
An emergency call to action for the forests, their peoples and life on earth. The Penang Declaration of the World Rainforest Movement

Malaysia, 17 April 1989

An emergency call to action for the forests, their peoples and life on earth

1. Forests, both temperate and tropical, are an integral part of the life support systems of the planet, performing numerous ecological and social functions that are essential for the continuation of life as we know it on earth.

Those functions include:

- Regulating climate at both the regional and global level;
- providing a habitat for the majority of species on earth;
- providing a homeland and spiritual basis for millions of forest peoples;
- maintaining and conserving soils
- regulating hydrological cycles and ensuring water supplies.

2. The continuing loss of the world's forests now constitutes a global emergency.

- In temperate areas, the bulk of primary forests have been destroyed. What remains is being lost to logging and acid rain and other pollutants;
- In tropical areas, forests are disappearing at the rate of 100 acres or more a minute. Moreover, the rates of destruction are increasing and, on current trends, little will be left within a few decades.

3. The immediate and long-term consequences of global deforestation threaten the very survival of life as we know it on earth. Indeed, the scale of deforestation and its impact now represents one of the gravest emergencies ever to face the human race.

Such consequences include:

- The disruption of climatic equilibrium and the acceleration of global warming;
- A loss of biological diversity on an unprecedented scale;
- The destruction of forest-based societies;
- Increasing droughts, floods, soil erosion and desertification;
- The dispossession and displacement of peasants and forest peoples through floods and the other ecological impacts of deforestation.

4. The current social and economic policies and practices that lead to deforestation throughout the world in the name of development are directly responsible for the annihilation of the earth's forests, bringing poverty and misery to millions and threatening global ecosystems with collapse.

Such policies and practices include:

- Plantations, both for industrial forestry and for export crops;
- Ranching schemes;
- Dam projects;
- Commercial logging;
- Colonisation schemes;
- Mining and industry;
- The dispossession of peasants and indigenous peoples;
- Roads;
- Pollution;
- Tourism.

5. Official solutions to the problem of deforestation have ignored or played down the fundamental causes of deforestation and have instead adopted policies that blame the victims of deforestation for their plight, while simultaneously pursuing solutions that can only result in the further degradation of forests and croplands through the promotion of industrialised forestry.

Specifically such policies include:

- The Tropical Forest Action Plan, as promoted by the World Bank, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the UN Development Programme and others;
- Sustained yield commercial logging, as promoted by the International Timber Trade Agreement;
- Policies to zone the forests;
- The commercialisation and privatisation of biological diversity, as promoted through the International Biodiversity Programme;
- Pollution control programmes that are directed towards managing specific pollutants rather than reducing the source of pollution.

6. Throughout the world, the victims of these policies are taking action to arrest deforestation and reverse the process of destruction. In Sarawak, Amazonia, the Himalayas, Thailand, the Philippines and elsewhere, people are standing up to protect the forests and their societies. Such peoples have proved that they are able to use the forests in the only way that is compatible with their preservation. It is not corporations, aid agencies and banks, which should be entrusted with the design and implementation of the protection and regeneration of the forest wealth of the planet.

7. The victims of the development process, along with those concerned with their fate and the fate of the earth, therefore call upon the United Nations and national governments to take urgent steps:

- To restore ecological justice and integrity to humanity by returning to the millions of people both who live in the forest and who depend upon it, their right to sustainable livelihood.
- To restore ecological justice and integrity to life on earth through ceasing further forest destruction and regenerating damaged forest lands through the guidance of indigenous peoples, peasants, and local communities, planting only their choice of trees and plants, with the aim of restoring ecological diversity and the survival of indigenous societies.

- To restrain the overconsumption and wastage of resources by the world's privileged groups through making the necessary changes in lifestyle and consumption patterns consistent with the development of sustainable livelihoods throughout the globe, in order to satisfy the ecological, spiritual, social and aesthetic needs of people everywhere.

8. Specifically we call upon the United Nations and national governments:

-To empower forest peoples and those who depend upon the forests for their livelihood with the responsibility for safe-guarding the forests and ensuring their regeneration by:

a) achieving land security for rural peoples , both through revising land tenure legislation and through land reform, as recommended in the Brundtland report;

b) empowering local people with the right to a decisive voice in formulating policies for their areas;

c) rejecting social and economic policies based on the assumed cultural superiority of non-forest peoples.

- To halt all those practices and projects which would contribute either directly or indirectly to further forest loss. Such projects would include: plantation schemes, dams, ranching, schemes, mining and industrial projects, commercial logging, the Tropical Forest Action Plan, the UN Biodiversity Programme, etc.

- To revise radically the policies of those agencies that currently finance the projects and practices causing deforestation. Funding for such projects should be ceased and instead directed towards projects that promote the protection and regeneration of forests. The agencies involved include: the multilateral aid agencies and banks, such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank; the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the United Nations Development Programme; the overseas aid agencies of the developed countries; and major international corporations.

- To implement, through the agency of forest peoples and under their direction, a programme for regenerating degraded forest lands and reinvigorating local cultures;

- To take immediate steps to curb the wastage, misuse and over-consumption of timber products.

- To ban all imports of tropical timber from natural forests and tropical woods products.

- To take immediate steps to cut down the consumption of imported beef from tropical forest areas.

- To restructure the present unequal world economic system which is dominated by institutions and practices that favour the developed countries at the expense of the poor of the Third World. This global system at present enables the developed countries to control and use an overwhelming and disproportionately high share of the world's natural resources. A fairer and more equitable economic system is therefore fundamental to any strategy for saving and regenerating the world's forests.

- To initiate a global shift towards developing sustainable livelihoods. The basic goals of such a shift would be developing systems of production that are ecologically and socially sustainable.

This will require:

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- a) reducing the scale at which production is carried out and adopting practices which minimise the impact of production on the environment;
 - b) maximising local self-sufficiency;
 - c) and assuring that economic activities are subordinated to social and ecological ends.

Statement drafted by participants of the World Rainforest Movement Meeting in Penang, Malaysia on 14-17 April, 1989, which included representatives from the following organizations:

- * The Indonesian NGOs Network for Forest Conservation (SKEPHI) (INDONESIA)
- * Sahabat Alam Malaysia (MALAYSIA)
- * Haribon Foundation (THE PHILIPPINES)
- * Project for Ecological Recovery (THAILAND)
- * Research Foundation for Science and Ecology (INDIA)
- * Japan Tropical Forest Action Network (JAPAN)
- * Rainforest Information Center (AUSTRALIA)
- * Probe International (CANADA)
- * The Ecologist (UNITED KINGDOM)
- * Survival International (UNITED KINGDOM)
- * Forest Peoples' Support Group (UNITED KINGDOM)
- * Bank Information Center (USA)
- * Rainforest Action Network (USA)