

24 September 2008



Press Release

ENV/DEV/1005

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

'REDD'-LETTER DAY FOR FORESTS: UNITED NATIONS, NORWAY UNITE TO COMBAT

CLIMATE CHANGE FROM DEFORESTATION, SPEARHEADING NEW PROGRAMME

Tropical-forested countries are stepping up the fight to combat climate change via a pioneering new initiative called the UN-REDD Programme, which was announced today.

The UN-REDD Programme, which stands for the United Nations Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, to be carried out by three United Nations agencies, was unveiled by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and the Prime Minister of Norway, Jens Stoltenberg, whose Government is financing this initial phase in the amount of \$35 million.

Nine countries have already expressed formal interest in receiving assistance through the UN-REDD Programme — Bolivia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam and Zambia.

Some among them, namely Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Democratic Republic of the Congo and United Republic of Tanzania will “quick start” their efforts through developing national strategies, establishing robust systems for monitoring, assessment, reporting and verification of forest cover and carbon stocks, and building necessary capabilities — with support to others to follow in due course.

In subsequent phases, pilot projects will be rolled out to test ways of managing existing forests, in order to maintain their ecosystem services and maximise their carbon stocks, while delivering benefits to the community and boosting livelihoods.

The UN-REDD Programme will support these countries as part of an international move to include the Programme in new and more comprehensive United Nations climate change arrangements to kick in post-2012.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that the cutting down of forests is now contributing close to 20 per cent of the overall greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere.

The UN-REDD Programme is aimed at tipping the economic balance in favour of sustainable management of forests, so that their formidable economic, environmental and social goods and services benefit countries, communities and forest users, while also contributing to important reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Ban said: “The battle against climate change cannot be won without the world’s forests — this is now clear. This initiative will not only demonstrate how forests can have an important role as part of a post-2012 climate regime, expected from the December 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference. It will also help build much

needed confidence that the world community is ready to support the implementation of an inclusive, ambitious and comprehensive climate regime, once it is ratified.”

“This initiative is also a concrete illustration of the UN system’s commitment to provide coordinated support to Member States in responding to their climate change challenges. We appreciate Norway’s partnership in our effort to help the global community address this shared challenge,” he said.

Mr. Stoltenberg commented: “We must reduce deforestation if we are to succeed in fighting climate change.”

Through concerted international efforts we can achieve major reductions quickly, said Mr. Stoltenberg, underlining the need to work out international standards for measuring, reporting and verifying emissions from deforestation and degradation.

“The UN-REDD initiative is a quick-start action programme that aims to demonstrate that early results are possible in some of the major forests of the world -- and to do so through the UN “Delivering as One”. That is why Norway has decided to finance the UN-REDD Programme,” he said.

The Norwegian Prime Minister concluded: “Fighting greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation is a priority for Norway now and also in the years to come. If we are successful in stage one, Norway will certainly continue support for the UN-REDD Programme and on an even more substantial scale.”

If the UN-REDD Programme gets the green light in a post-2012 United Nations climate agreement, it may eventually lead to developed countries being able to pay developing ones for the emissions saved. Such an arrangement will be crucial in the global effort to avoid catastrophic climate change, and must come in addition to deep cuts in developed country emissions.

Developing countries could receive significant payments that, in turn, can be spent on much needed development. According to one estimate, Indonesia has the potential to be compensated \$1 billion a year if its deforestation rate was reduced to 1 million hectares annually.

The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will implement the new programme in the spirit of the UN ‘Delivering as One’. Each agency will bring unique skills and knowledge to the Programme in order to maximize its success.

Achim Steiner, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, said that “UNEP ecologists and the scientific community have long argued that forests are worth more alive than dead — that their ecosystem services and benefits are worth billions, if not trillions, of dollars if only we can capture these in the economic models.”

“REDD offers an opportunity to begin capturing these real values and will bring much needed finance to maintain one of the world’s central life support systems,” he added. “With any new initiative, there are risks and rewards. REDD must benefit local communities and indigenous peoples as much as it benefits national economies and the global environment. If that is done the prospects are exciting and potentially far reaching.”

Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, said: “Providing adequate financial resources and relevant capacity-building to developing countries in the context of their development processes, with a view to managing forests and other land use changes, to preserve the carbon sequestration capacity of their forests and to improve their knowledge of the role of forests in climate change, has never been more important.”

“In this context, the spotlight has been turned on the means and ways to ensure forest monitoring, assessment and verification in a bid to safeguard forests and monitor emissions from deforestation. These will be a key component of the UN-REDD Programme,” he added.

Kemal Derviş, UNDP Administrator, said: “The scope of the climate challenge ahead of us requires that we innovate in the way we do development. Reducing carbon emissions by providing countries and local communities with incentives for not cutting down forests is emerging as a creative and effective way to help us address the climate change challenge, protect vital ecosystems and support livelihoods. The UN-REDD Programme, which brings together the skills of FAO, UNDP and UNEP, with generous assistance from Norway, sets the stage for this kind of ‘win-win-win’ situation.”

The Programme will assess a wide range of pressing issues, including how best to counter the forces that are driving deforestation and how best to ensure the needs of local and indigenous peoples are addressed in a post-2012 climate agreement that may include payments for standing forests.

Other issues include rigorous verification systems, some of which may be addressed by satellite monitoring, which can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the international community that a conserved forest remains that way.

The Programme will also look at how payments could be structured under a REDD climate convention instrument alongside the various financial and insurance options needed to cover losses from such projects as a result of events such as fire and pest attack.

By June of next year, it is expected that, as a result of the various capacity-building measures, national readiness plans will have been drawn up for participating countries, so that if a formal REDD agreement is made by nations in Copenhagen, countries will be ready to go.

The UN-REDD Programme is also working and cooperating closely with the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, the Global Environment Facility’s Tropical Forest Account and Australia’s International Forest Carbon Initiative.

Between 1990 and 2005 the rate of deforestation averaged 13 million hectares, mostly in the tropics. Greenhouse gas emissions with felling, slash and burn agriculture and other deforestation effects account for around 17 per cent or more of global emissions — the second largest source after the energy sector. By 2100, clearing of tropical forests could release 87 to 130 gigatons of carbon into the atmosphere.

In 2007, at the thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, countries agreed the Bali Action Plan. It mandates parties to negotiate a post-2012 instrument, including possible financial incentives for forest-based climate change mitigation actions in developing countries. The Bali meeting also adopted a decision on reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries, and encouraging parties to explore a range of actions in this field.

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