

## **Globalization and Great Apes: Illegal logging destroying last strongholds of Orangutans in National Parks**

24<sup>th</sup> Session of UNEP's Governing Council/ Global Ministerial Environment Forum 5-9 February 2007.

**Nairobi, 6<sup>th</sup> February 2007. The tropical forests of South East Asia, important for local livelihoods and the last home of the orangutan are disappearing far faster than experts have previously supposed according to a new Rapid Response report from The UN Environment Programme.**

The report says that natural rainforests of Sumatra and Borneo are being cleared so rapidly that up to 98% may be destroyed by 2022 without urgent action. The rate of loss, which has accelerated in the past five years, outstrips a previous UNEP report released in 2002 at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) Then, experts estimated that most of the suitable orangutan habitat would be lost by 2032.

The illegal logging, driven by global demands, accounts for tens of millions of cubic metres annually and an estimated more than 73% of all logging in Indonesia. Approximately 20% of the logs are smuggled directly out of Indonesia, the remaining is used to support an extensive international and local wood industry, and then exported to the international markets by well-organized, but elusive commercial networks.

New satellite imagery reveals that the illegal logging is now entering a new critical phase: As the demands grow, the industry and international market are running out of cheap illegal timber and are now entering the national parks where the only remaining timber available in commercial amounts is found.

Satellite images confirm, together with data from the Indonesian Government, that illegal logging is now taking place in 37 out of 41 national parks, and likely growing. *“At current rates of intrusions, it is likely that some parks may become severely degraded in as little as three to five years, that is by 2012”*, says the new study *“The last stand of the orangutan: State of emergency.”*

Overall the report is concluding that loss of orangutan habitat is happening at a rate up to 30% higher than previously thought. The report, compiled by a wide range of experts, is being launched at UNEP's 24<sup>th</sup> Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. Here, close to 100 environmental ministers and state secretaries are meeting under the theme of globalization – environmental risks and opportunities

Indonesia is active in fighting illegal logging and has worked with a series of international programmes and initiatives to reduce the logging. However, says the report, while many of these initiatives are valuable, they require the assistance of the international community to stop the demands for illegal timber, and they are also mainly long-term in effect. In response, the Indonesian government has on several occasions in recent years directly used support from the Navy and Army to arrest, confiscate timber and drive companies out of the parks.

Recently, the Indonesian government has launched perhaps one of the most promising initiatives in recent years, namely the training of specially equipped ranger units (SPORC) to protect the parks.

Achim Steiner, UN Under Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said:

“Globalization is generating unprecedented wealth and lifting millions out of poverty. But in this case, the illegal logging is destroying the livelihoods of many local people dependent upon the forests while it is also draining the natural wealth of Indonesian forest resources by unsustainable practices. The logging at these scales is not done by individual impoverished people, but by well-organized elusive commercial networks“.

“National Parks form a cornerstone in the 2010 target to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss and are also so valuable for eco-tourism and in generating new livelihoods. Their protection is vital to these international goals and to the entire concept of protected areas”.

He called on governments and the international community to assist the Indonesian authorities with the equipment, training and particularly funding needed to enforce and patrol their national parks from illegal loggers.

H. E. Rachmat Witoelar, Indonesia’s environment minister and outgoing president of UNEP’s Governing Council, said; “We are currently in an unequal struggle over illegal logging, which in the medium to long-term could be won through certification processes. Such processes can help global consumers choose between sustainably produced wood and palm-oil products and those produced illegally and unsustainably”.

He said that the government was acting in the short term with counter measures including through the development of Ranger Quick response Units to counter illegal forest destruction. “However, the challenge of policing and enforcing Indonesia’s vast parks is immense and rangers have currently little access to ground vehicles, boats, arms, communications or aerial surveillance such as planes or helicopters. In 35 of our national parks we have over 2000 rangers but they have to patrol an area of over 100,000 km<sup>2</sup>”

The scale of illegal logging, including into national parks is likely to increase not only in Indonesia, but also in other parts of Asia, Africa and Latin-America. “The situation is now acute”, says Christian Nellemann, leader of the Response team. “The recent Indonesian initiatives on law enforcement will require the necessary scale, financial and logistical support in order to stop the extent of this illegal logging. If successful, the Indonesian experiences gained in the coming years may substantially improve our ability to protect national parks and fight illegal logging in other parts of the World“.

The report is prepared by GRASP, the Great Ape Survival Partnership lead by UNEP and UNESCO in collaboration with a wide range of NGOs.

Note to Editors:

Bornean and Sumatran orangutans are classed as Endangered and Critically Endangered and are listed on Appendix 1 of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Recent estimates suggest there are between 45,000 and 69,000 Bornean and no more than 7,300 Sumatran orangutans left in the wild.

The orangutans share their habitat with a wild range of other threatened and ecologically important species including the Sumatran tiger, Sumatran rhinoceros and Asian elephant. UNEP and the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have launched the Great Apes Survival Project (GRASP) in response to growing concern over the plight of the orangutan, chimpanzee, bonobo and gorilla.

The report “Last stand of the orangutan: State of emergency” can be downloaded at [www.grida.no](http://www.grida.no) or at [www.unep.org/grasp/docs/2007Jan-LastStand-of-Orangutan-report.pdf](http://www.unep.org/grasp/docs/2007Jan-LastStand-of-Orangutan-report.pdf) or [www.globio.info](http://www.globio.info) including high and low resolution graphics for free use in publications.

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