The protection of forests will be high on the agenda at this year’s UN climate summit in Glasgow, where world nations are expected to come forward with more ambitious climate goals. EURACTIV gives you a roundup of the issues at stake.
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A n average of 2,400 trees is cut down every minute, leading to an area the size of Belgium being deforested each year, according to the Latin America regional director for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), who was speaking ahead of the COP26 climate summit.

“It is considered that between 15 million and 18 million hectares of forests, an area the size of Belgium, is destroyed every year,” said Pina Gervassi, the regional director in Latin America for FSC, a certification body aiming to help reduce deforestation.

Such statistics are causing growing concern as the world goes into the United Nation’s annual climate summit. Forests play an essential role in combatting climate change and ensuring that global warming is limited before it causes drastic, irreversible changes to the planet.

The world’s forests are a key carbon sink, absorbing planet-heating CO2 from the atmosphere as they grow. They are also vital homes for biodiversity.

But forests are coming under pressure from agriculture and increasing cases of wildfires and damage caused by pests that are exacerbated by climate change.

It’s a double-whammy: when a
forest goes up in flames, not only is the carbon it contains immediately released, its CO2-absoption capacity also disappears.

“Of course, deforestation is a key contributor to climate change. In that sense, land use change, especially in the form of deforestation, is the second-largest source of atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions after fossil fuel combustion,” Gervassi said.

According to the Global Tree Assessment, which compiled research on tree species from the past five years, the main threats to trees are forest clearance and habitat loss, direct exploitation for timber and other products, and the spread of invasive pests and diseases.

The report compiled the extinction risk of 58,497 tree species around the world. It found that 30% of these species are threatened with extinction and at least 142 are recorded as extinct.

“Despite the many efforts taken by countries to safeguard and sustainably manage them, forests continue to be under threat. Every year, seven million hectares of natural forests are converted to other land uses such as large-scale commercial agriculture and other economic activities,” according to a UN report on forestry.

“Although the global rate of deforestation has slowed over the past decade, we continue to lose forests in the tropics – largely due to human and natural causes,” the report said.

FORESTRY AT COP26

The protection of forests will be on the agenda at the COP26 climate summit, where world nations are expected to come forward with more ambitious climate goals.

Many of these pledges will be “net” targets, meaning they rely on things like forests to remove a certain amount of carbon from the atmosphere.

The UK government, which is leading the summit, has included forestry as one of the key issues for discussion. That includes a focus on imported deforestation – trees being felled because of pressure from Global North supply chains.

These pressures have led to huge sections of rainforests being destroyed – areas that are rich in biodiversity and able to capture large amounts of carbon. The EU alone was responsible for 16% of deforestation related to international trade, second only to China, according to WWF, the conservation group.

“The most concentrated deforestation rates are located in tropical rainforests ... they are very important for Indigenous Peoples, from an ecological point of view, for biodiversity conservation, for the provision of water, food and other services to people and society in general,” Gervassi said.

However, any attempt to tackle imported deforestation at COP26 is more likely to be a first step rather than a full-blown initiative. This is partly because China has been unsure of whether to join such an agreement, EURACTIV understands.

Meanwhile, forestry could play a role in COP26 negotiations around the so-called ‘Article 6’ negotiations related to international carbon markets.

Europe’s position on Article 6 is to avoid double counting where emissions are counted twice. This can happen if the host nation selling the carbon credit to another country or company fails to make the corresponding adjustment to its own emissions tally.

According to climate scientist Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, any reward system for carbon removals coming from forestry needs to come “in addition to” the natural flux of CO2 removal that has been going on for centuries.

“What’s clear to me as a climate scientist is that you cannot count carbon storage two times,” he explained, referring to carbon stored in forest, soils and other ecosystems.

The European Union is planning to put forward a legislative proposal to prevent imported deforestation within the EU shortly after the UN summit.
As world leaders head to Glasgow for the COP26 climate summit, campaigners have urged rich nations to take a holistic approach to forestry that considers the environmental and economic interests of communities in the Global South.

