

**Forum:** General Assembly 2nd Committee

**Issue:** The Question of the Protection of the World Forests

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## Introduction

Forests host 80% of biodiversity on land covering approximately one-third of Earth's total land area. Forests play a major role in the biggest challenges on the sustainability of our time, such as climate change and population increase. 8 out of 10 land-dwelling species on Earth reside in forests. Additionally, one billion individuals depend on forests for such as their livelihoods, shelter, and energy.<sup>1</sup>

Every year 8.8 million hectares of forest is destroyed. Between 1990 and 2015 the world lost 129 million hectares of forest, a district the dimension of South Africa. Over the past 50 years, humans have modified forest ecosystems more than in any other historical period. Nearly half Earth's forests are destroyed for agriculture, development or resource extraction, such as palm oil plantation or soy fields.<sup>2</sup>

Forests and forestry affect everyone. Besides providing habitats for animals and livelihoods for humans, forests conjointly provide watershed protection, prevent soil erosion and mitigate climate change.<sup>3</sup> With economical development additionally, forests are remodeled into agricultural land and with the general conversion of the forest ecosystem. Unfortunately not all regions nor groups have benefited and thus have faced socio-cultural, economic and environmental harm.

Climate change is one among the greatest threats humankind has known. Forests and climate are intrinsically linked: forest loss and degradation are each a cause and a bearing of our changing climate. Since the world's population is estimated to increase to 9 billion people by 2050, the global demand for timber products is anticipated to more than triple over the subsequent three decades.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/jrnl/2013/nrs\\_2013\\_pan\\_001.pdf](https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/jrnl/2013/nrs_2013_pan_001.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://wwf.panda.org/our\\_work/forests/importance\\_forests/](https://wwf.panda.org/our_work/forests/importance_forests/)

<sup>3</sup> [https://wwf.panda.org/our\\_work/forests/](https://wwf.panda.org/our_work/forests/)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cpfweb.org/32819-045ba23e53cbb67809cef3b724bef9cd0.pdf>

Human impacts have led to the loss of 40% of the world's forests. Currently an area the dimension of a football pitch of forest is being destroyed every second. Protecting and restoring the forests has never been thus urgent.<sup>5</sup>

## Definition of Key Terms

### Biodiversity

Term coined in 1985 - Biodiversity, or biological diversity means the variety of life on Earth in all forms and interactions. It is the most complex and vital feature of our planet. Biodiversity is comprised of several levels, from genes to the entire ecosystem. Biodiversity is often measured by the count of species in the area (species richness).<sup>6</sup>

### Deforestation

Deforestation occurs when forests are permanently converted to non-forest uses, such as agriculture and road construction. Deforestation and forest degradation are the biggest threats to forests worldwide. Most deforestation is currently happening in the tropics. A study showed that the tropics lost about 61,000 square miles of forest in 2017. Deforestation impacts livelihoods and leaves a threat to a wide range of plant and animal species, which threatens the biodiversity.<sup>7</sup>

### Forest degradation

Forest degradation occurs when ecosystems lose their capability to provide important goods and services to both people and nature. Most causes are agriculture, unsustainable forest management, forest fires, illegal and unsustainable logging, fuelwood harvesting and climate change.<sup>8</sup>

### Climate change

The Earth's climate has changed a lot throughout history. Among the last 650,000 years there have been seven cycles of glacial advance and retreat, with the end of ice age marking the beginning of the modern climate era - alongside human civilization. Climate change is any significant long-term change among the expected patterns of average weather of an area over a significant period of time. Conventionally climate change is caused by heat-trapping gasses, like CO<sub>2</sub>, when relieved to Earth's atmosphere. Most of these climate changes are attributed to very small variations in Earth's orbit that

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/08/the-human-impact-on-the-world-s-forests>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/12/what-is-biodiversity-and-why-does-it-matter-to-us>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.livescience.com/27692-deforestation.html>

<sup>8</sup> [https://wwf.panda.org/our\\_work/forests/deforestation\\_causes2/forest\\_conversion/](https://wwf.panda.org/our_work/forests/deforestation_causes2/forest_conversion/)

change the amount of solar energy our planet receives. It is regarding abnormal variations of the climate, that have an effect the Earth. Ice ages are a prominent example of climate change.<sup>9</sup>

