

DEFORESTATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Forests in ASEAN cover more than 193 million hectares, or 44% of the land area. Everyday, they play a vital role in our lives by contributing to national economic development and environmental stability.

Yet, forests in the region are threatened, and have declined by almost 7 million hectares, or 3.4%, since 2013, contributing to an alarming rate of loss of biodiversity, massive forest fires, pollution and climate change. Much of this has been undertaken at an industrial scale for agricultural and cash crop plantations.

This document gives key information and steps for lawmakers in Southeast Asia to ensure forest protection and management, and reduce pollution and climate impacts.

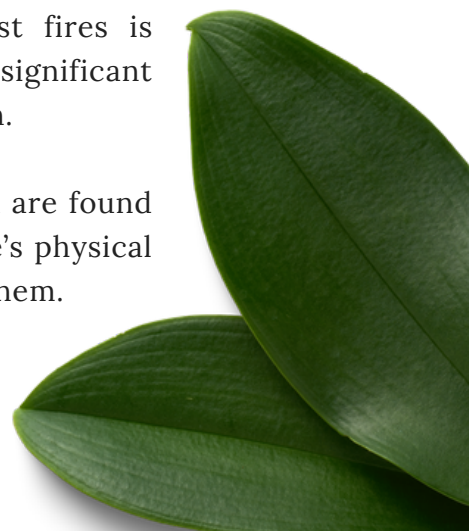
WHY DO WE NEED TO PROTECT FORESTS TO RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS?

TO PROTECT THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

Deforestation, by increasing human exposure to wildlife, causes an increase in the number of infectious diseases affecting humans, such as the COVID-19 virus.

Forest fires used in the crop planting process can cause huge spikes in pollution levels associated with respiratory, cerebrovascular and cardiovascular disease. The global annual mortality from forest fires is estimated at 250-600,000 persons, while forest fires also have a significant impact on infant and child mortality, wellbeing and physical growth.

Humanity relies on 28,000 medicinal plant species, many of which are found in forest ecosystems. Forests also have positive impacts on people's physical and mental health, and many have a deep spiritual relationship to them.





TO GUARANTEE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Forests are critical to prospects of development. They provide more than 86 million green jobs worldwide and support the livelihoods of many more.

Healthy forests provide food, nutrition, water, shelter and income-generating opportunities that become essential safety nets in times of hardship.

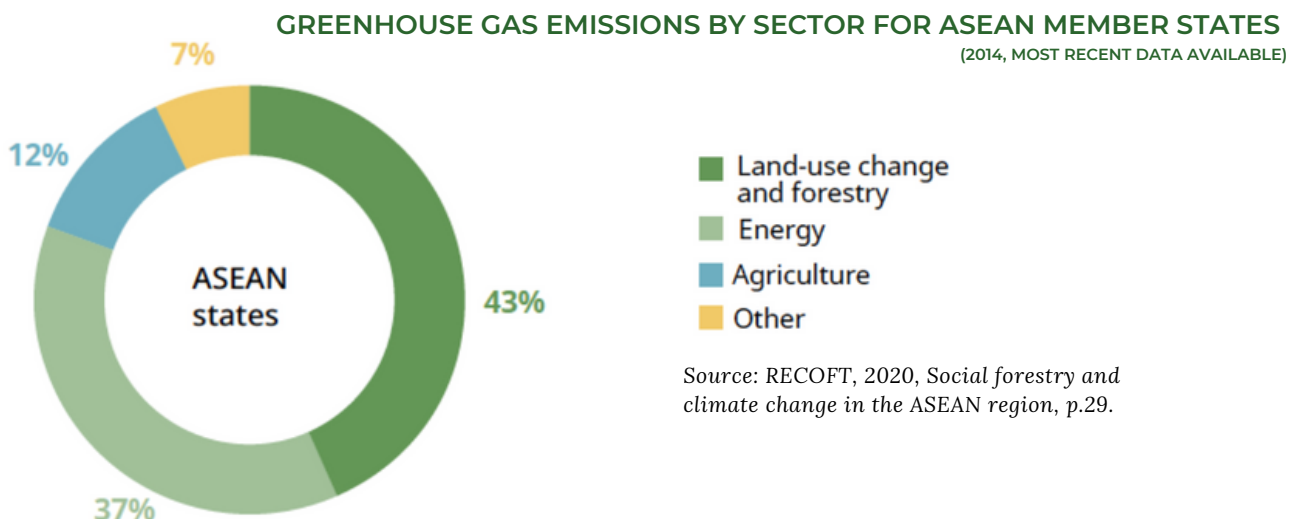
Forests supply water and provide habitats for many pollinators essential to sustainable food production and security. It is estimated that 75% of the world's leading food crops are dependent on animal pollination.

