



## **Sec. Vilsack announces joint \$3.5 billion pledge to help poorest nations protect their forests**

**By Agri-Pulse Staff**

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Copenhagen, Dec. 16 – Faced with angry third-world countries demanding more financial support to combat climate change, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Wednesday that the U.S., Australia, France, Japan, Norway, and the United Kingdom have agreed to provide \$3.5 billion as a down payment on slowing, halting and eventually reversing deforestation in developing countries. There's one string attached – that this \$3.5 billion will be provided only if there is “an ambitious and comprehensive outcome” in the Copenhagen climate talks scheduled to end this Friday.

This funding is designed to trigger “immediate actions” starting in 2010 for “REDD+” which is the acronym for “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation.”

“Protecting the world’s forests is not a luxury – it is a necessity,” Vilsack said in announcing the agreement. “This substantial commitment is reflective of our recognition that international public finance must play a role in developing countries’ efforts to slow, halt and reverse deforestation.”

The U.S. contribution to this effort will be \$1 billion over the next three years. These funds will be available for countries that develop ambitious REDD+ plans for their forest sector, according to their respective capabilities.

Vilsack explained that protecting the world’s climate is one of the world’s greatest challenges and that forests have a vital role to play in overcoming this challenge. The world loses more than 13 million hectares of tropical forests annually producing approximately 17% of global warming emissions. The loss of tropical rainforests is devastating to the protection and storage of water, the health of biodiversity, and the livelihood of rural populations.

The United States is already working with international partners to protect forests across the globe. The State Department, USAID, and USDA’s Forest Service are starting to work with developing countries around the world to learn how REDD+ can be implemented on the ground and USDA plans to ramp up these programs in the near future. These plans include improvements in carbon inventories, payment systems for ecosystem services, and assistance in helping forests adapt to a changing climate.

A USDA statement noted Wednesday that “While REDD+ can make it possible for developing countries to protect their forests, developed countries must also recognize their responsibility towards their own lands. In the United States, the Obama administration is taking steps to protect and restore our forests in order to sustain our climate and our water resources. This week, the U.S. Forest Service will formally announce a process for development of a new forest planning rule to govern the way we manage our publicly-owned National Forests.”

“It is imperative that we sustain our forests everywhere so that they, in turn, can sustain us,” Vilsack said.

### **Reactions From NGOs To The U.S. Commitment:**

“The President has taken the first step forward to bring resources to the table to break the deadlock in Copenhagen. Combined with the funding included in the clean energy and climate legislation pending in the Senate, this would amount to \$10 billion over three years. That’s real money to preserve forests and the essential carbon capture they provide. That’s a big step and an important first start on the long-term commitment we need.” - Frances Beinecke, President of the Natural Resources Defense Council

“The President’s commitment to jumpstart REDD+ is a powerful and timely signal of the U.S.’s commitment to protecting tropical forests and reducing climate change. It should help drive progress toward a successful deal here in Copenhagen,” said Kevin Knobloch, President, Union of Concerned Scientists.

“The commitment of the United States announced by Secretary Vilsack today to spend \$1 billion over three years for building capacity for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation is exactly what is needed to begin to address the global challenge of deforestation. We encourage other nations to join with commensurate commitments to support taking the actions that are urgently needed to begin solving this global problem.” - Mark Tercek, President and CEO of The Nature Conservancy

### **Reactions From Developing Countries To The Joint Contribution:**

“The announcement is a major breakthrough, bringing us toward the estimated costs of fast-tracking REDD+ start-up through the first three years of an interim start-up phase. Gabon is committed to moving forward.” - President Omar Bongo, Republic of Gabon.

“Colombia is committed to reduce its emissions from deforestation, as one of its ways to contribute to the global mitigation effort. We welcome initiatives such as this one that provides prompt-start finance that will allow developing countries and their communities to start work on the ground.” - Columbian Environment Minister, Carlos Costa

“Costa Rica has demonstrated that halting and reversing deforestation in tropical developing countries is possible, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks is feasible and cost-effective. Our country had 72 percent cover in 1950, it went down to 21 percent in 1987 and it has now recovered to 51 percent in 2005. Although this is an achievement, we aspire to do more. That is why we welcome the pledge for fast-start financing for REDD+ because it will allow us move forward as well as helping other developing

countries to become effective carbon sinks.” - Dr. Alvaro Umana, Ambassador for Climate Change and Chief Negotiator of Costa Rica.

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