 2010 to climate change mitigation. It also emphasizes that a massive shift in the existing finance is needed; forest finance is currently dwarfed by enormous dollars that are essentially paving the way to their destruction due to a lack of safeguards and policies that take forests into account.

“There has been a failure to transform the underlying economic incentives that favor forest destruction over forest protection,” added Ingrid Schulte, coordinator of the assessment and one of the report authors. “Halting forest loss will take a serious systemic shift in behavior—from everyone—by reducing demand for commodities that carry embedded deforestation, reducing meat consumption, and investing in governance and protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples.”

The Indigenous leaders who endorsed the NYDF argue that forest protection isn’t possible without strengthening their land rights, a claim backed by the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report released last month. “The report makes clear that Indigenous Peoples and local communities are critical allies in the fight against deforestation and climate change. The scientists concluded that when our land rights are secure and enforced, our territories have consistently low rates of deforestation—often lower than in neighboring protected areas,” said

Gregorio Mirabal, general coordinator of COICA (Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin). “We signed the NYDF and have kept our forests standing. Now governments and companies need to keep their end of the bargain.”

Restoration Slow to Ramp Up

Under the NYDF and the 2011 Bonn Challenge, countries pledged to restore a total of 150 million hectares of land by 2020 and restore at least an additional 200 million hectares by 2030, an approach increasingly viewed by scientists and policymakers as a proven, cost-effective and immediately available climate solution. But the report found that only a sliver of this restoration has taken place— 27 million hectares of forests (increase in additional tree and forest cover) over the last two decades. That’s roughly equivalent to the area of forest lost every year, and it represents 18% of the area countries committed to restore by the end of next year.

“Not all forest restoration is created equal,” Streck said. “While some approaches, such as planting fruit trees on farmsteads, provide a buffer to the food system and help farmers boost resilience against climate impacts, there is really only one type of restoration that presents the best strategy at our disposal for solving the climate crisis: when it is combined with protection, the restoration of natural forests is most critical to helping us meet global climate goals.”

Some NYDF endorsers are making great strides toward implementing their protection and restoration commitments, the study shows. Through a 2017 ban on metallic mining and the prioritization of restoration in its national climate strategy under the Paris Agreement, El Salvador, for example, has moved to align domestic policies with forest protection and restoration. However, difficulty securing financing for these forest policies, the report finds, have prevented the country from making even more progress.

“Countries are working very hard to restore deforested and degraded landscapes, and for maximum benefit, that includes areas inside and outside natural forests,” said Radhika Dave of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, who works with countries to track implementation of their Bonn Challenge restoration pledges. “Restoring across broad and diverse landscapes is critical—it maximizes not only climate mitigation and adaptation results but also the all-important co-benefits for people and communities, such as jobs, water and food security.”

While some countries are posting restoration successes, others see both restoration and continued losses of natural forests. An analysis in the report of the Mekong region using new satellite data reveals that a large amount of restoration in the past decade has taken place, mostly outside of forests, while natural forests continue disappearing. Overall, between 2000-2017, deforestation in the Mekong region amounts to a net loss of about 300,000 hectares of natural forests—despite the appearance of trees on farms.

“Our forests are disappearing at a dangerous pace — a risk for millions of people across the planet who depend on them for food, water and livelihoods.” said Andrew Steer, President and CEO of the World Resources Institute. “We know that the economics of forest protection and restoration is highly positive. What has been lacking is leadership and policy.”

Forest protection and restoration, as well as other natural climate solutions, will be one of the issue areas featured at the UN Climate Summit on September 23. According to the report

authors, the report underlines the importance of ensuring forest protection and restoration are key climate solutions profiled at the gathering.

“Many companies have cleaned up their individual supply chains, but this has not translated to reducing forest loss globally. As we head into the 2020s, it is imperative for us all to move from incremental to more transformational steps across sectors and landscapes. Only intensified partnerships and accelerated collective action can pull our forests back from the brink. Hopefully, this report will inspire and galvanise governments, business and civil society to redouble their efforts,” said Justin Adams, Executive Director, Tropical Forest Alliance, World Economic Forum.

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About the New York Declaration on Forests

The NYDF was first endorsed at the UN Climate Summit in 2014 as a voluntary, non-binding international declaration for action on global forest loss. Now it has over 200 [endorsers](#), including national governments like Colombia, Germany, Norway, Peru, the UK and the United States, and sub-national governments that include Acre, Amapa and Amazonas in Brazil. Large companies are also signatories, including McDonalds, Johnson & Johnson, Walmart and Unilever. Over 60 non-governmental organizations are endorsers, as are over 20 groups representing indigenous communities.

About the New York Declaration on Forests Progress Assessment

This report was researched and authored by the New York Declaration on Forests Assessment Partners and coordinated by Climate Focus. It is a collaborative effort that relies on the contributions of countless individuals and organizations. The report and its accompanying technical annexes have undergone an extensive internal and external peer review process, with 700+ comments received from 50+ experts around the world.

The NYDF Assessment Partners include: CDP, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Chatham House, Clean Cooking Alliance, Climate Focus, Conservation International (CI), Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Forest Foundation Philippines, Forest Trends, Global Canopy, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), Instituto de Manejo e Certificação Florestal e Agrícola (Imaflora), the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), National Wildlife Federation (NWF), Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Rainforest Alliance, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Sustainability Consortium (TSC), Woods Hole Research Center (WHRC), World Resources Institute (WRI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US), and the Zoological Society of London’s (ZSL) Sustainability Policy Transparency Toolkit (SPOTT) initiative

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