

Rampant Illegal And Destructive Logging Threatens The World's Third Largest Rainforest

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Rapid forest loss occurring in Indonesia is threatening its biological diversity and the livelihoods of hundreds of indigenous people who depend on the forest for their survival. Sumatra, Indonesia ©Harbinson/Greenpeace



Wawoi Falls, Papua New Guinea from the air. The forests of Papua New Guinea are part of the third largest rainforest in the world. ©Greenpeace

One of the last great Ancient Forests, is the Paradise Forest of Asia Pacific which encompasses the diverse tropical forests of Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and nearby archipelagos.

This region has evergreen rainforests including mangrove, coastal and swamp forests as well as lowland rainforests and monsoon and deciduous forests in the drier and more mountainous regions.

The Paradise Forests support well over 500 species of mammals and more than 1,600 species of birds, not to mention around 30,000 species of higher plants. These include biological treasures like Indonesia's giant rafflesia flower that can grow up to one metre across, and more than 2,000 species of orchids. Of 43 known species of the bird of paradise, 38 occur in Papua New Guinea alone. Indonesia's remaining ancient forest is a refuge for the last populations of man's fourth closest relative, the orang-utan, and for the Sumatran and Javan rhinoceros that once roamed across much of Southeast Asia.

The cultural diversity of these forests is as astounding as their natural wonders. In New Guinea alone there are more than 800 languages, one third of all the languages spoken on Earth. Many of these cultures depend on these forests for their livelihood- and have done so for untold generations. Their future and the future of the forests are intimately linked.

Unfortunately, Indonesia and New Guinea have already lost around 65% of their ancient Paradise Forests and the region as a whole has seen a 25% increase in timber production in 1996-98 compared to the previous decade. Across the Paradise Forests of Asia Pacific, trans-national corporations continue to operate destructively, and often outside of the law, as they harvest the last remaining accessible forest resources.



The Penan are one of the few remaining nomadic peoples of the rain forest. Their homeland in the Malaysian state of Sarawak is undergoing one of the highest rates of logging on earth. ©Greenpeace/Ngo

Paradise Forests of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands

The Paradise Forests of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands in Melanesia are part of the third largest rainforest in the world.

The forests provide food, water, housing, fuel, transport and medicine for generations of communities that depend on forests for their livelihood.

Over the past decade the Paradise Forests have been targeted by multi-national timber companies, particularly from Malaysia, who seek to profit from exploiting the region's remaining forests now that their own have been virtually logged out. These companies have secured rights to log huge areas and have established a strong political presence.

The forestry industry in Papua New Guinea is dominated by Rimbunan Hijau (RH). RH is a global conglomerate of companies controlled by the Tiong family from Sarawak in Malaysia. RH also has significant logging interests in Russia, Equatorial Guinea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Russia.

Illegal Timber

Most large-scale logging operations in PNG, including several of those operated by Rimbunan Hijau, are unlawful as they are in fundamental breach of a number of basic legal requirements.

Many logging operations do not have the informed consent of the local resource owners (most of whom have never even been correctly identified), have not been initiated and allocated according to the requirements of the Forestry Act, are being operated in almost complete defiance of environmental laws and regulations and are not sustainable, which is a specific requirement of both the PNG Constitution and the Forestry Act.

Indigenous landowners who did not give permission for logging to take place on their land are now facing threats to their livelihoods as their forest homes disappear around them.

John Danaie, a landowner from the Wawoi Guavi in the Western Province where RH is logging his land without permission is leading his people in a court case against the company. In a statement made to Greenpeace, he talks of major environmental damage where cultural sacred sites have been destroyed and water ways permanently damaged.



Sakas Aonomo's family is opposed to logging on their land at Wawoi Guavi, Middle Fly, Papua New Guinea. "By looking at that place I feel very sad and upset and frustrated about my land being destroyed." © Scheltema/Greenpeace

Forests Under Seige in Indonesia

Indonesia, an archipelago of some 15,000 islands, stretching from the waters off Malaysia to the island of New Guinea, is home to some 10% of the planet's diversity of plants and animals. Orangutans, elephants, tigers, rhinoceros, a thousand species of birds, and thousands of plant species are all part of the biological heritage of Indonesia. The archipelago is also home to hundreds of indigenous people who have traditionally lived in and been sustained by Indonesia's forests.

