



INDONESIA, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND RAINFORESTS



RAINFOREST ACTION NETWORK



INDONESIA: GROUND ZERO FOR RAINFOREST DESTRUCTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago – almost 18,000 islands spreading between the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. It's a hotspot of world diversity, home to hundreds of distinct cultures and over 3,000 animal species including Komodo dragons, Sumatran tigers and orangutans. Indonesia also houses the largest rainforest in all of Asia.

As recently as the 1960s, a little over 80 percent of Indonesia was forested. Since then, however, illegal logging, government corruption and corporate colonialization have combined to create the conditions for a massive land and resource grab that is moving across the island chain, wiping out forests, species and communities that stand in their path. Today, just under half of Indonesia's original forest cover remains, one of the reasons that Southeast Asia has the world's highest rate of deforestation.

Effects of this forest destruction are well documented. Indonesia has growing environmental and social problems: unique species like the Javan tiger are already extinct and the orangutan is gravely threatened. Burning to clear rainforests is widespread, laying down a thick haze of smoke that shuts down regional air traffic and provokes public health alerts in urban areas hundreds of miles away. Pesticides and factory run-off are polluting the waterways and local soils. And, increasingly, corporate control of land is spurring human rights abuses and persistent conflicts between companies and local communities.

Perhaps worst of all, the destruction of Indonesia's rainforests is one of the leading causes of climate change. Rainforest destruction causes huge carbon emissions as the carbon stored in forest and peatland ecosystems is released into the atmosphere. Because standing forests absorb and store large amounts of carbon already in the atmosphere, the loss of rainforests also means the loss of one of the world's greatest buffers against climate change.

THE RAINFOREST-CLIMATE CONNECTION

Forests and the climate are inextricably linked. Worldwide, the degradation and destruction of tropical rainforests is responsible for around 15 percent of all annual greenhouse emissions. The carbon emissions resulting from Indonesia's rapid deforestation account for around six to eight percent of global emissions. That's more than the emissions from all the cars, planes, trucks, buses and trains in the U.S. combined. This huge carbon footprint from forest destruction has made non-industrialized Indonesia the third-largest global greenhouse gas emitter, behind only the U.S. and China.

THE HUMAN IMPACT

Indonesia is home to over 300 Indigenous cultures and 700 languages. At least 20 million people rely directly on the forest for their livelihood. The survival of hundreds of Indigenous cultures are threatened as forests are destroyed and lands are appropriated for industrial plantations.



Many companies initially dangle glittering promises to get communities to give them access to their forests. Corrupt government officials often turn a blind eye, issuing permits and allowing forest clearance even if communities do not consent. Communities are often forcibly evicted if they refuse to allow their homes and forests to be destroyed. Others end up with no forest and no recourse, trapped on plantations where their only employer or civil authority is the company that destroyed their forest, traditional livelihoods and culture.



PEAT

Forest destruction in Indonesia is particularly significant because of the country's rich peatlands, a deep cushion of rich organic material that has accumulated over millennia, storing massive amounts of carbon. Many of the forests being cut down for paper and palm oil are on peat swamps, which must be drained and burned before the land can be cleared and developed. This process causes the soils to dry and oxidize, releasing huge bursts of global warming gasses into the atmosphere. These emissions continue until all the organic material has decayed – a process that can continue for hundreds of years.



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PULP AND PAPER

The pulp and paper industry, led by the private Asian conglomerates Sinar Mas Group (Asia Pulp and Paper) and Golden Eagle Group (APRIL), is perhaps the leading threat to the remaining large forests in Sumatra and some of Indonesia's largest intact peatlands. Pulp from cleared rainforests is made into cheap copy paper, books and toilet paper and luxury shopping bags that are then shipped to unknowing consumers in the United States, Europe and Asia.



PALM OIL

Found in close to 50 percent of all supermarket goods, palm oil is one of the world's cheapest sources of vegetable oil. At least 90 percent of all palm oil comes from Indonesia and Malaysia. The demand for palm oil is rapidly spurring additional forest destruction as standing forests are converted into "deserts" of oil palm trees. These palm oil plantations are notorious for their negative environmental impacts and human rights violations. Rainforests in Indonesia alone are being cleared and burned for palm oil at unprecedented rates.

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ADM, Bunge, Cargill:
The ABCs of
Rainforest
Destruction
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WHAT IS RAN DOING?

Rainforest Action Network's Tropical Forests Program is tackling the two greatest drivers of rainforest destruction in Indonesia: industrial palm oil and pulp plantations. RAN is focusing on reducing market demand for environmentally and socially irresponsible palm oil and pulp and paper products and transforming global supply chains. Working with partners in the U.S, Indonesia and around the world, RAN's campaigns create the market leverage necessary to improve both corporate and government policies and practices.

GET INVOLVED:

- 1) Stay informed! Go to www.ran.org and sign up for our Weekly Panther email updates with fast, effective ways to make a difference. You can also sign up for Rapid Responder updates from the Tropical Forests Program.
- 2) Spread the word! Go to www.ran.org/forests to download resources to educate people at your school or in your community.
- 3) Support the Campaign! Write a check today, or go to www.ran.org/give to donate online.

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