The value of forests for the environment and the local communities relying on them needs to be embedded in international trade agreements to incentivise climate-friendly practices, campaigners say.

Deforestation in the Global South is mainly caused by the exploitation of natural resources for consumption in rich countries, according to Mitzi Jonelle Tan, a climate activist from the Philippines.

“In her view, changing this requires putting Indigenous Peoples at the centre of international trade agreements.

“It’s really about the systems in place that are causing all of this destruction,” she told EURACTIV. “This profit-oriented system is very colonialist, where everything that is in the Global South is taken away by the Global North.”

Some EU countries are attempting to tackle this kind of exploitation with laws preventing imported deforestation. Countries like France, for instance, have threatened to veto the draft EU-Mercosur trade deal due to major concerns over deforestation in the Amazon.
But simply stopping trade agreements won’t solve the problem, Jonelle Tan said.

“There is a way to sustainably cut trees and protect the forests in a way that is in balance with the ecosystem,” she told EURACTIV. “That’s what leaders need to learn from. The Indigenous Peoples who live off the land understand what it is like.”

**FORESTRY AT COP26**

Forestry will be one of the key talking points at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, where leaders will attempt to agree on international carbon trading rules.

A new approach to trade deals is needed to promote sustainable forestry practices in South America and South-East Asia, where most of the deforestation is happening, according to Marc Palahí, director of the European Forest Institute.

More economic value needs to be put on biodiversity and sustainability in trade deals, Palahí argues.

“We need a much more holistic approach,” he told EURACTIV, questioning moves by rich countries to dictate forestry policy to the rest of the world.

“We need to bring them the tools, the capacities, the technology, the innovation so that they can live in harmony, use the biological resources in a sustainable way, use them to make money, to provide jobs so that the local communities can thrive,” he added.

The place of forestry in international carbon trading also needs to be clarified at COP26.

Because they absorb CO2, forests are often used as carbon credits to help countries or companies offset their emissions.

But campaigners have warned that over-reliance on carbon offsets risks propping up unsustainable business models, based on continued fossil fuel burning.

“Many politicians, many sectors, see forests as a tool to compensate for a broken economic system, like a shortcut to feeling better, so they can continue doing the same but claim they’re compensating somewhere else,” Palahí said.

“We should see our forests, not as a tool to compensate for our broken system, but as a tool to transform our economic system,” he told EURACTIV.

Forests fulfil multiple roles for the environment and society, serving as a home for biodiversity, storage for carbon dioxide and as an economic resource for local communities. To be effective, forest conservation measures need to keep all of those functions in balance, Palahí argues.

**FORESTRY IN EUROPE**

In Europe, too, these functions are not in balance. Environmental NGOs are warning that, while the amount of forested area has increased, their ability to absorb CO2 has dropped.

“European forests are getting larger, there’s an expansion of forest area, but the quality of those forests is declining,” said Hannah Mowat from the forestry NGO Fern.

“EU forests are now absorbing 15% less carbon dioxide than they were in 2005 – that’s 15% more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere,” she warned.

This is due to an increase in harvesting and climate change impacts, like forest fires and pests. And these are only going to get worse with climate change.

“Many forests will reach a tipping point where they will no longer be able to deliver the ecosystem services that we are used to,” Palahí told EURACTIV.

“We’ll start seeing the symptoms, with increasing forest fires in places in Europe where there were not so many forest fires before, pests and diseases like bark beetle, destroying millions of hectares,” he said.

Unless forests become more resilient to this new climate, many of them will deteriorate and become a source of emissions rather than a sink, added Palahí.

One of the solutions, then, is to embrace the economic potential of forests – for example, to replace fossil materials like plastics.

