



**SEEKING PEACE AND SAVING FORESTS:  
FOREST CONFLICT IN ASIA**



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Photo: Global Witness



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Photo: Paul Mason, USAID



## WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ?

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Violent conflict over timber and forest land is widespread in the developing countries of Asia. From Afghanistan to Papua New Guinea, at least 13 countries in Asia experience violent conflict over forest resources. Forest conflict arises when two or more groups want to use the same area of forest for competing purposes, resulting in violence and/or loss of land and livelihoods for one of the groups. One purpose, timber, has a high value; for example in 2004, the United States imported \$9 billion worth of wood products from Asia. Forest lands are also financially valuable for clearance to plantations for palm oil, pulp and biofuel. At the same time, many people depend on standing forests for their everyday lives. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimated in 1998 that 430 million people were dependent upon Asia's forests for their survival, yet more than 100 million acres of forests have been lost in Asia since 1990 and that number is growing fast. Recent figures show that since 1990, 1.7 million Cambodians lost access to forests and suffered harm. A conservative estimate for Indonesia indicates that from 1998 to 2002, 2.1 million Indonesians were affected by deforestation and most likely some form of associated conflict (see [www.forestconflict.com](http://www.forestconflict.com)).

Conflict also emerges as protests, often violent, when people feel that their rights to forests have been violated and that they have no other means for resolving their grievances.

Forest conflict is not unique to Asia as forests are considered a valuable resource by rich and poor alike around the world. Globally, more than 2 billion people depend on forest resources for their livelihoods, including around half of the 1.6 billion who survive on less than \$2 a day (see [www.rightsandresources.org](http://www.rightsandresources.org)).

In a number of countries in Asia and Africa, armed conflict between government and rebel forces has been financed or sustained through the sale of timber (also known as conflict timber) or other forest products. This causes conflict when the timber is harvested and again when timber is sold or bartered for weapons to maintain armed conflict. In 1995, total Khmer Rouge earnings from the timber trade from Cambodia to Thailand approximated \$10-20 million per month. In Burma, both military junta and armed opposition groups trade timber for arms. In one financial year alone (2001-2002), \$200 million worth of timber was traded from Burma to China (see [www.globalwitness.org](http://www.globalwitness.org)).



Photos: (l) Jim Jarvie,ARD; (rt) USGS; (rb) Jim Jarvie,ARD

Low-level disputes over forest resources are common within communities. Full-blown conflict, including beatings, killings and arson, is more likely between people living in or near forests, often the poor, and those with political and economic power to exploit forests. In these cases, forest conflict can be associated with illegal and sometimes legal logging and particularly with the complete removal of forests for plantations. Illegal logging is rampant throughout Asia; for example, up to 80% of Indonesia's timber and 90% of Cambodia's timber is reported to be illegal.

If we do not take action, millions of people living in and near Asia's forests will continue to be threatened by poverty and violence and forests will continue to be destroyed. People who rely on forests for food and shelter lose their lives, homes, and livelihoods when forests are cut down to fund armed conflict, buy political support, and enrich the powerful. Forest conflict is a symptom of corruption and failure of the rule of law. If left unchecked, it weakens governments, decreases public security, and can contribute to grievances that drive political conflict and instability. The loss of forests not only affects people's lives, it also has disastrous effects on the environment such as biodiversity loss, decline in water resources, and global climate change. Estimates are that forest loss will contribute to 20% of Asia's species becoming extinct during this century.



Photo: Mary Melnyk, USAID



Photo: Lori Severens, USAID



# WHO SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT FOREST CONFLICT ?

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If you, your organization, or your government is concerned about the environment, the poor, human rights, governance, economic growth or forest products supply, then you should consider how this type of resource conflict can be an obstacle to conservation, people's well-being, security, sustainable development, and profits. Also, consumers and firms around the globe can inadvertently contribute to forest conflict by buying or selling products that contain wood that was harvested in a conflict situation. Resolving resource conflicts, such as forest conflict, is essential to development success that benefits the poor and conserves the environment.

