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**Fighting climate change with forests**

The global community came together this September at the UN Secretary-General’s Climate Summit in New York and displayed the strongest level of ambition and commitment ever demonstrated against climate change. With nine climate change action areas the focus of the summit, one stood out – Forests. In a strong show of direct support for forests as a key climate change mitigation tool, more leaders of both developed and developing countries than ever before joined to announce significant reductions in forest carbon emissions, and to support a timeline to slow, end and reverse deforestation – representing a first in the fight against climate change.

This groundbreaking action sparked *The Times* newspaper to proclaim it “the key outcome” of the Climate Summit. The importance of forests, though, is something already appreciated by the more than 1.6 billion people around the world that depend on them. Forests provide food, shelter and financial resources to people, and play a critical role in conserving biodiversity. What is new is the growing swell of global support for forests as a climate change mitigation tool.

Scientist and technical experts have, for many years, known that carbon emissions from forest loss are a major contributor to climate change – in fact, destroying and degrading forests accounts for more carbon emissions each year than all the planes, trains, ships and automobiles in the world. Now we are seeing broader engagement from all sectors of the global community to address forest emissions. The launch of the *New York Declaration on Forests*[[1]](#footnote-1) and its endorsement by global decision makers marks a significant tipping point in this regard.

The Declarationhas now been endorsed by more than 160 entities, including countries, states, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations and major companies. The ambition captured in the Declaration is more than just a vision – it is backed by tangible commitments to action and a very clear timeline. These commitments come from all sectors and together have the potential to halve deforestation by 2020 and end it by 2030 and to restore 350 million hectares of degraded forest landscapes.

As part of this, indigenous peoples have committed through a global alliance to conserve hundreds of millions of hectares tropical forest, governments of tropical forest developing countries have pledged to reduce deforestation or restore degraded forests in some of the most valuable forest areas in the world, and new bilateral and multilateral agreements have been forged to financially reward countries for reducing deforestation.

This strengthened recognition of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) as a key to mitigating climate change, combined with the historic collaboration of governments, the private sector, indigenous peoples, forest-dependent communities and civil society marks a major turning point in the fight against climate change, and the conservation of the world’s forests.

The UN-REDD Programme – a collaborative initiative of the UN Development Programme, UN Food and Agriculture Programme and the UN Environment Programme – is pleased to have worked together with the many partners that developed the Declaration, and more so to see its broad endorsement. The Programme works with partner developing countries to support them in building the technical capacities necessary to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) and to harness the potential social, environmental and economic benefits of doing so.

While the Declaration represents growing support for a multi-sectoral action plan to end forest loss, we at the UN-REDD Programme are also seeing an upsurge of developing countries taking active steps to engage in REDD+ readiness. Since the Programme’s establishment in 2008, with nine pilot countries, we now have more than 56 partner countries, with this number increasing almost monthly.

This higher level of engagement on REDD+ by developing and developed countries, the private sector and forest-dependent indigenous peoples and local communities requires a higher level of support – both technical and financial. The UN-REDD Programme is responding to these shifting needs by developing an updated 2016-2020 strategy. A comprehensive consultative process is ensuring that the strategy considers the needs, challenges and opportunities across all sectors.

In addition, developed countries have stepped forward to increase their financial support to the process – including increased support to multilaterals. Multilaterals, including the UN-REDD Programme and the World Bank-facilitated Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, have played an important role in supporting countries across the spectrum of REDD+ action. And it is through multilaterals that the combined capacity and commitment of many nations has been harnessed to build the capacities of countries to deliver forest emissions reductions.

The world, therefore, is now poised and well-positioned to move to the next level. Together, forest-dependent communities, governments, the private sector and UN agencies can continue this positive momentum and work to deliver REDD+ for the benefit of people and the planet.

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For more information, visit [www.un-redd.org](http://www.un-redd.org)

1. <http://bit.ly/NYForestDeclaration> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)