



Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

RESOLUTION URGING THE UNITED NATIONS TO ALTER ITS POTENTIALLY MISLEADING FOREST DEFINITIONS

Whereas, the current definition of ‘forest’ used by the United Nations fails to distinguish between natural forests, modified natural forests, and tree plantations; and

Whereas, tree plantations are often comprised by monocultures of non-native species that have very limited value for conserving imperilled biodiversity; and

Whereas, in many tropical countries, complex, biodiverse forests that were designated as permanent forest reserves are being felled and replaced by plantations; and

Whereas, this serious loophole means that such changes would be regarded as having caused no change in the ‘forest, thereby allowing forest loss and degradation to occur without sanctions; and

Whereas, the conversion of carbon-rich natural forests or peatlands to wood, pulp, or oil palm plantations can lead to major net emissions of dangerous greenhouse gases; and

Whereas, the above distinctions are crucial for ongoing negotiations to conserve natural forests to reduce emissions from forest loss and degradation (REDD) as part of ongoing climate negotiations;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation, the world’s largest scientific organization devoted to the study, protection, and sustainable use of tropical ecosystems:

- Urges the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) of the United Nations to immediately clarify natural forest definitions on a biome basis (such as ‘cool-temperate’, ‘wet tropical, and ‘peat-swamp forest’) to reflect the wide-ranging differences in carbon and biodiversity values of these different biomes, while clearly distinguishing between native forests and those dominated by tree monocultures and non-native species; and
- Strongly recommends that developing and developed nations immediately implement these new forest definitions to ensure that they are incorporated in ongoing and future REDD negotiations.