



INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL TIMBER ORGANIZATION

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Statement on behalf of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)

By Gerhard Dieterle, Executive Director

Honorable Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great honor and opportunity to address this extraordinary assembly of global leaders on behalf of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO).

ITTO is an international organization governed by the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) 2006, with a membership of 73 tropical timber producer and consumer countries.

The objectives of the International Tropical Timber Agreement are to promote the expansion and diversification of international trade in tropical timber from sustainably managed and legally harvested forests and to promote the sustainable management of tropical timber producing forests.

For many years ITTO has complemented ongoing REDD+ efforts, among others through programs focusing on reducing deforestation and forest degradation and enhancing environmental services in tropical forests, forest law enforcement and good governance, implementing activities to support implementation of CITES regulations for tropical tree species, developing timber tracking methodologies, producing guidelines for sustainable forest management and building capacity for sustainable forest management in tropical producer countries.

Excellencies, distinguished Delegates, today I would like to draw your attention to an alarming new development which, in our view requires urgent attention to realize the potential of tropical forests as a major pillar in international climate mitigation and adaptation efforts.

New scientific research along with emerging reports from our member countries indicate that forest degradation in the tropics has been vastly underestimated and is contributing a much higher share to CO₂ emissions from tropical forests than previously assumed. A recent study goes as far as to state that forest degradation is contributing more than two-thirds of the CO₂ emissions from tropical forests and that tropical forests therefore might have become already a net emitter of CO₂. This suggests that forest management aspects should receive much higher attention in international forest and climate initiatives, including current REDD+ efforts which are mainly focusing on fighting external drivers of deforestation.



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In our view, this requires urgent attention as rapid population growth and increasing wealth will lead to a significantly elevated demand for harvested wood products and other forest products. Expert opinion suggests that the emerging supply deficit of timber and other forest products could amount to billions of tons by midcentury.

In this context we need to look at forest products the same way we look at food: there is no alternative to producing and using them. People in developing countries depend on forest products for living, shelter, food, medicine, income and household energy. If rapidly increasing demands for forest products are not provided in a sustainable way, more deforestation and forest degradation will happen, or will need to be compensated by using non-renewable materials for construction and energy. All of these outcomes have the potential to strongly undermine current efforts to fight climate change and promote sustainable development.

The conclusion is clear: Reducing demand for forest products through protection is not the answer. As a matter of urgency productive forests and forest landscapes including associated value chains need to become again a corner stone in the global forest climate and development agenda.

Closing the gap requires five essential forest management approaches:

- Protect essential high-biodiversity and protection forests for national and global public good purposes;
- Restore degraded multi-purpose forest landscapes for productive use and economically viable benefits;
- Improve the adaptive capacity of tropical forests to make them resilient against climate change impacts;
- Manage and use existing forests sustainably and more efficiently;
- Promote green and degradation-free supply chains and trade: establish legality and sustainability in domestic and international markets to increase demand.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, in concluding I would like to emphasize that ongoing REDD+ efforts will not succeed without considering the rapidly increasing demand for forest products and services in developing countries. Growing populations and especially the poor are in need of wood and household energy for their daily living. Smart incentives and finance are urgently needed to build legal and sustainable supply chains. And it would be money well-spent as it would not only lead to massive climate mitigation and adaptation outcomes but also contribute to significant green growth, jobs and income. As a renewable source it would yield also substantial substitution benefits which could eventually be higher than all other forest-related measures together.

With the support of the international community ITTO can make a substantial contribution in helping tropical forest countries harnessing the role of productive tropical forests for achieving desired climate and development outcomes.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Gerhard Dieterle
Executive Director
International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)