

Forests: the future of our planet

Draft resolution

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1. Forests are often referred to as the “lungs of our planet”. The estimated area covered by the world’s forests is about 38 million square kilometres, slightly more than half of which is in developing countries. Forests perform photosynthesis and produce organic substances, using atmospheric carbon dioxide as a source of carbon and releasing oxygen back into the atmosphere. Because of their huge biomass, forests have a tremendous impact on the gaseous composition of the planet’s atmosphere, thereby helping to counter global warming.
2. Forests also perform other environmental functions. They play an important role not only in controlling the Earth’s climate but also in protecting the soil (by preventing soil erosion and floods) and water (by controlling the water balance). Forests also help to reduce desertification, by decreasing wind speed, which helps to prevent soil erosion and accumulate moisture.
3. Forests also play a fundamental role in preserving global biodiversity. Tropical, temperate and boreal forests offer a diverse range of habitats for plants, animals and microorganisms and the majority of the species living on our planet live in forests.
4. Forests are also very important for the economy of some countries while at the same time playing an environmental, social, cultural and recreational role.
5. The Assembly notes that there has been a significant decrease in the surface area covered by forests, particularly in developing countries, where there has been an increase in illegal logging, in violation of legislation and the international conventions in force, leading to substantial losses, particularly for timber-producing countries. In many cases, the proportion of illegally produced timber far exceeds that of legally produced timber.
6. In Europe, on the other hand, the surface area covered by forests is increasing as the result of a serious scientific approach adopted to reforestation. A large proportion of the forests planted in Europe are monocultures with little biodiversity. The Assembly regrets that a substantial proportion of these plantations comprise alien species.
7. The Assembly would underline the fact that the importance of European forests for the conservation of nature was acknowledged in the context of the implementation of the Bern Convention and that several types of forest habitat are listed in Appendix I to Resolution No. 4 of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention and in Appendix I of the EU “Habitat Directive”. The Assembly also welcomes the establishment of the Emerald Network and the Natura 2000 Network.
8. The Assembly would also draw attention to the two major world conventions signed at the United Nations 1992 Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro – the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity – which concern the conservation and sustainable use of forests throughout the world.
9. The Assembly draws attention to its Recommendation 1761 (2006) on preventing forest fires and to the fact that most forest fires are caused by human beings and lead to considerable losses in terms of flora and fauna. The Assembly deplores the fact that the vast majority of fires are caused directly or indirectly by people who do not comply with safety regulations.

10. The Assembly believes that it is necessary to establish more effective monitoring to curb deforestation and harmonise the legislation governing forestry in the different countries. The Assembly therefore invites member and non-member states and the organisations concerned, to:

10.1. set up a committee within an existing organisation (the UN, for instance) to be responsible for the development, adoption and enforcement of legislation designed to preserve and protect forests;

10.2. draw up international agreements on forest protection which would be binding on all the countries with significant forest resources which ratify them;

10.3. devise and introduce a system for the payment of a tax in respect of every unit of greenhouse gas, to be allocated for forest rehabilitation purposes to countries which have forest resources, in proportion to the volumes of greenhouse gases absorbed by their forests ;

10.4. register the organisations concerned existing in countries with significant forest resources with the aforementioned committee so that the former have authority to monitor compliance with the new legislation and the forestry situation;

10.5. take the necessary steps to prevent and detect forest fires and improve response times and forest-fire-fighting technologies to reduce the number and the extent of such fires ;

10.6. develop and implement tried and tested sustainable forest management techniques ;

10.7. introduce criminal sanctions for pyromaniacs ;

10.8. take steps to launch campaigns to raise awareness of this problem in schools with a view to preventing forest fires;

10.9. establish climate policies which take into account the role of forests as carbon sinks and stores in order to tackle worldwide environmental challenges such as global warming;

10.10. carry out reforestation in a carefully supervised and scientific manner and avoid monoculture and particularly the large-scale planting of alien species;

10.11. support the work being done by forestry protection and inspection departments, in particular in dealing with insects and forest diseases;

10.12. ensure that forestry management complies with the following principles:

10.12.1. use of forests not exceeding their capacity for regeneration;

10.12.2. preservation and strengthening of forests' environmental and protective functions, (in particular the protection of soil and water) and forests' other functions;

10.12.3. good management and conservation of forest biodiversity;

10.12.4. allowing the use of forests in accordance with their size, functions, location, and environmental and economic conditions;

10.12.5. creating the conditions for forest regeneration;

10.12.6. compliance with science-based rules of use;

10.13. make it compulsory for forestry industries to use more efficient processing technologies which provide a better final output while using a smaller quantity of raw materials.

11. The Assembly also invites the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to study and encourage good practices in forest conservation at local and regional level .