

TACKLING FOREST DESTRUCTION CRUCIAL TO BEATING CLIMATE CHANGE, UK MINISTER SAYS



The challenge of climate change will not be met unless greenhouse gas emissions caused by deforestation (forest destruction) are reduced, a Government Minister is warning on the eve of National Tree Week.

Ian Pearson, UK Climate Change Minister, today told a conference of 50 leading forestry scientists and policymakers from around the world that the Earth lost an average 7.3 million hectares of forest - an area the size of Panama - each year during the first six years of the 21st century.

Deforestation contributes to greenhouse gas emissions because carbon is released into the atmosphere from the trees and plants as they burn or decompose, and from forest soils as they are disturbed, for example, when they are ploughed for conversion to farming.

The conference is being hosted by the OECD and organised by the British Forestry Commission's Forest Research agency.

Mr Pearson said:

"Internationally, deforestation is one of the most serious problems we face in fighting climate change, accounting for around 18% of global emissions. As well as contributing to emissions, deforestation has a significant impact on the world's biodiversity and on the people who depend on forests for their livelihood.

"The Stern Review clearly identified that curbing deforestation would be an effective way to reduce emissions, but we in developed countries must recognise the difficulties in achieving this. Last week's climate conference in Nairobi saw all 189 parties to the UNFCCC working together on this issue.

"The UK has been successful in getting this on the international agenda, and we are confident of reaching an international agreement. The UK will be co-operating with Brazil, Papua New Guinea, Costa Rica, the Coalition of Rainforest Nations, Germany, as Presidency of the G8 and the EU, plus the World Bank and other interested parties, to explore ways of mobilising international resources to help developing countries with forestry management that will reduce emissions

"Deforestation policies should be shaped and led by the nations where forests stand, but there must be help from the international community. We need an international framework for achieving sustainable forestry, and last week's agreement in Nairobi was an important step in reaching that goal."

Lord David Clark of Windermere, Chairman of the Forestry Commission, said,

"This issue is as important as it gets - we overlook the role of forests at our peril. Forests here and around the world play a crucial role in regulating our climate, but we are losing them.

"Deforestation accounts for 18 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, making it the second largest source of emissions after heat and power generation, greater than emissions from all the world's transport, and 10 times greater than the UK's total emissions.

"The delegates to this conference have a chance over the next few days to help us identify the part that forestry can play in addressing this global concern.

"This is not a talking shop. We have brought together leading experts from around the world to come up with workable, practical proposals for reversing deforestation, protecting forest resources, and ensuring that forestry contributes its full role to tackling climate change.

"The story is not all bad, and in some areas of the world there is already a very considerable expansion of forest cover occurring, although not yet enough to offset the losses.

"From this I believe we can say that global forest decline is not inevitable - that positive action can yield results.

"Taking action and developing proposals for the sustainable management of the world's forests is essential and urgent."

The conference, entitled "Forestry: A Sectoral Response to Climate Change", is being held at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's Wilton Park conference centre in Steyning, West Sussex.

The Forestry Commission has launched a website, www.forestry.gov.uk/climatechange, to provide information about forests and climate change.

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