
[PRESS RELEASE: International campaign to define Forests by their true meaning!](#)

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International campaign to define Forests by their true meaning!

La Via Campesina, Friends of the Earth International, Focus on the Global South, World Rainforest Movement and more than 120 organizations from around the world sent a letter to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO, in Rome, on the occasion of March 21st, the UN International Day of Forest. The letter demands that the FAO change its present definition of forests. During the coming three months, groups will also present the demand to national and regional FAO offices.

Isaac Rojas, coordinator for forests and biodiversity of Friends of the Earth International notes that *“FAO’s forest definition needs to reflect the cultural wealth that forests represent. The present definition only helps to hide this diversity, rather strengthening a set of false solutions and privatization trends, as well as activities that create negative impacts in the communities that depend on forests”*.

For these people who depend on forests, non-timber forest products like fruits, seeds and medicinal plants have a huge importance, as well as fishing, hunting and also agriculture. *“Peasants in forest areas traditionally practice agriculture based on knowledge transmitted over many generations, conserving, not destroying forests. Forests are fundamental for peasants to guarantee their food sovereignty. We oppose the increasing commodification of natural resources like forests, pushed by TNCs and mechanisms like REDD. Forests are crucial to maintain the ecosystem and therefore the farmers’ livelihoods”*, explains Henry Saragih from the largest global peasant organization La Via Campesina.

One of the most perverse aspects of the present FAO forest definition is the fact that it includes industrial tree monocultures. According to Teresa Perez of the World Rainforest Movement, *“these large-scale industrial tree plantations have expanded four times in the past 20 years in the global South and now account for tens of millions of hectares. The result has been deforestation and many other negative impacts for indigenous, other traditional and peasant populations like loss of territory, water and biodiversity”*.

Shalmali Guttal from Focus on the Global South adds that *“the present FAO definition benefits first and foremost corporate interests, especially the tree plantation and timber industries. These companies – national and transnational—exacerbate and often drive land and resource grabbing over territories of communities across the global South”*. It is shameful that the FAO and other international institutions associated with forest conservation continue to perpetuate this charade.

The letter concludes with the appeal to FAO to reflect in its definition what makes a forest a forest for

the communities who depend on them: *“In contrast to the existing process within FAO, a process of elaborating a new and more appropriate definition of forests must effectively engage those women and men who directly depend on forests. An appropriate forest definition must support their modes of living, their networks and organizations. On the International Day of Forests we commit to continue the campaign to move the FAO and all concerned institutions to initiate a process led by forest communities to formulate a new definition of forest.”*

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Link to the Open Letter: <http://wrm.org.uy/all-campaigns/open-letter-to-fao-on-the-occasion-of-the-international-day-of-forests-2014/>