In contrast, improper forest management and deforestation have massive economic costs approximating billions of dollars due to increased diseases, fire mitigation and emergency operations and the loss of valuable resources.

TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

The poor management of land and forests is ASEAN's leading source of greenhouse gas emissions (about 43% in 2014) that contribute to climate change. ASEAN forests and how they are managed are of critical importance to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Forests can help reduce the impacts of climate change such as extreme weather, flooding, storm, heatwaves and drought, and provide natural resources that aid recovery.





THE PROBLEM

Agricultural expansion is the main driver of deforestation and the associated loss of forest biodiversity. A wide-range of agricultural activities - land burning, both before and after harvest, monoculture or the use of chemical fertilizer - add to the deterioration of land.

The UN has launched a range of initiatives to promote the protection and rehabilitation of forests. Yet, only seven countries have reported reduced deforestation to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated how this unsustainable deforestation path is putting our collective future in danger. Despite this, during the pandemic, tree cover losses increased by 77% globally as countries pushed for the exploitation of resources to boost their economy.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN



ENHANCED FOREST PROTECTION

ASEAN member states must accelerate efforts to protect forests in a way that is compatible with human rights, in particular indigenous rights and customary land rights. One successful approach has been to promote social forestry and the transferring of land to community-owned status for management and conservation. In ASEAN, it represents almost 14 million hectares, double the area since 2010. This trend is positive but needs acceleration.

RESTORING DEGRADED FORESTS

Deforestation has caused the degradation of forests' capacities to regulate ecosystems on a wide scale. It is estimated that 60–80% of intact forests were already degraded by 2015. Sixty one countries have pledged to restore 170 million hectares of degraded forest lands under the Bonn Challenge, but none are from ASEAN.

TRANSFORMING OUR FOOD SYSTEM

Transformational change is needed in the way we manage our forests and their biodiversity, produce and consume our food, and interact with nature. It is imperative that land-use decisions take the true value of forests into account. This requires adopting, on a wide-scale, agroforestry and sustainable production practices, embracing healthier diets, reducing food waste, and ensuring agribusinesses commit to deforestation-free commodity chains.

WHAT CAN PARLIAMENTARIANS DO?

Global level

- Push for your government to join UN initiatives such as the Bonn Challenge and to integrate ambitious land use and deforestation mitigation goals in its Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Agreement.
- Join associations of parliamentarians seeking to advance environmental protection such as the [Ecocide Alliance](#), [Global Renewables Congress](#) and [ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights](#).

National level

- Push your government to adopt legislation that will ensure the transboundary regulation of companies' environmental impacts. Examples of such legislation include [Singapore's Transboundary Haze Pollution Act, 2014](#).
- Push for your country to adopt a rights-based approach to forestry management that takes into account indigenous and customary land rights and practices, the rights of women, and protects the right to health and to sustainable development.
- Ensure your country has clear short and long-term targets concerning: forest restoration, forest conservation under the social forestry approach, and climate change mitigation from land use.
- Push for your government to adopt legislation that provides strict incentives and or sanctions to companies that have not yet made zero-deforestation commitments.

Local level

- Meet with constituents to take up their concerns and feedback on issues such as forest fires, climate change, pollution or biodiversity loss.

COUNTRY-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS



Cambodia

Climate risk index: **115** out of 181 countries

FROM 2001 TO 2019, CAMBODIA LOST 2.31MHA OF TREE COVER, EQUIVALENT TO A 26% DECREASE IN TREE COVER SINCE 2000, AND 973MT OF CO₂ EMISSIONS.

- Community forest managers under social forestry programs should be given adequate compensation for their participation in forest restoration or forest protection activities, and have clearly defined roles and rights.
- Ensure the meeting of the target of increasing the level of forest cover to 60% of the total land area and of allocating 2 million hectares of forest to community forests by 2029 as set out in The 2010–2029 National Forest Programme.
- Ensure adequate incentives for communities to participate in community forestry plans by providing land that is not overly degraded, has reasonable production capacity and by providing training for communities and local government staff to develop, submit and verify community forestry management plans.
- Increase efforts and funding allocated to tackling illegal logging.
- Ensure companies commit to no deforestation and enforce judgements and legal measures taken to sanction companies responsible for environmental damage from their supply chain. Adopt strong sanctions such as canceling permits for land grabbing and land encroachment.

