

Forum: United Nations Environmental Programme

Topic: The question of preserving the Amazon rainforest

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The Amazon rainforest, or Amazonia, is the biggest tropical rainforest in the world. It is situated in the Amazon Basin, in South America. 60% of the rainforest is in the Brazilian territory, while the rest is contained mainly in Peru and Colombia

Deforestation of the Amazon rainforest

Until the 19th century, deforestation was a minor problem and the rainforest grew larger.

In the 1960s the establishment of farms in the forest started the serious deforestation of the Brazilian part of the Amazon rainforest. The slash-and-burn system used in the farms enhanced the deforestation. According to Greenpeace and FAO: by 2006, 91% of the deforested region since the 1970s have been used for livestock ranching and by 2009, 80% of such areas have been exploited only for cattle pasture.

There is a considerable number of reasons behind the deforestation of the Amazon forest. Some of them could be international: the leather and meat market that is stimulating the use of deforested lands for cattle ranching. Other reasons are national: the necessity of new croplands (to produce and export biofuels and animal feed) and the extraction of valuable wood.

The construction of new highways passing near or inside the Amazon region (e.g. Trans-Amazonian Highway, Belém-Brasília Highway and Cuiaba-Porto Velho Highway) induced many farmers to settle in such region and to play a role in the deforestation of the rainforest.

A minor aspect that contributed to the loss of rainforest areas is the resettlement of native tribes due to the slash-and-burn system that was forced to abandon their villages and deforest different areas to build new villages.

According to the Brazilian National Institute of Space Research, the year with the highest ratio of deforestation was 2004, where the forest lost almost 27772 km² of land. In 2017, only 6624 km² were lost thanks to international and national laws that aim to reduce and stop the deforestation.

Why it is vital to reduce deforestation

Amazon rainforest is also well-known as the "Lung of the Planet". This is because of the fact that rainforests absorb an enormous quantity of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and they release oxygen, which is vital for living beings. Since the Amazon Jungle is the biggest rainforest in our planet, reducing its area could lead to a loss of oxygen concentration in the atmosphere. The high levels of carbon dioxide could increase the greenhouse effect and enhance global warming. It is estimated that if global temperature increases by 4°C, the entire Amazon rainforest could die.

Such environment shall consist of the largest biodiversity. It is only needed to consider that almost 400 billion trees of 16000 different species live in the Amazon area. Biodiversity includes both plants and animals: it is estimated that there are about 40000 different species of plants, 2.5 million species of insects and about 4000 different species between mammals, reptiles, birds, fishes and amphibians. Deforestation is threatening countless living being species and it is leading to an ecocatastrophe.

Not only environmental but also cultural aspects are threatened by deforestation. Since the 1970s, many natives have been killed only to exploit their lands. And while some native tribes completely disappeared, other uncontacted tribes made efforts to socialize with modern society (trying to protect their culture, lands and tradition). Although the efforts, some uncontacted tribes did not survive due to some illnesses for which they had not the immunity or medical treatments.

National and International Actions

Brazil, Peru, Colombia and other nations which do have territories in the Amazon Basin are taking national initiatives to reduce deforestation.

In 2006 major industries stopped buying soil grown in the Amazon area as to force farmers not to support the deforestation.

Since 2003, governments are designating always more protected areas and recognizing indigenous lands as to protect them from loggers and to cooperate with natives.

The Brazilian government is relentlessly monitoring via satellite Amazonia. Along with patrol from space, Brazil decided to work on a law enforcement as to increase the efficiency of ground-patrol over such a large area. Every violator is now charged with very high fines.

In 2008, UNEP, FAO and UNDP established the United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (or **UN-REDD Programme**). This programme's main goal is "to reduce forest emissions and enhance carbon stocks in forests while contributing to national sustainable development". The UN-REDD supports the trans-national REDD+ (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries), a voluntary national approach to deforestation led by UNFCCC with the aim of reducing carbon dioxide emission by controlling and stopping deforestation.

Questions a resolution must answer

- In the view of 2018 Brazilian elections, **how to convince involved countries governments to remain actively focused on the topic?**
- **How to promote the reforestation of Amazon lands?**
- **How to stop residual deforestation?**
- **How to spread and how to implement the "zero net deforestation" plan?**
- **How to protect native (contacted or uncontacted) tribes?**

Bibliography and useful links

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