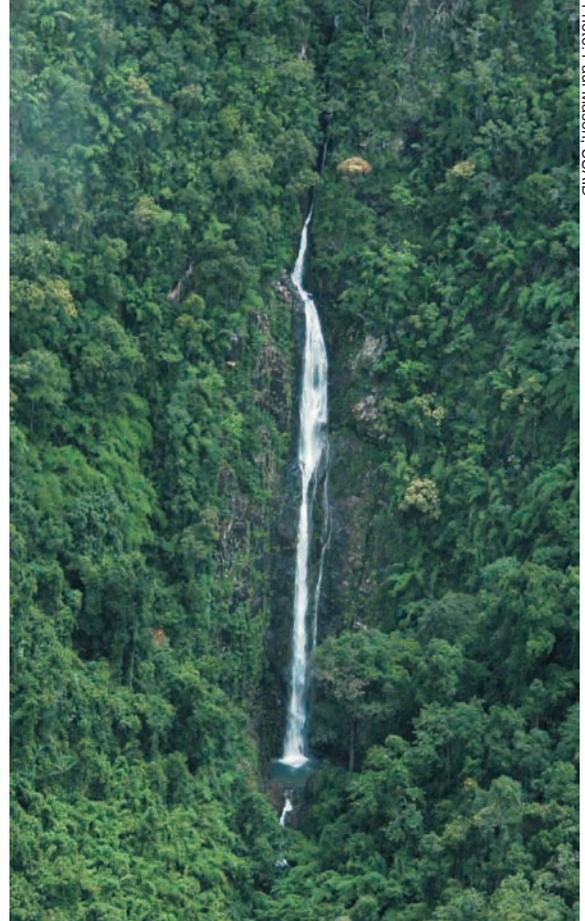


Photo: Paul Mason, USAID



Photo: Mary Melnyk, USAID



# HOW DOES FOREST CONFLICT AFFECT PEOPLE ?

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## INDONESIA

Twelve people died and hundreds were injured during massive public protests over the seizure of forest land by a pulp mill on the island of Sumatra in 2001. This is only one instance in a pattern of violence between local people and security forces as Indonesia's tropical forests on Sumatra and Borneo have been cut, burned, and cleared over the last decade to provide raw material for paper mills and to open land for oil palm plantations. This is typically done by private sector firms in collusion with government officials or security forces.

Deforestation has winners and losers. A political and administrative transformation of Indonesia took place after the resignation of former President Suharto in 1998, which gave greater decision-making powers to local governments. The resulting decentralization of Indonesia's forest sector saw newly empowered, forest-dependent communities exerting property rights over customary forest. However, these communities did not have adequate knowledge and skills to negotiate conflicts with logging interests, and ended up worse off as a result. Indonesians who live in or near forests can lose their land and livelihoods; many have been forced

to move with no compensation or prospect for employment. We estimate that 2.1 million Indonesians were living in the areas deforested between 1998 and 2002, giving rise to conflict over forest loss. When considering that people living kilometers away can also be dependent on forests for everyday needs, the number of those potentially affected can rise to 20 million. Forest conflict continues in Indonesia and there is a risk of increased violence as plans for conversion of natural forests to biofuel plantations emerge.



Photo: Jim Jarvis, ARD



Photo: Mary Melnyk, USAID



## CAMBODIA

In the eastern part of the country, a woman leads a group of villagers into the forest in the middle of the night to confront armed timber smugglers. The standing forest is important to them as a source of cash and a sanctuary for wildlife. The villagers win this particular confrontation by risking death, but are still rapidly losing the forest to illegal loggers and land grabbers.

In another part of the country, a man walks through a forest he has known since childhood to find a scene of utter destruction. The century-old trees that he and his family depend on to yield resin that they sell to buy food have all been cut down by illegal loggers.

Forest conflict in Cambodia gained international attention in the early 1990s when both government and Khmer Rouge forces harvested timber in border areas to buy weapons. This was one of the first cases of “conflict timber.” When a peace agreement was reached, logging concessions were seen as a means of economic growth. As the government awarded massive logging concessions without regard for the people living in the forests, conflict spread across the country in the latter half of that decade. In recent years, the conflict and human rights abuses have further escalated due to increased illegal logging and the illegal grabbing of forest lands. As many as 1.7 million Cambodians have been

affected by forest conflict over the past 15 years. Cambodia provides an example that if during peace negotiations, forest rights are not addressed, a country can easily return to conflict; in this case, not a full-blown civil war, but violence still affecting millions of people. Furthermore, the common practice of establishing concessions to jumpstart economic growth rarely results in the distribution of benefits to the resource-dependent poor or sustainable forest management. In most cases, the income earned is captured for personal wealth rather than for the country's development.





