



United Nations Decade on Biodiversity

STATEMENT BY

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“Forests and biodiversity: Too precious to lose”

Home to some 80 per cent of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity, more than a billion people depend directly on forests for their food, shelter, income and energy.

Forests are one of the key pillars for maintaining biodiversity globally, nationally and locally. Forest growth sequesters and stores carbon from the atmosphere, contributing to regulation of the global carbon cycle and climate change mitigation.

Healthy forest ecosystems produce and conserve soil and stabilize stream flows and water runoff—preventing land degradation and desertification and reducing the risks of natural disasters such as droughts, floods and landslides.

In addition, forested watersheds provide an estimated 75 per cent of the world’s accessible freshwater resources, on which more than half the Earth’s people depend for domestic, agricultural, industrial and environmental purposes.

Finally, forests serve as storehouses of genetic material for the development of medicines, with an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 plant species harvested for traditional or modern medicine.

However, continuing deforestation caused by human activities and climate change pose major challenges to sustainable development, with severe implications for our planet and human well-being.

Biodiversity loss in forests takes many forms. It happens through clearing for agriculture and grazing, replacing old forests with plantations, illegally harvesting wood and illegal wildlife trade. All of this can make forests less resilient to threats such as climate change and habitat degradation, creating a negative-feedback cycle that ultimately leads to more biodiversity loss.

Increased deforestation over the past two decades has also been linked to almost one third of disease outbreaks such as Ebola, and the Zika and Nipah viruses. This is because deforestation drives wild animals out of their natural habitats and closer to human populations, creating a greater opportunity for diseases that spread from animals to humans.



Fortunately, we can prevent further forest loss. Using Nature Based solutions, we can use the power of forests to restore and strengthen these ecosystems, even while enhancing their contributions to resolving global challenges.

Trees and forests, for instance, are a big part of nature-based solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Carefully planted trees can act as firebreaks, keeping trees next to farmland can protect crops from the erosive forces of intense rain, and forests can alleviate inland floods due to the sponge-like way they absorb water.

This is an urgent time for our planet. We are in the middle of a climate crisis and a global biodiversity emergency. Yet we are also living in a period of unprecedented momentum for the environment. Young people everywhere are holding us to account. And governments are listening. Through various recent commitments and agreements, including the New York Declaration on Forests, the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 and its Global Forest Goals, governments are beginning to integrate consideration of forest ecosystem services into their development policies and plans.

And later this year, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will adopt a post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

In this 'Super Year' for biodiversity, and for many years to come, managing forests sustainably and restoring them when needed will be critical for people, biodiversity and for the climate.
