

**Forum:** Environmental Committee

**Issue #EV-03:** Banning the use of products that drive deforestation

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## Introduction

To reduce the deforestation caused by international trade, many nations and organizations are aiming to ban the export of products that are directly connected to deforestation.

Said countries and international organizations have recognized the issue of deforestation and its environmental and socioeconomic impact on the world.

This is mostly focused on products such as soy, palm oil, timber, cocoa and beef which are significantly linked to deforestation in multiple countries.

When limiting or simply embargoing the export of said products nations intend to pressure producers to apply sustainable practices and, consequently, decrease the global level of deforestation.

## Definition of Key Terms

### NYDF

New York Forest Declaration

### FSC

Forest Stewardship Council

### RSPO

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

## Issue Overview

The predominant cause for deforestation is the augmentation of agriculture, specifically the production of products of high demand such as palm oil, soy, beef and timber and other products, which require the clearing of extensive land.

Annually, 3.83 million hectares of forests suffer deforestation because of the production of beef cattle, soy, palm oil and wood

Beef cattle have been the number one contributor to deforestation in South America for several years now. Due to the conversion of forest to pasture for beef cattle, at least 2.71 million hectares of forests were destroyed each year.

Since soy is mainly used for cattle feed, the growing demand for meat and dairy products has brought as a consequence an increase in soybean production in the last 25 years. Soy, however, is also needed to produce vegetable oil and biodiesel. Around 480,000 hectares are deforested annually, mostly in South America, because for the production of soybeans, newly deforested land is needed.

Produced significantly in Southeast Asia, palm oil has a critical effect on the environment, not only because of the numerous hectares that have to be deforested for its production but also because most of these areas are peatlands: soils rich in carbon. These areas contain up to more than 25 times as much carbon as forests, carbon that is then released when the peatlands are drained for palm oil plantations.

Unsurprisingly, wood production is the cause of an annual deforestation of over 380,000 hectares in various countries. Wood derivatives are divided into two different categories: pulp and timber. Pulp, made from tree fibers, is used to produce papers and related products while timber is used for high-end products or construction.

Many areas of the world are severely affected by the production of the commodities previously mentioned, however, the Amazon Basin, the Gran Chaco and regions of Southeast Asia and Central and West Africa are considered to be the ones affected in a critical sense.

The Amazon Basin includes parts of the Amazon rainforest, which span several South American countries, including Brazil. Due to the production of Soybeans, cattle raising and

timber extraction, this is the area that is most gravely affected by deforestation around the globe.

The biggest producers and exporters of palm oil are located in Southeast Asia, these being Indonesia and Malaysia. It is important to note that palm oil is one of the biggest boosters of deforestation and the destruction of peatlands.

The Democratic Republic of Congo and various other countries of Central Africa are significant producers and exporters of timber, which, when harvested unsustainably, is linked strongly to deforestation. In the west of this same continent, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Nigeria are producers and exporters of cocoa, which has been previously linked to deforestation.

Though these regions are not the only ones affected by the production of the previously mentioned commodities, they are among the significant areas of deforestation on a global scale.

Soybean exports are primarily produced and exported by Brazil, while palm oil is primarily produced and exported by Indonesia and Malaysia. These nations are significant participants in global trade for their products contribute to different industries (food, cosmetics, biofuels, etc), however, even though nations like the United States, China, and the European Union don't produce or export these commodities, they are significant importers and, as a result, their desire for these goods contributes to deforestation.

According to the World Economic Forum (WEC), China's high demand for beef, soybeans and various wood products, including timber, has led them to be the largest importer of products that drive deforestation, while also being the second-largest importer of palm oil (first being India). Consequently, China is considered to be responsible for at least 40% of global deforestation. China has a very high demand for timber, soybeans, palm oil, and beef; this nation is considered to be the biggest importer of products that drive deforestation globally.

According to a report by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), around 76% of global timber exports from Mozambique were illegally cut, and more than 90% were imported by China. It is estimated that between 20% and 30% of China's timber imports are illegal. However, given these facts, China has declared it would try to tackle its role in causing deforestation, including by taking measures to tighten controls on illegal timber imports and encouraging the sustainable development of palm oil.

The continued use and export of these products have several negative and severe impacts on not only the environment but also the socioeconomic state of the world.