“If we can connect the dots between this new economic traction that forestry and forest-based solutions will have and use it to finance the adaptation that our forests need, we could have a win-win solution,” Palahí argued.
Climate scientist: On forestry, COP26 must avoid double counting of carbon removals

By Kira Taylor | EURACTIV.com

Global leaders must not allow the double counting of emissions removals from forestry during negotiations at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, says Professor Jean-Pascal van Ypersele.

Professor Jean-Pascal van Ypersele is a climate scientist and former vice-chair of the IPCC. He is now a professor of Environmental Sciences at the UC Louvain university in Belgium. He spoke to EURACTIV’s Kira Taylor ahead of COP26.

Why are forests important in the fight against climate change and how can Europe grow the capacity of its forests to act as a carbon sink?

As everybody knows, forests are absorbing carbon. They also are providing many services to humanity in terms of biodiversity, oxygen provision, beauty provision, natural space to walk in, but storing carbon is also one aspect of all those useful

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services that forests provide to humanity.

Forests, also because they are destroyed, are one of the sources of CO2. It’s not the forests, of course, that are responsible for that – it’s the humans who are responsible for that destruction.

That deforestation is responsible for between 10 and 15% of global CO2 emissions, so there’s every reason to stop deforestation and to protect them so that they can store more carbon and provide all those other positive services.

How can Europe grow the capacity of forests to act as a carbon sink – do they just need to plant more forests or do they need to change the way that forestry is done?

From my understanding of the literature I know at least, it appears that keeping existing mature forests has a key role in that function of storing carbon.

Some people say we can plant new trees etc and it’s good to plant new trees, but the amount of carbon that a small coppice – or very young tree – is storing is almost negligible.

It’s only after decades that most tree species start to absorb a significant amount of carbon. So a key aspect in helping forests to store more carbon is actually to stop deforestation and to help the existing forests, particularly old and biodiversified forests, and not monocultures of trees planted a few years ago.

The best way to store more carbon is to first stop deforestation.

Forestry will be one of the topics on the agenda at COP26. What are you hoping will come out of the summit? Could it be a moratorium for stopping deforestation?

Very frankly I don’t know. Of course, it would be nice to have a moratorium. COPs are very formal things usually. There’s usually a high level of resistance to introducing new elements that would have a legal force and would force countries to do something they don’t want to do.

The Paris Treaty doesn’t explicitly contain any provision to stop deforestation. It’s only when you start to discuss and interpret the goal of reaching carbon neutrality in the second half of the century, which is what’s written in the Paris Agreement text that you can comment that this means that, among many other measures, one needs to protect forests.

It’s not written in black and white that you need to stop deforestation, or even to decrease deforestation, even if it’s hard to imagine that reaching carbon neutrality, either by 2050 or only in the second half of the century, can take place without stopping as quickly as possible deforestation in the world.

I am not very optimistic, but I may be wrong, about a new legal text coming out of Glasgow. It’s even very hard to imagine because the legal texts usually require several years of preparation. Now, if it’s an intention that is pursued by several countries on a voluntary basis, that’s different. But then would the countries where most deforestation takes place sign such an aspirational text. I doubt it.

And countries like Russia and Brazil are pushing for greater recognition of the carbon absorption capacity of their forests at the UN level, what are the rules on carbon removal by forestry at this level?

What’s clear to me as a climate scientist is you cannot count carbon storage that is happening naturally in the forests of the world – not only in the forests by the way: also in the soils and in many ecosystems – two times.

There is a big natural loop of exchanges, which was taking place well before humans started to affect forests, between soils and land ecosystems, including forests, and the atmosphere. It’s of the order of 700-750 gigatons of CO2 that’s emitted by natural systems every year and absorbed every year.

Before disturbance by human activities, those huge fluxes were almost perfectly in balance. That’s one of the factors explaining why for most of the last 10,000 years, the CO2 concentration in the atmosphere was stable.