## Global warming

Global warming is the long term rise in the average temperature of the Earth's climate system. It is a major aspect of climate change. Scientists have determined that the major factors causing the current climate change are greenhouse gases, land use changes, and aerosols and soot. Since the pre-industrial period, human activities are estimated to have increased Earth's global average temperature by about 1 degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit). Most of the current warming tendency is exceedingly probable (greater than 95 percent probability) the result of human activity since the 1950s and is proceeding at an unprecedented rate over decades to millennia.<sup>10</sup>

## Sustainability

Sustainability has no universally agreed definition. Hence it can be described in several ways: "Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."<sup>11</sup>

## Forest certification (FAO)

Forest certification is a voluntary process, where an independent third party assesses the quality of forest management and production compared to a set of international standards. Forest certification can be predetermined by a public or a private certification organization.<sup>12</sup>

## Ecosystem

Ecosystem is a large community of different living organisms in a certain area, interacting as a system. Generally in ecosystems the living organisms in conjunction with the nonliving components are linked through nutrient cycles and energy flows.<sup>13</sup>

## Rainforest

Rainforests in the world come in two forms: tropical and temperate. Within this context, the term "rainforest" conveys the tropical rainforest.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://climate.nasa.gov/resources/global-warming-vs-climate-change/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://academicimpact.un.org/content/sustainability>

<sup>12</sup>

<http://www.fao.org/sustainable-forest-management/toolbox/modules/forest-certification/further-learning/en/?type=111>

<sup>13</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ecosystem>

Tropical rainforests are located near the equator, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. They are evergreen with a warm and wet climate and receive consistent rainfall. 57% of all tropical rainforests are found in Latin America, with a third in Brazil. 80% of the world's species can be found in tropical rainforests.<sup>14</sup> The world's biggest tropical forests are the Amazon rainforest and the Congolese rainforest.<sup>15</sup>

## Agriculture

Agriculture is the practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops or raising livestock. Agriculture includes also varying degrees in the preparation and marketing of the resulting products. With agriculture being the key development in the rise of sedentary human civilization, farming of domesticated species created food surpluses that enabled people to live in cities.<sup>16</sup>

## Explanation of the Question

### The importance of forests and causes of deforestation

More than 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihoods. The forest product industry is a source of economic growth and employment, with global forest products traded internationally in the order of \$270 billion. At the same time, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that 13 million hectares of the world's forests are lost due to deforestation every year, which accounts for up to 20 percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming. The world's forests and soils store more than one trillion tons of carbon – twice the amount found in the atmosphere.<sup>17</sup>

Forests cover 30.7% of the Earth's surface and besides providing food security and shelter, forests are the key to combating climate change, protecting biodiversity and the homes of the native population. By protecting forests, we will also be able to strengthen natural resource management and increase land productivity.

The growth in the annual loss of forest area has caused persistent degradation of drylands, which has led to the desertification of 3.6 billion hectares. Even though up to 15% of land is currently under protection, biodiversity is still at risk. Deforestation and desertification – caused by human activities and climate change – pose major challenges to sustainable development and have affected the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the fight against poverty.

<sup>14</sup> [https://wwf.panda.org/our\\_work/forests/importance\\_forests/tropical\\_rainforest/](https://wwf.panda.org/our_work/forests/importance_forests/tropical_rainforest/)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.atlasandboots.com/largest-rainforests-in-the-world/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agriculture>

<sup>17</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2007/04/217222-un-adopts-new-international-agreement-protect-worlds-forests>

With 2.6 billion people depending directly on agriculture, 54% of the land used for agriculture is moderately or even severely affected by soil degradation. 75% of the poor in the world are directly affected by land degradation globally.

Forests also affect the biodiversity. Over 80% of the human diet is provided by plants. Only three cereal crops (rice, maize and wheat) provide 60% of energy intake. Also as many as 80% of people living in rural areas in developing countries, rely on traditional plant-based medicines for basic healthcare.<sup>18</sup>

According to FAO, the global deforestation is largely driven by agriculture. In FAO's annual State of the World's report, the need to produce more food and the need to grow oil palm and soya, as well as cattle farming are main reasons for deforestation. However, 22 countries have successfully maintained or even increased forested areas by improving food security.<sup>19</sup>

### Sustainable development

Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development calls for collaborate efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without climate action.

For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to coordinate three core components: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. These elements are linked and all are crucial for the wellbeing of individuals and societies.