But these forests are under seige. Forest loss in Indonesia has doubled during the 1990's to 3.8 million hectares lost in 2000¹. This is equivalent to six times the rate of forest loss in the Brazilian Amazon.² The most recent and authoritative survey of the country's forest cover predicts that lowland dipterocarp forests – the richest tropical habitat of all – will have vanished from Sumatra and Kalimantan by 2010 if current trends continue³.

"In many cases, the timber industry has made life harder for the landowners at all levels. Not only do they have to face destruction of their environment, but they face the destruction of the society."

*Justice Thomas Barnett,
Leader of Commission of
Inquiry into Aspects of the
Timber Industry in PNG,
1988-1989.*

1 Sustainable Forest Management as the Basis for Improving the Role of the Forestry Sector, Pak Boen M. Purnama, Department of Forestry, 2003

2 The Brazilian Amazon is four times the size of Indonesia's forests. The annual deforestation rate in the Brazilian Amazon in 2001/2002 was 2.55 million hectares. http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/press_releases/news.cfm?uNewsID=7651

3 The report, The State of the Forest: Indonesia, is a product of Forest Watch Indonesia (FWI) and Global Forest Watch (GFW). <http://www.globalforestwatch.org/english/indonesia/>

Paradise Forest

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Action where Greenpeace stepped up demands for the Papua New Guinea government to shut down the Malaysian logging company Concord Pacific and to stop the export of illegally and destructively logged timber from Papua New Guinea's ancient forest.
©Greenpeace/Davison

Indonesia began to exploit its forests in earnest in the early 1970s, with the development of the country's wood-processing industries. Today, Indonesia is a significant producer of tropical hardwood logs and sawn wood, plywood and other boards, and pulp for papermaking. More than half the country's forests, some 54 million hectares, are allocated for timber production (although not all are being actively logged), and a further 2 million hectares of industrial wood plantations have been established, supplying mostly pulpwood. Agricultural plantation crops including tea, coffee, rubber and oil palm are also important for domestic consumption and exports.

Illegal logging – a big part of the problem

One of the major problems is illegal logging. Nearly 90% of all industrial wood extraction is illegal⁴. In 2003 the Forestry Department's annual allowable cut for the nation's forests was set at 6.9 million cubic metres⁵. This was dwarfed by the estimated 80 million cubic metres that were logged to feed the nation's ply, pulp and saw mills and for illegal export⁶.

No large protected forest in Indonesia is free of illegal logging and many areas are being severely degraded. Landslides, floods and droughts are becoming common across the country as forests are destroyed, causing devastation to people's lives. The impact on forest dependent species is also severe. There are only 500 tigers left in the wild in Sumatra, less than 10% of their original population. Destructive and illegal logging is also destroying the habitat of the Orang-utan, the Great Ape of Asia. The Orang-utan population has been reduced by 90 per cent over the last century and could disappear within 20 years⁷.

Attempts by the Forestry Department to prosecute big illegal logging operations routinely fail, and are unlikely to be successful without major reform of the police, the military, the judiciary and the forestry department. In October 2003, the Forestry Minister took the unprecedented step of calling on the European Union to stop purchasing wood products from Malaysia, as a significant proportion of Malaysian wood exports are suspected of being made from wood logged illegally in Indonesia and 'smuggled' into Malaysia⁸. Some estimates indicate that up to 10 million cubic metres of illegal wood is 'laundered' through Malaysia and Singapore⁹. The Malaysian Government denies this trade occurs, and says that illegal logging is Indonesia's responsibility.

- According to an April 2000 World Bank report, almost three-quarters of logs produced in Indonesia are illegal.
- Illegal logging in Indonesia may account for losses in revenue of up to US\$3.5 billion per year.
- Eighty percent of Indonesia's devastating forest fires are caused by plantation companies using cheap, but illegal 'slash and burn' methods to clear forest.
- At least 60,000 cubic metres of timber are looted every month from the Tanjung Putting National Park in central Kalimantan in the heart of Borneo.
- In 1997 and 1998 some 10 million hectares of forest were destroyed by fires – largely due to weak law enforcement. The fires in 1997 alone led to US\$8 billion in health costs.¹⁰

4 Greenpeace 2003. Partners in Crime: A Greenpeace Investigation of the links between the UK and Indonesia's Timber Barons. London, June 2003.