There are two big fluxes – one flux up, one flux down – between land ecosystems and the atmosphere, and it’s the same for the ocean. The fluxes are a little smaller for the ocean, but they’re also perfectly balanced. You cannot say we have some of this big flux absorbed by land ecosystems every year and some of that is on our territory, so this is a carbon sink we should be rewarded for. No. This is the natural flux that was taking place over millennia. It would be wrong to label this as the result of deliberate human or political efforts to get that negative flux of CO2.

It’s very different if you plant a new forest, for example, on a piece of land that was not used for that

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previously. If you can demonstrate in a rigorous and scientific way that the forest you have planted on this new piece of land is absorbing more CO2 than the ecosystem present there before, then it’s different. You can then start to argue that this is the deliberate result of human intervention. And that this could be rewarded as a service to humanity.

But to reward the CO2 fluxes which were happening naturally over the years without any human intervention would be completely wrong. I think much of what’s happening today in the large forests, either of Russia, Siberia, or Congo are natural fluxes, which shouldn’t be rewarded.

So it’s rewarding anything additional, but not what was already there.

Rewarding something additional and clearly the result of human intervention and scientifically demonstrated as delivering results. There are a few conditions in what I say. Climate change is not the only crisis you have in the environment at the global level.

Biodiversity is very important as well. Even if it was additional storing of carbon, if it’s happening in a monoculture, I don’t think the rewards should be as high as if it’s a diverse forest where there is a multiplicity of tree species and attention for biodiversity, together with climate. I think it would be much better to have that set up for the rewarding system.

**What do you think of net targets because those include carbon sinks so they include that natural flux, alongside emissions reductions. Do you think that also has a similar issue?**

The atmosphere only understands the additional CO2 and other gases that are delivered to it. So if the atmosphere receives more CO2 on a net basis – and of course, this is on a net basis – then it means that the thermal insulation layer that we’re installing around the planet, is increasing in thickness.

So the concept of net CO2 emissions has some scientific value because, from the atmosphere point of view, from the climate point of view, it’s net emissions that matter.

But the other aspect is that the way that net emissions are assessed, evaluated, quantified needs to be very rigorous. When you cut the amount of coal or oil or gas that you burn in a factory or power plant, this results very clearly in an emission reduction. If you say we will plant trees, there’s more fuzziness. Also, think about the risk of forest fires.

When you have a net target you probably need to exert a lot more caution to consider it because of the risk of fire among other things, but there are other factors as well.

The atmosphere only understands net emissions, but when you’re on the ground, things become much more complex. It would probably be clearer to have separate targets for emissions and absorption because, as far as the absorptions are concerned, there are many question marks and many risks associated. If the net target is presented as the guarantee that the net emissions will decrease without taking into account those elements, it’s not ideal.

**Should the UN allow trading of carbon removal permits, and how does it ensure that system is robust and isn’t abused?**

It very much depends on what is the solidity of the information available about the net reduction – is it effectively a net reduction? Again, it would be probably clearer if it was a reward that would be separated between emissions and additional absorption clearly distinguished from the natural fluxes.

**Europe is looking at legislation to prevent deforestation – in your mind is that enough?**

In its present version, the renewable energy directive considers the usage of wood in the renewable part of the energy mix in Europe as carbon neutral. The assumption is that the wood absorbed carbon over its life, and that, when it’s burned in Europe, it can therefore be considered as a zero CO2 emission source.

That’s wrong. This should be considered as imported deforestation.

The EU doesn’t check how this wood has been acquired, whether it’s coming from old-growth forests and from the trunks of old trees, which absorb a lot of carbon and would continue to absorb a lot of carbon if they were left alone. Or if it comes from other sources, where it can be demonstrated that there was a sustainable way to exploit the forest. So, the assumption that wood coming from other countries is automatically CO2 neutral needs to be revisited.

