



**International Day of Forests
Forestry Debate: Forestry in a changing world!
21 March 2014**

Celebrating the importance of forests!

The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 21 March to be celebrated as the International Day of Forests each year. The International Day of Forests was established to raise awareness of the importance of forests and trees in ensuring the sustainability of ecosystems, providing valuable goods and services, supporting livelihoods, and reducing hunger.

What did the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific do to celebrate?



To mark the International Day of Forests, the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) collaborated with RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in organizing a forestry debate under the theme of *Forestry in a changing world!*

The event was presided over by Mr Vili Fuavao, Deputy Regional Representative of FAO RAP, Mr Thomas Enters, UN-REDD Programme Coordinator for UNEP and Ms Caroline Liou, Communications Manager for RECOFTC.

Participants in the debate were drawn from two tertiary educational institutes (King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi and the Asian Institute of Technology) and two Bangkok high schools (Anglo Singapore International School and Garden International School).

The elder group of students debated the pros and cons of whether 'keeping people out of forests' is the best approach for protecting and conserving forests, while students from the two international secondary schools debated a proposition 'that trees should be preserved, not logged.'



The debate was attended by 55 participants and resulted in a very informative and interesting discussion. The constructive and rebuttal speeches were very well-prepared with good fundamental analyses. Each speaker possessed very good speaking skills, which helped to stimulate the discussion to a very interactive level.

The students, ranging from high school to post-graduate studies (from 13 to 35 years of age), stressed that forests and forestry issues are highly important and that concrete actions must be taken now, today. In addition, they demonstrated excellent knowledge of forests and forestry issues. Both sides (affirmative and negative teams) were able to present the current issues and challenges faced by the forestry sector and how they could be addressed jointly by relevant stakeholders. Each team debated the topics based on different views of how forests could be managed sustainably. These included participatory approaches versus command and control measures.

Key observations from the debates

- Forestry is not a stand-alone sector; it requires the active involvement and participation of stakeholders at cross-sectoral levels.
- People depend on forests for their survival and well-being; therefore, they must be placed at the centre of sustainable natural resource management.
- Rights of access to forests for local people is a fundamental requirement for sustainable forest management and poverty reduction of forest-dependent communities in the rural areas.
- The equitable sharing of benefits between indigenous and local communities and external entities operating in forests must be ensured.
- Indigenous or traditional forest-related knowledge should be reconciled with scientific knowledge and intellectual property rights.
- There are no viable alternatives to timber for many products. Even when there are alternatives (e.g., plastic), the use of such materials may have a larger environmental footprint than timber.

- Forestry generates income, contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and creates employment for local people.
- Forests could be logged in a sustainable manner through careful planning of logging activities and conservation of biologically and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Trees come not only from natural forests but can also be grown in plantations. Many countries have planted new forests to ensure that we have enough timber for society in the future.
- Rather than categorizing all forms of logging as bad practice, more emphasis should be placed on promoting sustainable forest management, preserving forests with high conservation values, reducing deforestation and tackling illegal logging by strengthening governance and law enforcement.
- Promoting certified timber (timber from sustainably-managed forests) offers opportunities to enhance sustainable forest management, in contrast to banning the use of timber altogether.



Highlights of arguments - That the best way to conserve forests is to keep people out of the forests!