5 Remarks By the Minister of Forestry of the Republic of Indonesia at the Twelfth CGI Meeting Denpasar, January 2003: http://mofrinet.cbn.net.id/informasi/CGI/CGI_03/remarks_12th.htm

6 Restructuring Forest-based Industries of Indonesia, Reuters, 28 January 2003.

7 Orang-utans facing extinction, 12 January 2004, http://www.wwf-uk.org/News/n_0000001080.asp

8 EU Urged to Reject KL Wood Products, Jakarta Post, October 15, 2003

9 Analysis of Timber Supply and Demand in Indonesia David Brown, WWF/World Bank Alliance, 2002.

10 Ibid

Malaysia: Penan struggle against logging in Sarawak continues

For years, indigenous peoples of Sarawak have been fighting to defend their land and forests against "development" plans involving logging, oil palm plantations, pulpwood plantations, hydroelectric dams, mining activities and resorts development. These activities, which count on the support of local and national authorities, are not only destroying their livelihoods but also, as in the case of the nomadic Penans, are putting their existence as a culture at risk. Nowadays, there are only about 10,000 Penans left in Sarawak's interior region. As well as other Dayak peoples, they have been and still are victims of all kinds of abuses, including physical violence, at the hands of police and intimidation by thugs deployed by timber companies.¹¹

"What happened to all the money?"

Ajang Kiew, 50, Long Sayan, Apoh River Chairman, Penan Association of Sarawak

"We asked for forest reserves. We asked them not to disturb the land surrounding our longhouses. We asked for school for the village so that our children could go to school. It is difficult for them to go to school with children from other communities. We asked for clinics.

Instead they gave us the logging companies.

Now it is oil palm plantations. We would end up as labourers for hire. The profit is for them to take home. Just like logging. The profits would only make other people rich. But the land they work on is land belonging to the Penan.

They like to accuse me with all sorts of allegations. That I embarrass the government. When have these people ever set their foot on a Penan longhouse? Next time, ask us first. What are our problems? What are our requests? Now, they only hurl accusations. From their offices. That these Penan are defiant."¹²

MARKETS and Chain of Custody

The international trade in tropical timber only exists because of the demand from the market place. The trade in illegal timber and the human and environmental suffering that it causes are the direct result of a market where the buyers of timber and timber products do not discriminate between timbers from different sources.

The major export markets for raw log exports from Papua New Guinea and Indonesia are China and Japan. Of 1.85 million cubic metres of declared exports from Papua New Guinea in 2002, 62 percent went to China and Hong Kong and 23 percent to Japan. Over the last three years log exports to Japan have declined as China has become the dominant market.

Sawn timber is the fastest-growing timber export from Papua New Guinea. Volumes have risen dramatically from 19,000 cubic metres in 1999 to over 46,000 in 2002. This reflects the commissioning of Rimbunan Hijau's major sawmill at Kamusie in Western Province.

Rimbunan Hijau's major markets for sawn timber from Papua New Guinea are in Australia and New Zealand/Aotearoa.

Despite widespread awareness of the illegal and destructive nature of the Indonesian and Malaysian log trade, the global market for the region's products remains buoyant, with China and several G8 members (from Europe, Japan and the United States) forming the bulk of the region's markets.¹³

Protect Life on Earth

Life on the planet is rapidly disappearing, our forests are being destroyed and our oceans are being depleted. Local peoples are being robbed of the natural resources they need for their survival. At this year's CBD governments must stop this destruction and honour the commitments they have already made to stop the trend of biodiversity loss. Governments must provide money for this urgently needed protection instead of wasting it on wars and activities that ultimately end life rather than protect it. Instead of having endless discussions about the devastation, governments must stop the destruction now. As the future guardians of the planet, we have the right to receive a planet rich in life.



Destructive and illegal logging practices are destroying the habitat of the endangered orang-utan species in Indonesia and Malaysia. If immediate conservation measures to protect their habitat are not implemented organ-utans face a very high risk of extinction in the near future. UNEP- World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) ©Verbelen/Greenpeace



Aebi Sakas with is taught how to make rope fibre from the tulip tree that grows in the rainforest. The rope is then used to make bilum bags, clothes and twine. Elie, Middle Fly District, Western Province, PNG. A 1997 study by a European scientist into the impact of logging operations in the Wawoi Guavi concession (Wawoi Guavi Case Study) found that "for every tree felled and extracted from the forest 45 other standing trees were destroyed (an average of 119 trees per hectare). The standing trees were being destroyed as result of poor techniques and planning in both the tree felling itself and in the bulldozer extraction of logs. ©Scheltema/Greenpeace

¹¹ World Rainforest Movement. Bulletin No. 38. September 2000.

¹² <http://www.earthisland.org/borneo/news/articles/020519article.html>

¹³ Spotlight on the Illegal Timber Trade: The ASEAN Countries. Greenpeace. September 2001.