Eliminating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is a crucial requirement for sustainable development. In conclusion, there must be promotion of sustainable, inclusive and fair economic growth, which would create greater opportunities for all by reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, and promoting unified and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.<sup>20</sup>

### Climate change and global warming

Climate change is already impacting public health, food and water security, migration, peace and security. Climate change left unchecked will roll back the development gains we have made over the last decades and will make further gains impossible. Investments in sustainable development will help address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building climate resilience.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/audio/2016/07/615152>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

Even though The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not legally binding, countries are nevertheless expected to take ownership and establish a national framework to achieve the 17 goals set. The implementation and success will fully rely on countries' own sustainable development policies and programmes.

Climate change is now affecting every country on every continent. Climate change is disrupting national economies and affecting lives, costing people, as well as communities and countries. More and more people are experiencing the significant impacts of climate change, such as changing weather patterns, rising sea levels and more extreme weather conditions. The greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are driving climate change, with them being now at their highest levels in history.

Without action, it is stated that the world's average surface temperature is to rise over the 21st century and is likely to surpass 3 degrees Celsius this century. The poorest and most vulnerable people are being affected the most.

To address climate change, countries have adopted the Paris Agreement in 2015. In the agreement all countries agreed to work to limit global temperature rise.<sup>21</sup>

## Key Member States and NGOs Involved and Their Views

### Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a specialized agency of the UN that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. FAO's goal is to achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough highquality food to lead active, healthy lives. With over 194 member states, FAO works in 130 countries worldwide. FAO also works with different UN departments which share the same prospect, such as IFAD, WFP, IAEA, and WHO.<sup>22</sup>

### United Nations Development Programme

UNDP works in about 170 countries and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion. We help countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities and build resilience in order to sustain development results.<sup>23</sup> UNDP remains committed to work closely with partners across the UN system.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.fao.org/home/en/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-forest-management/toolbox/en/>

## United Nations Environment Programme

UNEP is a global environmental authority that sets the global environment agenda and promotes the implementation of the environmental expansion of sustainable development. UNEP takes also part in collaboration for REDD+.<sup>24</sup>

## Russian Federation

Russia holds one-fourth of world's reserves of wood in its territory, which makes Russia the largest country in the world. Around 45% of Russia is covered by forest area. Even though Russia supplies wood to all around the world, the potential of Russian forests is not fully exploited. Consequently Russia's share of the global forest product trade is only 4%.

At the country level, the Russian Federation alone accounts for 20 percent of the total forest area in the world.<sup>25</sup>

## Brazil

Brazil's financial success and stability relies on forest industry. By June 2012, Brazil had 7.74 million hectares of certified forest. Brazil hosts the second largest area of remaining forest on the planet, making up almost 17% of the world's frontier forests.<sup>26</sup> Brazil however has the greatest annual loss of forest area, caused by deforestation of Amazonia.

The rainforests of Brazil occupy an area of 517 million hectares, which counts up to 98% of the country's forestry. Pine and eucalyptus are the two predominant timber species produced and traded in Brazil.<sup>27</sup>

Brazil hosts 65% of Amazon rainforest basin. Since 1970 an estimated 700,000 square kilometers, or 20% of Brazil's Amazon forest has been cleared. Deforestation levels reached 20,000 square kilometers per year for much of 1980-2005, an area almost the size of Belgium. Apart from the huge annual loss of area, Amazon basin still has a great potential on sustainable forestry.

## Canada

Canada is the second largest country in the world with forest making up 40% of its land area. Canada's forests cover 9% of the whole world's forest area.<sup>28</sup> Under Canada's constitution, the federal government is responsible for matters relating to the national economy, trade and federal lands. The laws and regulations governing forest practices on provincial and territorial public lands are among the

<sup>24</sup> [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25765/SDG15\\_Brief.pdf?sequence=1&i](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/25765/SDG15_Brief.pdf?sequence=1&i)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/i1757e/i1757e.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.brazil.org.za/the-forestry-industry.html>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.fao.org/forestry/20288-0f6ee8584eea8bff0d20ad5cebcb071cf.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.sfmcanada.org/en/canada-s-forests>

most rigid in the world. Federal laws and regulations support sustainable forest management. Canada has updated these laws to meet global sustainability goals.<sup>29</sup>

## Timeline of Events

18th century	Negligent forestry, no such sustainability noticed with wood being the main source of raw materials <sup>30</sup>
19th century	The task of the 19th century consisted of afforestation of all felled areas again - this time sustainably
Late 20th century	More global awareness
1970	Committee on Forestry (COFO) established by FAO, the first UN meeting on matters concerning the forestry sector
1992	UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Outcomes included the “Forest Principles”, and Chapter 11 of Agenda 21 Combating Deforestation.
2000	UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) established in succession to the IFF as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, Millennium Summit, New York (September). World leaders accept the Millennium Development Goals
2002	World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, South Africa (September), or Rio+10