Actually, the IPCC itself, which is often misquoted about this, says in Chapter 11 of the mitigation volume of working group three, the one published in 2014, it says there on page 879, “The assumption that the CO2
emitted from biomass combustion is climate neutral has often been used in the assessment of bioenergy systems.” Just two sentences later, “The shortcomings of this assumption have been extensively discussed in environmental impact studies and emission accounting mechanisms.”

It even says later, “Forest bioenergy systems can temporarily have higher cumulative CO2 emissions than the fossil reference system.”

The IPCC is sometimes used as an argument to burn the wood in coal plants. And used to reduce on paper the CO2 emissions from those coal plants. Then it’s often said, well, the IPCC allows for that or even recommends that, which it never did.

It’s very clear that a lot of caution needs to be exercised when importing biomass and I’m afraid this is not done at the moment in the EU. So this renewable energy directive needs to be revised along those lines and it has not been done up to now to my knowledge, at least.
The pushback from EU countries against the European Commission’s new forest strategy, which seeks to protect biodiversity and enhance the role of trees in capturing CO2, has been “hyperbolic”, according to the forestry NGO Fern.

“I think there’s been a grossly hyperbolic reaction to the forest strategy, which is very telling of what’s going on in forests at the moment and of the plan to harvest more,” Fern campaigner Hannah Mowat told EURACTIV.

The strategy was published just two days after the European Commission’s 2030 climate package in July and includes aims to protect old-growth forests, which have huge potential as carbon sinks, to plant three billion trees by 2030 and increase observation of forests to help improve their condition.

However, many EU countries have joined forces against the strategy, complaining that it does not sufficiently take into account the economic role of forests and that the European Commission is overstepping its competence.

“The forest strategy says: ‘we think
there’s a problem in forests, and we need to do some monitoring and observing of those forests and maybe certify good practices,” Mowat said.

“And the response is: ‘Brussels is taking away the forests from citizens – farmers of the world unite’, which shows that they’ve heard a different question in their minds,” she added.

According to Mowat, Europe’s forests are in a poor state, a situation she says is caused by the intensification of forest management – including harvesting – and growing impacts of climate change like wildfires and pests.

“Forests are getting larger, there’s an expansion of forest area, but the quality of those forests is declining and the amount of carbon dioxide they’re absorbing is also declining,” she told EURACTIV.

And, in her opinion, the EU’s forest strategy won’t be enough to fix this.

“What we need are clear limits on the levels of harvesting across Europe, in line with the Paris Agreement, and in line with biodiversity limits,” she said, adding this will “also fulfil citizens needs for nature”.

**COUNTRIES AND INDUSTRY UNITE AGAINST FOREST STRATEGY**

But EU countries, the wood and paper industry, and some in the European Parliament hold the exact opposite view, saying the European Commission both overstepped and misstepped with the forest strategy.

According to them, the strategy rubs up against historic sustainable forestry practices in Europe and violates the powers of EU member states.

Marc Palahí is the director of the European Forest Institute, a research organisation bringing together 29 European states. Although he believes the strategy is good overall, he warned that implementation risks being tricky since so many EU countries are against it.

Earlier this month, a group of 15 EU countries plus Norway met in Vienna to discuss the strategy. Their joint statement – the so-called Vienna Declaration – is a scathing indictment of the forest strategy.

“In the strategy, suggestions made by the member states and the European Parliament are only reflected rudimentarily. In addition, the needs and expectations of 16 million forest owners have been largely ignored,” the signatories wrote.

The declaration was signed by Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

The proposed strategy “significantly alters the current balance between socio-economic and ecologic functions of multifunctional forestry moving towards an almost exclusive propagation of environmental concerns, whilst the economic aspects seem to be essentially overlooked, jeopardising the long-term viability of European forests and forestry,” the signatories warned.

As a result, “the role of forests as the source of many forest owners’ income will lose its value”.

According to them, a new political approach must be established which involves forest managers from the beginning and as equals in the implementation of the strategy.