Affirmative team	Negative team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We agree that indigenous people should be allowed to stay inside the forest; however, we need to restrict access of logging companies into the forests. - We will allow people to enter protected forests for research purposes only. Hunting and ecotourism will be prohibited. - As forest resources decline, we need to reduce the allotted area for timber harvesting and maintain the majority of forest areas as strictly off-limits to logging and other activities. - By keeping logging companies and other people out of the forests, we believe that forest conservation is achievable and that this solution will provide longer lasting and more sustainable development to the people. - The best way to conserve forests is to keep people, especially those that carry out illegal activities, out of the forests so that we can allow natural forests to regrow. Efforts will be made to promote the use of alternative timber sources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People are part of the ecosystem and without a healthy ecosystem, there is nothing to conserve. - Around 1.6 billion people rely on forests. Therefore, keeping people inside the forest will help contribute to poverty reduction as forests provide a source of both cash and non-cash income for the people. Forests contributed 22% of the household income of local people based on 51 studies in 19 countries. - Income earned from non-timber forest products in some countries such as Laos and Vietnam is very significant. Moving people out of the forest or limiting their access to the forests is against human rights. - To conserve forests is to promote social equity and social empowerment. Allowing people access to forests helps to protect their identity. Participatory governance is the key to sustainable forest management. - Removing people from the forest will make them lose their ownership and they will start to destroy the forests with the fear of losing them to concessions or logging companies.

Highlights of arguments - That the trees should be preserved not logged!

Affirmative team	Negative team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is no way to meet the human needs and greed! People always take forests resources for granted and always want more! - There are substitutes for timber (e.g., weeds to produce paper, metal for construction). Therefore, there is no real need for timber in today's world. - Logging fuels corruption in developing countries. Logging poses a serious threat to indigenous communities. - Wood is flammable and susceptible to weather conditions. Brick or cement is much stronger. - Logging might be important now but there won't be a surplus of trees to log in the future. - Long-term benefits of forest preservation outweigh short-time economic benefits from logging. - If logging is allowed, concession companies may log more than what they should. Income from logging may not go the government or local communities. - The only way to protect forests is preservation through awareness-raising coupled with logging bans. Forest management schemes have failed to manage forest in a sustainable manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To propose that all forests should be preserved and no logging activities should take place anywhere, would only serve to highlight the lack of awareness and ignorance one might have regarding our reliance on the property of timber. - Wood is different from other materials as it is renewable and let's plant a tree to replace the one we have cut down. - Extraction of timber through the process of sustainable forestry, including the use of reduced impact logging, should not be stopped. However the process of harvesting should be strictly regulated. - Wood is an extremely valuable material. Timber is extremely useful for human consumption. - Legal logging will not destroy our forests; we are able to plant new forests and we could continue to bring prosperity to our own. The key is not preservation but conservation and strengthening law enforcement. - In order to continue to legally log the forests in a sustainable manner, we must aim to educate and bring awareness of these issues and sustainable process to every corner of the world. - If we don't use the trees we stand to lose the economic value of our trees. We need to generate income to survive. - Sustainable forest management and plantations are the only efficient ways to meet the society demands for wood.

Message from the Organizers

Sustainable forest management requires a carefully coordinated long-term perspective, and it therefore depends not only on the actions of today's adults, but is also in the hands of the younger generations.



While the link between deforestation and resource degradation in context of climate change has been reported for years, most countries in the Asia-Pacific region have been slow to implement the changes necessary to sustainably manage and restore forests, and reverse the environmental damage. According to Hiroyuki Konuma, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific, "Awareness must be coupled with concrete action." FAO is calling on member countries to implement sustainable forest management policies without further delay. "About 17.4 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions result from deforestation and forest degradation. By reducing or eliminating deforestation and forest degradation, forests offer the quickest, most cost-effective and largest means of decreasing global emissions," Mr. Konuma added.

"To reverse the current loss and unlock the full potential of forests, UNEP is supporting the transformation of the forest sector," said Kaveh Zahedi, Regional Director & Representative for Asia and the Pacific, UNEP, in opening remarks to the student debate. "The scale required in moving away from business-as-usual to a Green Economy is enormous, and beyond the capacity of any individual organization."

The Executive Director of RECOFTC, Tint Lwin Thuang, called on the participants in the debate and others "to take the initiative to work toward securing not only more forests under community management - but good quality forests - so that we can progress toward the goal of empowering local people to effectively and equitably engage in the sustainable management of forested landscapes."



You can view the short video of the debate online via <http://youtu.be/CM8pjOrhmaM>