FAO definition must recognize that plantations are not forests!

On 21 March, the International Day of Forests, 180 organisations are reminding the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) that its misleading forest definition dating back to 1948 must be changed. The definition has allowed the plantations industry to hide the devastating ecological and social impacts of large-scale monoculture tree plantations behind a positive forest image.

FAO’s forest definition has allowed the plantations industry to call their monoculture plantations of fast-growing species such as eucalyptus, pine, rubber or acacia "forests" because it defines a forest only by the number, height and canopy cover of trees on an area. The FAO forest definition has been used as blueprint for over 200 national and international forest definitions since 1948.

Under the guise of this FAO forest definition, the industry has been able to expand fast, especially in the global South, where monoculture tree plantations now cover some several tens of millions of hectares of land. This expansion has brought misery to countless rural and peasant communities, and indigenous peoples. Families have lost land and livelihood where monoculture tree plantations have taken their land, destroyed their way of life, dried up their water springs and streams and poisoned their food with agro-toxins. (1)

"For almost 70 years, the misleading FAO forest definition has served the tree plantations industry well. They have hidden the destruction caused when diverse forests, grasslands and peatlands overflowing with life are converted into 'green deserts' made up of monoclonal trees in straight rows behind the positive forest image provided by the FAO," says Winfridus Overbeek, international coordinator of the World Rainforest Movement.

Forest restoration as climate protection debate adds urgency to get forest definition right

"With the adoption of the UN Paris Agreement on climate change, revision of this FAO forest definition takes on additional urgency", says Guadalupe Rodriguez from Salva la Selva/Rettet den Regenwald, "it would be a tragedy if the misleading FAO definition makes expansion of these damaging tree monocultures eligible for climate funds earmarked for "reforestation" and "forest restoration." This would not only harm even more communities where tree plantations take over land used by villagers but also undermine climate protection: Carbon-rich forests could be destroyed and be replaced by monoculture tree plantations with countries claiming that according to the FAO forest definition, no forest area has been lost - despite the massive loss of carbon, biodiversity, water sources and local livelihoods when forests are replaced by monoculture plantations.

An example where the deliberate mis-labelling of plantations as forests allows the plantations industry to tap into climate funds is the 'African Forests Restoration initiative' (AFR100). Launched at the 2015 UN climate meeting, it aims to cover 100 million hectares that participating African governments consider “degraded” lands. The World Bank will make USD 1 billion available for this plan – and relies on the FAO forest definition to define eligibility for funding. Unsurprisingly, one of the most controversial tree plantations companies operating in Africa, the Norwegian-based Green Resources (2), was among the keynote speakers at a 2016 conference in Ghana, where the implementation of the AFR 100 initiative was prominent on the agenda.
2017 FAO International Forests Day themed 'Forests & Energy' shows urgent need to change forest definition

"Industrialized countries' unsustainable energy demand combined with their new quest for 'renewable' energy is already converting forests in the global South into industrial 'biomass' plantations. Yet, the word 'plantation' does not appear once on the FAO's "Key messages" webpage for the International Forests Day 2017", says Wally Menne of the Timberwatch Coalition, South Africa. For example, to fuel all of the UK's energy requirements through eucalyptus-based biomass would require some 55 million hectares of plantation in Brazil – an area larger than twice the size of the UK.

180 groups today join the more than 130 thousand groups and individuals who called on the FAO in 2015 to rise to the challenge and urgently change the FAO forest definition because tree plantations are not forests.

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Notes:
(1) The letter sent to FAO today can be found here. It is also available in Spanish, French and Portuguese.

(2) In response to the 2015 petition signed by over 130,000 people calling on FAO to change its forest definition, the FAO claims that its role is merely to harmonize the different national and international forest definitions of forests elaborated since 1948. However, the letter sent today shows how this view ignores that in fact, the FAO forest definition is THE reference for many of the national definitions, in the UN climate talks, in initiatives such as AFR100, etc.
**Signatories as of 16 March 2017:**

Abibiman Foundation in Ghana

Acción Ecologica

Acción por la Biodiversidad

Africa Europe Fait and Justice Network

African Women’s Network for Community management of Forests (REFACOF)

Aliança RECOs – Redes de Cooperação Comunitária Sem Fronteiras

Alianza Biodiversidad

All India Forum of Forest Movements.

Allure Marketing

Ambiente, Desarrollo y Capacitación

ARA

ARBA (Asociación para la Recuperación del Bosque Autóctono)

Árboles sin Fronteras

ARPENT – Association pour la Restauration et la Protection de l’Environnement Naturel du Tonnerrois

Asoc. Conservacionista YISKI

Asoc. Lihuen Antu

Asociación Amigos de los Parques Nacionales (AAPN)

Asociación Comunitaria Soluciones

Asociación de Usuarios del Agua de Saltillo AUAS, A.C.