Similarly, forest owners and managers raised “substantial concerns” about the strategy undermining the current balance of social, environmental and economic roles of sustainable forestry in Europe earlier this month.

In a joint declaration from the European Forest Owners’ Conference, forest industry representatives argued the strategy’s approach does not correspond to realities on the ground, ignores the economic role of forestry and will not help the sector reach Europe’s climate objective.
Climate activist: Global North needs to step up at COP26 in order to stop deforestation

By Kira Taylor | EURACTIV.com

Deforestation in countries like Brazil is driven by demand for agricultural products in the Global North. That colonialist system has to change, argues Mitzi Jonelle Tan.

Mitzi Jonelle Tan is a full-time climate activist based in the Philippines. She is the international spokesperson of Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines and an organiser of Fridays for Future and Fridays for Future Most Affected Peoples and Areas, amplifying voices from the Global South. She spoke to EURACTIV’s Kira Taylor ahead of COP26.

How do climate activists in the Global South view COP26?

I think for several activists in the Global South, or in areas most impacted by the climate crisis, people don’t even know about COP26, especially young climate activists. It’s been kept away from people so much and it’s not talked about in our countries at all – or just barely.

Something that we’re campaigning on with COP is ensuring that the knowledge gap is bridged between activists from the Global North and the Global South because people often don’t even know what COP is. It’s so wild that that’s happening when it’s such a crucial event. It’s the 26th one now and still, not a lot of people know about it.

Do you see many media outlets, many people talking about it?

At least in the Philippines, it really isn’t being talked about. The first time I heard about COP was when I became a climate activist in 2019. I didn’t even know what happened after COP – I just knew that it got moved from Chile to

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Madrid.

I didn't know what happened inside, what the resolutions were, what happened in the negotiations. I had to look at international news coverage to see it and just a few Philippine ones, but really not enough. Because, again, like the climate crisis isn’t being spoken about, it’s not on the table.

We’ve heard a lot of concerns about access to COP26, particularly from the Global South – what issues do you see when it comes to inclusivity and diversity?

There are several issues. Conferences of Parties, in general, have always been very difficult to get to for activists in the Global South, just because of the location and economic challenges of getting there. There are so many barriers – just think of the money and visas required. Usually, activists in the Global South don’t have monetary support from NGOs because activism is frowned upon in our countries.

At COP26, we will still be in the middle of the COVID pandemic – a lot of people say we’re going out of it, but we’re still in it in our countries. A lot of people aren’t getting vaccinated. The UK government said that they would vaccinate, but they’re only starting to contact people now. We have so many people who were counting on that vaccination with the UK government, but it never came. Because of the lockdowns, a lot of visa centres are saying that they’re not giving visas even though they’re supposed to.

You don’t only have to look at the rules of COVID in the UK, but also in the transit countries that you have to go to when flying. Of course, the money and the access to badges have been greatly lowered for civil society. That’s not what we need, especially at this COP26, which is claiming to be the most inclusive, yet so many people still don’t have access to badges.

It took so long for them to say that they would support the quarantine hotels and everything, and now when they finally said that, it’s kind of a bit too late to start processing everything you need to process. A lot of people have already given up.

The UK Government and the COP26 presidency have not supported the delegates, especially from the Global South.

What do you want from global leaders at the summit?

Honestly, it’s so simple. It’s just stopping prioritising profit over people and the planet.

But how does that look concretely? So it’s drastic carbon dioxide emission cuts and not these creative pledges and creative accounting that we’re seeing. But cuts with milestones, short term goals, an action plan and concrete steps towards it and how to achieve it.

A fossil fuel phase-out, especially in the Global North. Of course, reparations for the Global South in terms of loss and damages, so climate finance for loss and damages and adaptation. That is so crucial because it’s not being talked about enough. Everyone’s just talking about renewable energy and drastic emission cuts, but how do you expect the Global South to transition into renewable energy?

