

## Preserving Tropical Forests Is Key Issue at Talks on Global Warming

By Juliet Eilperin and Steven Mufson  
Washington Post Staff Writers  
Sunday, December 9, 2007; Page A25

As 12,000 people gathered in Bali this week to begin framing a global response to Earth's warming climate, efforts to close a deal that would slow destruction of tropical forests appear to be the best prospect for a concrete achievement from the historic assemblage.

But the deforestation issue is also Exhibit A for the disputes that have made climate negotiations lengthy and divisive despite widening agreement that global warming is real and largely man-made. While scientific dispute over what causes global warming has ended, the debate over how to address it has just begun.

Deforestation is one of the biggest drivers of the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Each year, tropical forests covering an area at least equal to the size of New York state are destroyed; the carbon dioxide that those trees would have absorbed amounts to 20 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, about the same as total U.S. emissions.

The bargain is being championed by a dozen of the world's developing countries at the conference, whose ultimate goal is to map out a two-year path aimed at forging a global system for imposing and enforcing reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.



### GALLERY

#### Indonesia Hosts Climate Control Talks

A major United Nations-sponsored conference on climate change is underway in Bali, Indonesia, to negotiate an accord on greenhouse gas reduction.

But the hoped-for compromise -- which would give financial rewards to poor nations that slow or halt the destruction of their forests -- could still founder amid divisions over who bears how much responsibility for slowing climate change -- and who should pay for it.

Developing countries that profit from logging or expanded farming and construction are seeking incentives and assistance for preserving their forests or slowing the rate of destruction. But many

developed countries do not want to pay other nations for actions that are not taken, and they worry that it would be hard to measure the amount of avoided deforestation.

"The problems tend to start when you get down to the small print," said Yvo de Boer, executive secretary of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, the treaty organization that oversees international climate negotiations.

Deforestation aside, much of the focus on the Indonesian island will be on the large print. "If things go wrong in Bali, I think we are in deep trouble," said de Boer.

The goal is to come up with climate accords that would take effect after the expiration in 2012 of the Kyoto Protocol, which was negotiated a decade ago. Under that treaty, a cap-and-trade system for limiting and creating a market for emissions is in effect in Europe and has become a multibillion-dollar-a-year business.

"It will be a process to get to a mandate to get a protocol," said Dirk Forrister, a managing director of Natsource LLC, a firm that invests in projects that produce marketable credits for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

But government officials are also trying to leave Bali with some concrete achievements, and preserving the world's forests ranks as one of the most likely prospects.

"It's the area of climate-change negotiations that offers the most promise of cooperation between developing and developed countries, which is why it's so attractive to people on both sides," said Duncan Marsh, director of international climate policy for the Nature Conservancy, an advocacy group.

There is ample scientific evidence that tropical forests are particularly valuable in curbing climate change. Ken Caldeira, a scientist at the Carnegie Institution's department of global ecology, has done studies showing that these forests not only store carbon in their trees but also help produce white clouds that reflect sunlight back to space, which has a cooling effect.

In 1997, deforestation was left out of the final Kyoto accord. Industrialized countries balked at paying countries for avoiding action, and Brazil did not want interference in what it considered a matter of national sovereignty. Later, when Europe implemented its cap-and-trade system, it did not give offset credits for avoided deforestation, which it feared would flood its system with cheap credits. (It did allow credits for planting trees in areas that were deforested before 1990 or where there had been no forest vegetation for at least 50 years.)

Without financial assistance, persuading poor countries to preserve their forests is not easy. Last week, Everton Vieira Vargas, one of Brazil's senior delegates to the Bali talks, told the *Folha de Sao Paulo* newspaper that his country should not be held to the same standards as developed countries when it comes to greenhouse gases.

"It's a myopic vision to want to compare the responsibilities of India and China in emissions with the United States and Europe," Vargas said, adding that it's "very different" to compare the carbon generated by bringing electricity to Chinese villagers with the carbon emitted by sport-utility vehicles in rich countries.

But Daniel M. Price, Bush's deputy national security adviser for international economic affairs, said in an interview that one of the key tests of any climate agreement will be whether developing countries do their part.

"It can't just be the developed countries. It's got to be the developing countries as well," Price said. When it comes to the next round of climate commitments, he added, "A post-2012 framework will simply not be effective if developing countries adopt the view that they need to do nothing."

Even the traditional allies of developing nations say those countries must tackle climate change. "It's a perfectly understandable point, but to not do anything to improve the greenhouse gas situation is semi-suicidal for everybody," said Thomas E. Lovejoy, president of the H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment.

Providing financial incentives to "reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation" has emerged as the most likely way of enlisting poor countries in combating climate change. American nongovernmental organizations have helped write proposals for determining historical deforestation baselines that could be measured on a national level. That would avoid the problem of paying a country to stop deforesting one area and then have it do so elsewhere. Credits based on those "savings" could then be sold in cap-and-trade markets in industrialized nations.

Papua New Guinea is leading the group of tropical-forest nations backing a financial incentive plan. A session at the Bali talks will present 10 years of satellite and ground data to convince negotiators that accurate measurement is possible.

"Eighteen months ago, most people were really skeptical that this would ever be included in the next round," said Glenn T. Prickett, senior vice president for business and U.S. government relations at the advocacy group Conservation International. "Political opinion has really come around."

James L. Connaughton, who chairs the White House Council on Environmental Quality, said the Bush administration was still studying how to steer money to the protection of tropical rain forests. "The concept of paying for avoided deforestation is a good one," he said. "The proponents themselves recognize there are difficulties. It's a new area, and we want to make sure it is done right."

Robert G. Aisi, who is Papua New Guinea's U.N. ambassador, has been pushing for more than two years to address deforestation in the context of a climate accord. He said industrialized nations need to understand that if countries such as his hold off logging their forests, there has to be financial compensation.

"It's our resource, it's not yours," he said. "But we understand it's a resource that can be part of the global public goods."