Asociacion Ecologica del Oriente, Santa Cruz de la Sierra

Asociacion ecologista rio mocoreta

Asociación Ecologistas en Acción Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Asociación Geográfica Ambiental

Asociación Qachuu Aloom “Madre Tierra”

Asociacion Red de Coordinacion en Biodiversidad

Associação dos Geógrafos Brasileiros, Seção Local Três Lagoas (AGB/TL)

Attac France

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

BankTrack
BCMTY.org Chile
BCMTY.org New Zealand
Berggorilla & Regenland Direkthilfe
Biodiversity Conservation Center,
Biofuelwatch, UK/US.
Biowatch
Blog Combate Racismo Ambiental
Borneo Orangutan Survival (BOS)
Botshabelo Unemployment Movement
Brainforest
Brighter Green
Bruno Manser Fund
BUND – Friends of the Earth Germany
Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD)
Censat Agua Viva.
Center for Food Safety
Centro de Investigación, Validación y Transferencia Tecnológica para el Desarrollo Rural, Ac
Centro Internazionale Crocevia
CETRI – Centre Tricontinental
Chilamate Rainforest Eco Retreat
Climate change awareness kenya
Coalition Against Land Grabbing
COECOCEIBA-Amigos de la tierra Costa Rica
Colectivo VientoSur
Comité Nacional para la Defensa y Conservación de Los Chimalapas
Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN)
Conselho Indigenista Missionário
Construisons Ensemble leMonde
Consumers Association of Penang
Cork Forest Conservation Alliance
Crescente Fértil
Denkhausbremen
Diálogo 2000 – Jubileo Sur Argentina
Dogwood Alliance
EcoNexus
Edenvale RiverWatch
Environmental Association for Latin America
European Civic Forum
FASE Espírito Santo
Finance & Trade Watch (Austria)
Flemish Centre for Indigenous Peoples
Forest Observatory
Forests of the world
Forum Carajas
Fórum Mudanças Climáticas e Justiça Social
Forum Ökologie & Papier
Fossil-Free South Africa
Friends of the Earth International
Friends of the Earth Sweden
Friends of the Siberian Forests
Fundación Azul Ambientalistas
Fundación para el Desarrollo Comunal Integral
Fundacion Recysol
GeaSphere
Geografía Viva
Global Forest Coalition
Global Justice Ecology Project
GRAIN
Great Ape Project
Greenpeace International
GroundWork
Grupo de Investigación de Suelo y Agua (GISA)
Grupo de Trabalho em Assuntos Agrários (GT Agrária – Seção Rio-Niteroi) da Associação dos Geógrafos Brasileiros (AGB)
Grupo ETC
Grupo Guayubira
Grupo Semillas
Guardianes del Iberá
Human Rights Law Network
ICCA Consortium
ICRA International
Indigenous Environmental Network
Instancia de Consenso del Pueblo Maya Q’eqchi’-Poqomchi’ de Alta Verapaz “K’amol B’e”
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Instituto Amazónico de Investigaciones Imani, Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Instituto Socioambiental
International Center for Technology Assessment
International Tree Foundation
Intipachamama
Jubileo Sur Americas
Just Forests
Justica Ambiental / FoE Mozambique
Kalpavriksh
La Asamblea Veracruzana de Iniciativas y Defensa Ambiental (LAVIDA)
Maderas del Pueblo del Sureste, AC
Maiouri Nature Guyane
MEFP
Mesa Coordinadora De Jubilados y Pensionados de la República Argentina Filial Chaco
MLT – Movimento de Luta pela Terra
Mother Nature Cambodia (MNC)
Movimento Amigos da Rua Gonçalo de Carvalho
Movimento Camponês Popular
Movimento Mulheres pela P@Z!
Movimiento Colombiano en Defensa del Territorio y afectados por Represas “Rios Vivos”
MST- Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra
Nature and Youth Sweden
Naturvernforbundet – FoENorway
Núcleo de Pesquisa Estado, Sociedade e Desenvolvimento na Amazônia Ocidental- NUPESDAO
Oasis Earth
Observatório dos Conflitos no Campo (OCCA)/UFES
OFRANEH
Oilwatch Latinoamérica
OLCA – Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales
Orang-Utans in Not e.V.
OPIROMA – Organização dos Povos Indígenas de Rondônia, Noroeste do Mato Grosso e Sul do Amazonas
Otros Mundos AC/Amigos de La Tierra México
Pacific Institute of Resource Management
PAPDA – Plateforme haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif
Partner Südmexikos e.V.
PGU (Personal-Global-Universal): Towards Equitable Sustainable Holistic Development
PLANT
Pro Natura – Friends of the Earth Switzerland
Programa Universitario Diversidad Cultural e Interculturalidad – UNAM oficina Oaxaca
Protect the Forest
Proyecto Gran Simio (GAP/PGS-España)
Proyecto Lemu – Epuyen – Chubut
PUSH
Rainforest Foundation
Rainforest Relief
RECOMA – Red Latinoamericana contra los monocultivos de árboles
Red Argentina de Ambiente y Desarrollo
Red de Acción por los Derechos Ambientales (RADA)
Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad
Red de Mujeres Rurales de Costa Rica
Red de Semillas “Resembrando e Intercambiando”
Refopar (Reforestemos Paraguay)
Reforest the Earth
Regenwald statt Palmöl”
Robin Wood e.V.
Russian Social Ecological Union
Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia)
Salva la Selva
SAVIA – Escuela de Pensamiento Ecologista
School of Democratic Economics, Indonesia
Siemenpuu – Foundation for Social Movements’ Cooperation sr.
Solidarity Sweden – Latin America
SOS Forêt du Sud
Swedish foundation Naturarvet
Synchronicity Earth
Tanzania Alliance for Biodiversity
Terra Australis Co-Op Ltd
Terra Nuova – Centro per il volontariato Onlus
The Bioscience Resource Project
The Corner House
The Gaia Foundation
The Indigenous People of Mariepsko
ThiSaBi
TimberWatch
Transnational Institute
Unión Universal de Desarrollo Solidario
Universidade Federal de São João Del Rei
Verdegaia
WALHI/Friends of the Earth Indonesia
War on Want
Woodland League
World Rainforest Movement
Zo Indigeous Forum (ZIF)

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