Just like how it’s happening with the COVID pandemic and vaccines, we’ll end up going into debt to the Global North countries because of the intellectual property rights, the patents that come along with the vaccines and the technology of renewable energy.

So when we call for a just transition, it includes technology transfer. It’s not financial aid. It’s a debt that the Global North owes to humanity and the Global South. There have to be reparations in finance for the loss and damages that have already happened so many times in the past and our countries for adaptation and renewable energy because it’s not just about the extreme weather events. It’s also about being able to bounce back after.

What challenges do you see when it comes to international agreements?

When it comes to finance for loss and damages, the countries that are blocking it are the ones that have historically caused the climate crisis: the US, Japan, Australia. We’ve seen that, in the past, when trying to fight for the 1.5°C or 2°C warming limit – again, it was the Global North countries, who are “transitioning already”, that were trying to hold back because they know they have the most to lose.

Again, you’re seeing the same system that prioritises the profit of the Global North and the overexploitation of the Global South versus the quality of people’s lives everywhere. I think that is the thing that’s blocking a lot of our negotiations. It’s that lack of political will from Global South leaders and the lack of political will of Global North leaders to prioritise again the most marginalised people.

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That’s what’s been happening year after year, crisis after crisis – COVID, climate, all of it – it’s always been that product of the same system that led us to this climate crisis. So I think there is a possibility to change this, but it comes from the people demanding justice, being so loud that the leaders are scared that, if they don’t do this, they might lose their position. They have to do this because the people are asking for it.

What do you think Western countries, like those in Europe and the US, are missing when it comes to tackling climate change?

Everything. No policies are enough right now. Those policies don’t even have implementation plans. You have pledges, but the pledges aren’t enough because they don’t even have plans or action steps. None of the things that are being said is good enough.

Everything is still missing. Honestly what’s most missing in our political leaders is the leadership that is needed to bring us out of this climate crisis, the leadership that can stand up to fossil fuel capitalism and the leadership that can stand up to the multinational industries that are destroying the environment and say, ‘Okay, enough is enough. We’ve destroyed this enough, we will lose a little bit of profit, but that’s okay because people’s lives will be better.’

Many climate-damaging industries, particularly when it comes to deforestation are based now in the Global South – how do you think Western countries can tackle that?

We also have to remember why deforestation is happening in a lot of our countries. In some countries, like Brazil, it’s because of their agricultural industry to provide food for the Global North countries. A lot of the destruction of the environment in our countries is to exploit the natural resources to be exported to the Global North.

That’s something that has to change. It’s not just about transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy. It’s not just about transitioning from a meat-based diet to a plant-based diet. It’s really about the systems in place that are causing all of this destruction. That is the system rooted in this profit-orientedness and is very colonialist, where everything in the Global South is taken away and given to the Global North.

To help, Global North leaders need to change. We need trade policies that are actually fair for people. We need laws and rules that are listening to people. You have examples where in Indonesia when they stopped the paper plantation because deforestation was happening, they changed it into a palm oil plantation. It wasn’t exactly better. It was just a different form of exploitation of the land. It’s things like that that we really have to be careful about.

The EU is bringing in imported deforestation legislation. Do you think that’s enough or do they need to be working on the ground?

I think it’s so important that you talk to the people on the ground in any legislation, especially legislation like this. You work and collaborate with them so that you don’t end up leaving them behind.

Because of deforestation laws or because of conservation laws, you end up pushing out Indigenous Peoples; you end up locking them away from their ancestral land that they’ve been protecting and using sustainably.

There is a way to sustainably cut trees and protect the forests in a way that is in balance with the ecosystem. That’s what leaders need to learn from. We need to stop thinking that they are the leaders. The Indigenous Peoples who live off the land understand what it is like. They need to actively work with these people so that we don’t end up thinking that we have all the answers, and then you go there, and it’s like, ‘Oh, no, it’s so bad’.

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