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/forests/canada/13161>

<sup>30</sup> until this point: <http://forestindustries.eu/print/137>

2005	Kyoto Protocol comes into force, includes legally binding goals for greenhouse gas emissions by developed countries, and establishes the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for developing economies
2007	UN General Assembly adopts the Non-legally Binding Instrument on all Types of Forests (NLBI)
2008	UN-REDD Programme launched by FAO, UNDP and UNEP
2009	13th World Forestry Congress, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Forests in development: a vital balance UNFCCC, Conference of 12 Parties (COP15) and meeting of the parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP5) in Copenhagen. Record numbers of participants and observers but the outcome is not clear-cut – except for forestry, where REDD is established
June, 2012	UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) <sup>31</sup>
September, 2015	UN Sustainable Development Summit: Adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 Sustainable Development Goals <sup>32</sup>
22 April 2016	196 countries signed the Paris Agreement on climate change <sup>33</sup>
28 Nov 2017	UNDP Strategic plan 2018-2021 is optimized to help countries achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development <sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Until this point: <http://www.cfa-international.org/userfiles/files/Forestry%20timeline.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

<sup>33</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

<sup>34</sup> <http://strategicplan.undp.org/>

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 12 December 2015, **(A/RES/21/1)**<sup>35</sup>
- UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021 to help countries succeed on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 27 November 2017 **(A/RES/71/243)**<sup>36</sup>
- World Charter for Nature, 28 October 1982 **(A/RES/37/7)**<sup>37</sup>
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 25 September 2015, **(A/RES/70/1)**<sup>38</sup>

## Possible Solutions

### Raising public awareness

Raising public awareness is important. Without people realizing the effect of neglecting forest protection, taking action is complicated. With forests rapidly disappearing all over the world, people might be unsure how to prevent this global crisis. It will become more and more important to educate people to start with small changes, such as using the library instead of buying books, recycling or preferring public transport.<sup>39</sup>

Awareness can be raised by several methods, such as but not limited to, including forest studies to the curricula of different level educations, online databases, spreading information via media and especially social media. By raising public awareness, people can start to act for achieving sustainable future.<sup>40</sup>

### Following the Paris Agreement

The WHO reported in “The WMO provisional statement on the State of the Global Climate” report, published in 3 December 2019, that if we do not take urgent climate action now, we are heading for a temperature increase by more than 3 degree Celsius by the end of the century. WHO also stated that the countries are nowhere near on track to meet the Paris Agreement target.

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[https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=XXVII-7-d&chapter=27&lang=en&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-7-d&chapter=27&lang=en&clang=en)

<sup>36</sup> <https://undocs.org/DP/2017/38>

<sup>37</sup> <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/39295>

<sup>38</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.conserve-energy-future.com/fabulous-ways-to-protect-trees-and-protect-forests.php>

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/gtr/gtr\\_nrs90/gtr-nrs-90-chapter-4.pdf](https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/gtr/gtr_nrs90/gtr-nrs-90-chapter-4.pdf)

As stated before, on a day-to-day basis the impacts of climate change are seen by abnormal weather patterns and other climate related risks. The WHO stated that the global temperature in 2019 was about 1.1 degrees Celsius higher than in the pre-industrial period. <sup>41</sup>

Since the Paris Agreement is not legally binding, its demands are easier to bypass. If the Paris Agreement (or other similar agreement to prevent climate change) was made legally bounding, it would make countries have to obey the protocols and programmes.

### Commitment within the countries and international liaison

With ending a global crisis like this, the governments must take action. It is upon the governments alone and together to raise awareness and keep up with their programmes and principles. Commitment and presistency is needed, since the sustainability that is pursued cannot be achieved in a short period of time.

It is also important for countries to co-operate and work together. Countries should have legally binding agreements demanding countries and governments to take action on protecting the forests. Politically, the lack of internationaly binding rules is an obstacle.

Within the countries, governments could at least survey the current situation with forests in their country area. Surveying the forest resources to prevent overusing them, categorizing forest areas and properly delimitating them from damage and finding out which areas require reforestation could be easy actions to begin with. <sup>42</sup>

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