Photo: Lori Severens, USAID



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

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Despite the pervasiveness of forest conflict, for those of us working in these countries or engaged in the processing, manufacturing, or purchasing of their forest products, there are ways that we can seek peace and save Asia's forests. Forest conflict can be reduced in three ways: by improving the governance of forests, by sending signals through forest product markets, and by showing that consumers are not willing to buy wood products that contain material that was harvested in a conflict situation. This is a pivotal time to address forest conflict because forests and forest people are at grave risk from a number of threats. It is time to focus international attention on ways to protect these people and the forests they depend on. Progress can be made through the concerted action of groups and individuals including the governments of countries where forest conflict occurs, international organizations and donors, international and domestic civil society groups, the forest products industry including processors, manufacturers, retailers and consumers, and the media.

Some important work has begun with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), other donors and international organizations in bringing together a range of people and groups at local

and international levels to form partnerships to reduce forest conflict and conserve forests. An example of such a partnership involves USAID, the British Department for International Development, the Government and civil society of Indonesia, international and local organizations, and retailers. This alliance is working to establish wide agreement on the principles that underlie a definition of legal timber within Indonesia and other countries in Asia. This is a crucial step toward identifying legal wood sources, reducing the potential for conflict over forest resources and the codification of the rights of forest-dependent poor.

By mainstreaming the use of credible standards of legality in Indonesia, issues of forest tenure, a key driver of conflict, have been brought to the fore and the principles of conflict-free timber have been broadly accepted by a wide range of stakeholders including industry, government agencies, and civil society organizations. Assistance has also been provided to timber buyers in applying responsible timber purchasing policies, including the exclusion of conflict timber from supply chains. More information on this program is provided at: [www.illegal-logging.info](http://www.illegal-logging.info), search Indonesia Standard.



Photo:ARD



This work, including USAID's Forest and Conflict Toolkit, is fully described and links to various partner Web sites are provided at: [www.forestconflict.com](http://www.forestconflict.com). The continuation and growth of group and individual efforts is important and urgent. Organizational and partnership efforts need to be directed at forest law enforcement and governance, forest conservation, acceptance of legal and conflict-free standards, transparency in forest products trade, human rights for forest-dependent people, and establishing conditions for peace, security and stability. Individual efforts include the need for forest product retailers and consumers to voice their concern about forest conflict to encourage processors and manufacturers to supply materials that are from conflict-free areas.

Specific interventions at the organizational and partnership level may include:

### **Improve governance**

- Clarify forest use rights and land tenure, particularly for the poor and indigenous peoples.
- Work with forest communities, government officials, and the forest industry on conflict management and dispute resolution.
- Strengthen laws for forest management.
- Allow citizens to fully participate in land-use planning decisions including a range of options for forest management such as community-based forest management.
- Uphold and enforce the rule of law through policing and an impartial judiciary.
- Prevent government officials and security forces from gaining illegal access to forests or funds generated by illegal timber harvesting.
- Educate forest people about their legal rights and give them a voice in forest management.

### **Use the market**

- Urge the forest products industry, including processors, manufacturers, retailers and consumers, to demand wood products that are conflict-free and legal.
- Develop standards and systems for ensuring the legality of wood, such as is being done in Indonesia. These systems must be tailored to laws and conditions in each country, but the basic principles are the same.
- Track legal, conflict-free wood through the marketing chain so that consumers can be assured that they are buying “good wood.”

Specific interventions at the individual level may include:

### **Highlight consumer demand**

- Individual consumers should voice their concerns to forest product retailers and the media about the human and ecological destruction linked to products made from materials harvested in forest conflict areas and their desire for products that are conflict-free and legal.
- Forest product retailers should notify their suppliers that their customers’ concerns about the destructive effects of forest conflict may disrupt demand for forest products from conflict areas.
- Forest product retailers should in turn seek suppliers (processors and manufacturers) sourcing products that are conflict-free.



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## WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ?

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The information in this brochure is based on the findings of work done over a five-year period in affected countries such as Nepal, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Several partnership-building meetings were convened over this period to develop actions to resolve and avoid forest conflicts. Participating in the design of actions were representatives from governments, the private sector, research institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and forest-dependent communities, including indigenous peoples.

To learn more about this work and to download reports of forest conflict assessments in individual countries, please visit the forest conflict Web site: **[www.forestconflict.com](http://www.forestconflict.com)**.

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