When looking at the environmental consequences of deforestation, the loss of biodiversity, climate change and soil degradation are the first that come to mind. When deforesting large areas, habitats are inevitably destroyed as well as ecosystems, therefore causing the extinction of a variety of species. Moreover, by removing forests, one is also removing beings capable of absorbing carbon dioxide, and therefore deforestation plays a crucial role in climate change. Furthermore, the productivity of agricultural land is at risk since deforestation leads to soil erosion, nutrient depletion and reduces the capacity the soil has of retaining water. All these factors also increase the risk of different natural disasters, including landslides.

Many communities of indigenous people rely on forests for their cultural practices and livelihood, and when these regions are deforested, these communities are displaced.

As long as products that contribute to deforestation are used and exported, markets will end up distorted since these products are less expensive than sustainable alternatives, which consequently discourages businesses from adopting sustainable practices.

## **Historical Background**

One of the first actions taken to ensure sustainable and responsible forest management was in 1993 with the creation of the Forest Stewardship Council, an international certification scheme. The FSC has since become an internationally recognized standard for proper forest management. It provides a framework for companies to prove that their wood products come from sustainable practices and therefore promote environmentally responsible approaches around the globe.

Later in the 2000s, the United Nations Forum on Forests was established to bring governments, intergovernmental organizations and society together to develop strategies to tackle deforestation and promote sustainable forestry.

The European Union has formerly taken multiple steps to tackle this issue. In 2003 the EU Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade was established. In 2010 the EU Timber Regulation was established to obligate operators to deny illegally harvested

timber or timber products from entering the EU market. This regulation supported international certification programmes to promote sustainable forest management.

Moreover, multiple consumer campaigns have been put into action to raise awareness of the direct connection between various products and deforestation. One example is the “Say No to Palm Oil” campaign, which encourages consumers to avoid products that contain palm oil.

### **Latest Events**

More recently, published in 2021, the European Union developed a proposal for a regulation to minimize deforestation and forest degradation. This proposal plans to address the connection between their consumption of certain imported commodities -soy, palm oil, beef, cocoa, and timber- and deforestation and forest degradation in other nations. This law would apply not only to EU-based companies but also to exterior companies that want to sell their products in the EU market. This law would prerequisite companies to conduct due diligence to guarantee that the imported products are not contributing to deforestation and other environmental and social abuses. To do this, they would need to identify risks in their supply chain and monitor the impact their activities have on the environment and communities. Moreover, companies would need to obtain certification that proves their products are “deforestation-free” or provide evidence that their imported products do not risk deforestation.

The proposed law is still in the stages of development, and it will probably be further debated and modified before it is legislated.

In 2021, the United States and Norway signed a memorandum of understanding, intending to endorse cooperation on different environmental issues, one of which is deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; said memorandum calls for collaboration on issues such as sustainable land use, conservation of forests, and mitigating climate change.

Furthermore, some companies such as Nestle and McDonald’s have also taken steps to acknowledge and act upon deforestation in their supply chains. They have dedicated themselves to sourcing sustainable palm oil, and others like Cargill have committed to zero deforestation for their entire supply chain.

However, the total ban on the export of products linked to deforestation has various consequences, both positive and negative.

On one hand, when applying this ban, the conservation of forests is the main focus but this leads to the mitigation of climate change, since deforestation also provokes air and water pollution as well as helps with the spread of infectious diseases; this ban would also lead to the improvement of public health. Moreover, this ban would leave no choice but to find sustainable alternatives for the products that once cause deforestation, therefore promoting sustainable development.

Contrarily, this would significantly impact the global economy. It would substantially affect global trade, possibly reducing the exports and income for producers. It can be especially damaging for developing countries who depend on that income. It can also distort the market since the sustainable alternatives would be placed at a higher price than the unsustainable ones, which would be a clear disincentive for producers to adopt said sustainable practices.

## Major Parties Involved

### European Union

On the 1st of January this year, the Due Diligence Regulation came into effect. Importing companies will have to ensure that the products do not contribute to deforestation. Said law applies to products such as palm oil, rubber, cocoa, beef, timber and soy.

### Norway

Norway is the first nation in the world to commit to stopping all deforestation. This nation contributes significantly to international forest conservation projects and supports human rights initiatives for local communities living whose livelihoods depend on these forests.

### United States

The US is one of the biggest importers of products linked to deforestation, in 2020 having imported over \$5 billion dollars of commodities directly from countries whose products foment deforestation.

### Brazil

Brazil is a significant exporter of soybeans, meat, and wood, all of which are all directly linked to deforestation in the Amazon rainforest.

## Indonesia and Malaysia

Both of these nations respectively are the two most significant producers and exporters of palm oil, which is associated with deforestation and peatland destruction.

## Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a major producer and exporter of timber, which is connected to deforestation and illegal logging.

## Paraguay

Paraguay is an exporter of soybeans which is connected negatively to the Gran Chaco region.

## Argentina

Argentina is a significant producer and exporter of soybeans and beef.

## Bolivia

Bolivia is an exporter of soybeans and beef, which are linked to deforestation in the Amazon and Chaco regions.

## Timeline of Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of Event</b>
1993	The Forest Stewardship Council was founded.
2003	The EU Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade was adopted.  The EU Timber Regulation was established.

2010 EU Proposal on deforestation.

2021 COP-26 Climate Conference

Oct 31, 2021 – Nov 12, 2021

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

The United Nations has already taken various measures to try and ban exports of products that drive deforestation, some examples being the UN Forum on Forests. This forum developed multiple initiatives to deal with deforestation, one of which is the Forest Instrument, which provides guidelines for sustainable forest management.

The UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) developed the REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) framework to direct activities in the forest sector to lower emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, as well as the sustainable management of forests and the preservation and improvement of forest carbon stocks in developing nations.

The UN also created the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 15 focuses primarily on the preservation, restoration, and sustainable use of forests and associated ecosystems.

In the COP-26 climate conference, one of the many things discussed was the elimination of the investment in activities linked to deforestation. 137 nations have pledged to put a stop to deforestation and land degradation by 2030.

Overall, the UN has significantly contributed to encouraging international collaboration and action to combat deforestation and ban the export of commodities that encourage deforestation.

## Past Action

Many initiatives have been undertaken throughout the years to ban or limit the export of products that drive deforestation. The Tropical Forest Conservation Act (TFCA) was passed in 1998 to protect tropical forests in developing countries. The TFCA provides debt relief to these countries in exchange for their commitment to conserving their forests.



The FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) is an international certification program which is designed to support ethical forest management. For products to be deemed FSC certified, they must meet environmental, social and economic requirements.

The European Union Action Plan on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade, established in 2003, aims to improve forest governance, promote legal timber trade and reduce illegal logging in those countries that supply it to the European Union.

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) establishes ethical and environmental criteria for the production of palm oil. When receiving the RSPO certification, companies must adhere to a set of requirements which lead to the sustainable goals set by the company.

In 2006, the US worked with Brazil to establish the Soy Moratorium. The soy moratorium is set to prevent deforestation caused by the production of soybeans in the Amazon rainforest. Under this agreement, soybean traders agreed not to buy soybeans from areas of newly deforested land. The United States also enacted the Lacey Act in 2008, which bans the trade of agricultural products that have been illegally harvested. Additionally, the US and Brazil signed the Cattle Agreement in 2009, aimed to reduce deforestation caused by cattle production. Its goal is to promote sustainable cattle practices to dissuade deforestation caused by the increase of cattle ranching.

The EU Timber Regulation was signed in 2010, later put into action in 2013. This prohibits the placing of illegally gathered timber and timber products on the European market. To enforce this they applied due diligence to ensure that the timber traded is legally harvested.

Launched in 2014, The New York Declaration on Forests aims to end deforestation by 2030. One of the main initiatives, “Goal 3” specifically, states that it intends to “Significantly reduce deforestation derived from other economic sectors by 2020”. Moreover, it also included the Tropical Forest Alliance 2020, which is set to “support companies through the ongoing global transition to deforestation-free supply chains for commodities including palm oil, soy, beef, and paper/pulp”. The NYDF was signed by over 140 nations, multiple corporations, international organizations and indigenous communities.

Finally, the Rainforest Alliance Certification was developed by the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN); this certification system identifies which products are produced sustainably.

## Possible Solutions

Different nations have noticed and addressed this issue, and have started to look for possible solutions, one of them being the partial or total ban on the export/import of products that compel deforestation.

A possible solution in the area of produce is the certification and labeling schemes by the FSC and the RSPO. These can help to ensure that products are produced using sustainable practices that do not contribute to deforestation.

Import bans and tariffs can be imposed by governments worldwide on products that are linked to deforestation, which would disincentive producers to engage in unsustainable practices and foment sustainable production.

Finally, encouraging alternative land uses, such as agroforestry, can provide a way for farmers to still generate income without having to resort to unsustainable practices.

Overall, a combination of these solutions and other measures will be needed to effectively ban exports of products that drive deforestation. It will require cooperation between governments, businesses, and civil society to address this complex problem and transition towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

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