Indonesia

Climate risk index: **50** out of 181 countries

FROM 2001 TO 2019, INDONESIA LOST 26.8MHA OF TREE COVER. THIS IS A 17% DECREASE IN TREE COVER SINCE 2000, AND 10.9GT OF CO₂ EMISSIONS.

- Improve official monitoring of air quality systems and provide public access to data.
- Protect, rewet and restore peatlands and cancel all plans to further convert peatlands.
- Publish detailed maps of company plantation boundaries to ensure transparency and accountability, and publish regular government audits of plantation companies' compliance with forest fires and deforestation regulations.
- Ensure companies commit to no deforestation, and enforce judgements and legal measures taken to sanction companies responsible for environmental damage from their supply chain. Adopt strong administrative sanctions such as canceling permits.
- Ensure the meeting of the target of transferring 12.7 million hectares of state forest for community management as per 2016 announcement.

Malaysia

Climate risk index: **44** out of 181 countries

FROM 2001 TO 2019, MALAYSIA LOST 8.12MHA OF TREE COVER, EQUIVALENT TO A 28% DECREASE IN TREE COVER SINCE 2000, AND 3.55GT OF CO₂ EMISSIONS.

- Malaysia must take action against companies within its own jurisdiction responsible for fires in Indonesia. It can take as an example the Singapore Transboundary Haze Pollution Act, 2014, which applies extraterritorially.
- Set a target of land to transfer to local communities for social forestry.
- Integrate land-use and deforestation climate mitigation pledge in NDC.

Myanmar

Climate risk index: **69** out of 181 countries

FROM 2001 TO 2019, MYANMAR LOST 3.69MHA OF TREE COVER, EQUIVALENT TO A 8.6% DECREASE, AND 1.45GT OF CO₂ EMISSIONS.

- Review and amend the Virgin, Fallow and Vacant Management of Lands Law to respect and protect customary land rights and prevent further deforestation.
- Achieve strong, clear and transparent forest tenure based on the recognition of customary land rights.
- Ensure the meeting of targets to transfer forest areas to local communities as per the Community Forestry Strategy 2018-2030.
- Ensure companies commit to no deforestation and enforce judgements and legal measures taken to sanction companies responsible for environmental damage from their supply chain. Adopt strong administrative sanctions such as canceling permits.

Thailand

Climate risk index*: **10** out of 181 countries

*2019

FROM 2000 TO 2018, THAILAND LOST 1.8MHA OF TREE COVER. THIS IS A 9.4% DECREASE IN TREE COVER SINCE 2000

- Promote environmental sustainability in all aspects of the supply chain for all products linked to deforestation, and ensure companies commit to no deforestation.
- Publish detailed maps of company plantation boundaries to ensure transparency and accountability. Enforce legal measures to sanction companies responsible for environmental damage from their supply chain.
- Ensure the meeting of targets to transfer forest areas to local communities.

FROM 2001 TO 2019, VIETNAM LOST 2.86MHA OF TREE COVER, EQUIVALENT TO A 17% DECREASE IN TREE COVER AND 1.03GT OF CO₂ EMISSIONS.

- Recognize and clarify the legal rights and roles of households and communities under the social forestry policies.
- Reform the 2021–2030 Vietnam Forestry Strategy to increase the value, quality and sustainability of agricultural products over the expansion of their volume.
- Increase investment for forest plantation, forest protection and forest enrichment activities and for forest protection equipment such as fire management and equipment.
- Ensure companies commit to no deforestation and enforce judgements and legal measures taken to sanction companies responsible for environmental damage from their supply chain.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- APHR's [Manifesto](#) on and [webinar series](#) on measures ASEAN parliamentarians can take to promote adjust and sustainable economic recovery from COVID19
- FAO and UNEP. 2020. The State of the World's Forests 2020. Forests, biodiversity and people. Rome.
- RECOFT, social forestry and climate change in the ASEAN region, situational analysis, 2020.

If you are interested in further information or support to address these issues in your country and parliament, please contact Cannelle Gueguen-Teil at: cannelle@aseanmp.org or info@aseanmp.org.