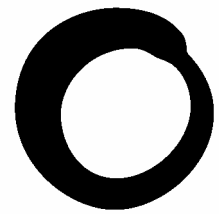


Press Briefing



**Friends of
the Earth**

Embargo: Monday 27th May 2002

WHAT DID THE RIO EARTH SUMMIT DO FOR INDONESIA'S FORESTS?

TEN YEARS OF ACCELERATING DESTRUCTION

One of the biggest objectives of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 was to save the world's forests and biodiversity. To this end the Convention on Biological Diversity was set up and a set of "Forest Principles" agreed. As up to 90 per cent of terrestrial biodiversity is contained within rainforests, rainforest conservation was recognised as a key priority.

So what has the Earth Summit done to help save the world's rainforests? Indonesia - home to the third largest area of rainforest in the world - provides a good barometer to judge how successful it has been.

Indonesia's forests are among the world's most diverse and biologically rich. Although the country comprises only 1.3 per cent of the Earth's land surface, it holds a disproportionately high share of its biodiversity, including an estimated 11 per cent of the world's plant species, 10 per cent of mammal species, and 16 per cent of bird species. Resident species include the Sumatran tiger, Sumatran elephant and the orang-utan.

But despite the wealth of Indonesia's rainforests, in the 10 years since the Earth Summit, they have been subjected to unprecedented levels of destruction. Indonesia is today losing 2 million hectares of forest every year, up from 1 million hectares in the 1980s, a doubling of the deforestation rate. Indonesia has lost over 15 million hectares of forest since the Earth Summit, representing a loss of approximately 14 per cent of its forest area.

In total, Indonesia has now lost at least 50 per cent of its original forest and much of the remainder is now severely degraded. Indonesia's lowland forests, the most biologically rich forest type, have now been almost entirely cleared on the island of Sulawesi. If current trends continue, they are predicted to disappear in Sumatra in 2005 and in Kalimantan by 2010.

The Earth Summit process has in fact done almost nothing to address the underlying causes of deforestation in Indonesia. Instead corruption, illegal logging, political instability, land rights disputes and over-expansion of the forest industry have taken their toll. Today 10 companies still control more than 45 per cent of the total logging concessions in the country. A UK-Indonesian forest programme recently calculated that up to 73 per cent of all logging in Indonesia was illegal. A former senior official to the Ministry of Forestry has claimed that theft and illegal logging have destroyed an estimated 10 million hectares of Indonesia's forests.

FOREST INDUSTRY IN CRISIS

The destructive practices of the forestry corporations in Indonesia have left the forest industry in crisis. Legal timber supplies from natural production forests declined from 17 million cubic metres in 1995 to under 8 million cubic metres in 2000. This reduction was a direct result of Indonesia's unsustainable forestry practices. The industry has made up for it by obtaining timber from forests supposedly cleared to make way for acacia and palm oil plantations. In 75 per cent of cases, these plantations are never actually planted.

It is estimated that approximately 80 per cent of the forest loss in the last 10 years has been conducted by major corporations involved in forestry, pulp and paper, mining and palm oil activities. Many of these companies have received finance from the world's leading international financial institutions and from government export credit agencies.

Large scale corporations have used fire as a cheap and easy means of clearing forest for further planting. Deliberate fire setting, combined with the dry conditions caused by El Nino events, has led to uncontrolled wildfire, causing damage of an unprecedented extent and intensity. More than 5 million hectares of forest burned in 1994 and another 4.6 million hectares burned in 1997-98.

Industrialised consumer countries have done very little to address their responsibilities for helping drive the deforestation crisis in Indonesia. They have continued to offer an open market for almost all timber products exported from Indonesia, whatever the origin, legal or otherwise. Such insatiable and irresponsible consumption patterns, set against a background of political instability and corruption, have created an ecological disaster.

EARTH SUMMIT FAILURE?

The Earth Summit process has so far entirely failed to address the conservation of the world's rainforests. Levels of rainforest destruction have not slowed and in most cases, such as Indonesia, the rate of forest loss has accelerated.

As world leaders meet in Bali, Indonesia, to set the agenda for the Johannesburg Earth Summit 2002, they cannot afford to ignore the damage done to Indonesia's rainforest since the Rio Earth Summit. They must act to save the world's forests. Friends of the Earth is calling on world leaders to:

- establish global rules for big business to make them accountable for their destructive impacts
- make it illegal for consumer countries to import illegally sourced timber
- ban the conversion of forests to plantations
- support community-based forestry management
- destroy excess timber processing capacity
- ensure government aid and World Bank/IMF policies directly support the conservation of forests.

Friends of the Earth – May 2002

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