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Parliamentary efforts in achieving negative carbon balances of forests

***Explanatory memorandum submitted by the co-Rapporteurs
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1. The 2019 call by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to scale up action in order to “turn the tide on deforestation” should be seen not as a suggestion but as an obligation for the international community. Even with ambitious efforts to reduce emissions, the internationally agreed goals of limiting global warming are unlikely to be achieved. Achieving negative emissions through carbon sequestration is therefore imperative. Trees are essential to climate stability in their role as solar-powered engines that capture carbon from the atmosphere and store it in biomass. The world’s forests have massive potential not only for mitigating climate change, but also for supporting biodiversity conservation, cultivating carbon-neutral natural resources and fostering sustainable economic development, particularly in developing countries. But this potential can only be unleashed by stepping up global efforts on halting deforestation and forest degradation and, at the same time, on the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of forests.
2. With the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015 and the adoption of the Katowice climate package (the “Paris rulebook”) in 2018, the international community recognized the climate crisis as a shared global challenge. Parties to these instruments have agreed on the goal to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C and to achieve global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible. Article 5 of the Paris Agreement calls on Parties to take action to conserve and enhance sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases, including forests, and to develop policy approaches and positive incentives for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, for sustainable management of forests and for the enhancement of forest carbon stocks.
3. At the nineteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP19), held in Warsaw in 2013, Parties agreed on the Warsaw Framework for REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries) which, along with the related package of seven decisions, established a framework for measurable and verifiable emission reductions through forest protection measures in developing countries.
4. By adopting the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030 in April 2017, the UN General Assembly committed to fostering enhanced coherence, collaboration and synergies with regard to sustainably managing all types of forests and trees outside forests, and to halting deforestation and forest degradation.

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5. Through the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, adopted at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, more than 140 countries pledged to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation, including through sustainable forest management. An additional US\$ 19 billion has been allocated to help developing countries achieve these objectives.

6. The world's forests and trees are of singular importance to the global climate through, among other factors, their ability to capture and store carbon, to retain and release moisture, and to provide sustainable and renewable resources to humankind. They cover 31% of the Earth's land surface (4.06 billion hectares) but hold almost half of all carbon stored on land. Annual sequestration capacities per hectare amount to 0.4–1.2 tonnes of carbon in boreal forests, 1.5–4.5 tonnes in temperate forests and 4–8 tonnes in tropical forests. Beyond removing carbon from the atmosphere, sustainably harvested products can serve as substitutes for climate-damaging alternatives, thereby avoiding additional emissions. Tropical forests are particularly important for regulating the regional water balance: they prevent droughts, floods and desertification, protect against soil erosion, and ensure the preservation of biodiversity. Active protection and sustainable management of these forests contributes to economic development by creating income and work and securing the livelihoods of rural populations.

7. According to *The State of the World's Forests 2022*, a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, forest destruction caused by fire, overexploitation or conversion to agricultural land results in a net annual forest area loss of approximately 7 million hectares. If this trend continues, 170 million hectares of forest will be lost by 2030.

8. Forest loss is having an increasingly severe impact on various aspects of human life and security and development opportunities and, in many respects, is compounding existing crises:

- Global forest destruction is a rapidly accelerating climate change, contributing 15% of global CO₂ emissions.
- Deforestation is one of the main root causes of increasing biodiversity loss and loss of genetic resources, with forests providing habitat for 80% of amphibian species, 75% of bird species and 68% of mammal species. Tropical forests are particularly important as they are home to about 50% of all animal and plant species.
- Forest loss is a major threat to food security and agriculture. In the Amazon and African tropics, it is significantly affecting rainfall and, therefore, rain-fed agriculture.
- Deforestation is harmful to societies and economies. About 33 million people are thought to work directly in the formal and informal forest sector, representing 1% of global employment. It is estimated that more than half of global gross domestic product depends on ecosystem services, including those provided by forests.

9. The draft resolution states that deforestation and its impact on humanity is a common struggle, to be tackled by the international community as a whole. Parliamentarians need to stand together to uphold the natural foundations of life and to ensure we can all live well on our planet. This is essential not only from a climate policy perspective, but also as part of the peace, stability and sustainable development agenda. There can be no healthy economy on an unhealthy planet.

10. The draft resolution aims to align the efforts of IPU Member Parliaments in three major fields of action in order to maintain global climate stability, to minimize the risks of accelerated climate change through extensive forest loss, and to protect the forests that are essential to life on Earth. Specifically, the draft resolution:

- calls upon Member Parliaments to recognize the need for national and international policies to respond to climate stability risks caused by deforestation, including supporting vulnerable and fragile regions in implementing the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda, and ensuring that the United Nations system – including its most powerful organ, the United Nations Security Council – as well as States, multilateral institutions and other relevant actors are equipped to deal effectively with the looming threats of deforestation to the global climate, food security and sustainable economic development;

- encourages Member Parliaments to invest in prevention strategies;
- calls upon Member Parliaments to intensify urgent actions to halt deforestation and forest degradation in order to secure forest ecosystems and to maintain and enhance CO₂ sequestration as a way to mitigate climate change;
- encourages Member Parliaments to ramp up efforts on forest and landscape restoration and agroforestry in order to revive degraded ecosystems and restore their vital environmental, climatic and economic benefits;
- stresses the need for Member Parliaments to increase the sustainable use and management of forests, which provide essential goods and services to people worldwide.