

COP26: Over 100 countries pledge to curb deforestation by 2030; India bows out

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Countries worldwide, including India, continue their efforts to prevent the Earth's temperature from shooting up further. And after years of debate, many large emitters have opted to go for net-zero emissions or carbon neutrality in the coming decades.



The world's annual emissions have been sky-rocketing over the last few decades. In 2019 alone, the world released a whopping 36.44 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Removing such massive amounts of gases that create an imbalance in the Earth's atmosphere appears impossible with current technologies and requires the development of multiple cutting-edge solutions.

However, one natural option that has been removing excess carbon from the atmosphere for millennia are trees. Forests are natural carbon sequesters and can play a crucial role in slowing climate change. But over the last few decades, widespread deforestation is slowly taking away this self-defence tool from the Earth.

And finally, the world seems to be waking up to this reality! Many countries, led by the United Kingdom, have pledged to end deforestation by 2030 during the ongoing 26th Conference of Parties (COP26). The declaration is known as Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forest and Land Use.

The president of COP26, Alok Sharma, said: "Forests are one of our best defences against catastrophic climate change and essential to keeping 1.5°C alive. This historic commitment will help end the devastating effects of deforestation and support the developing countries and indigenous communities that are the guardians of so much of the world's forests."

COP26 declaration



Scientific approaches to tree planting and restricting ruthless chopping is the low-hanging fruit in the tedious battle against climate change. The Glasgow Leaders' Declaration comes at a time when the countries are scrambling to put an end to their share of carbon emissions. Curbing deforestation is extremely important in limiting emissions from land-use change.

Leaders of around 100 countries took the pledge on ending deforestation by 2030 to preserve the critical forest covers around the globe. Major countries like Canada, Russia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Indonesia, and Congo endorsed the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forest and Land Use.

Together, these countries support 85% of the world's forests, an area of over 13 million square miles, which absorb around one-third of global CO₂ released from burning fossil fuels each year.

However, India is among the few countries that have chosen not to sign this commitment. Despite hosting four biodiversity hotspots, India's hesitation to be a part of the declaration have raised eyebrows across the globe. Reportedly, India's concerns around the declaration's linkages with trade remained the major roadblock.

To execute the task to halt and reverse deforestation and land degradation, around \$19 billion (~Rs 1.4 lakh crores) has been pledged by public and private sources. Over 12 countries, including the UK, have promised to contribute \$12 billion between 2021 and 2025 for the interest of developing nations and to help slash deforestation activities. Moreover, \$7 billion is likely to be funded by more than 30 private companies.

Reportedly, several financial institutions have also come forward to support this cause by stopping investment in companies into deforestation-related activities.

Lost of forest cover



According to the World Resources Institute's (WRI) Global Forest Watch report in 2020, the world lost 258,000 sq km (100,000 sq miles) of forest, i.e., equivalent to an area of more than the United Kingdom. Moreover, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report has estimated that nearly 27 football fields of forest are lost every minute.

Surprisingly, the WRI has estimated that if we compare tropical deforestation to a country, it will account for the third-biggest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world—after China, the United States—replacing India.

Healthy forests are not just natural storehouses of carbon, but also play a vital role in executing other ecosystem services like filtering water, cooling the air, sustaining biodiversity, supporting human health, regulating rainfall and many other tasks. With the prevalence of anthropogenic logging activities, rotting or burning, these forests, in turn, release harmful greenhouse gases.

However, the signing of this declaration came with a mixed response among the expert community. This is not the first time the leaders have vowed to end deforestation. Earlier, in 2014 New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF) under the United Nations sustainability goals was also not fulfilled.

Moreover, experts assert the role of indigenous people has been missing while planning such pledges. Around the world, around 35% of protected natural areas are guarded by indigenous and local communities. Hence their involvement is very crucial in outlining conservation efforts of forests.

Moreover, the total amount deemed under this initiative is also considered fairly less. An estimated \$6 billion is required annually to restore millions of forest land, as per the Centre for International Forestry Research.

Overall, achieving this goal requires strict monitoring of deforestation activities around the globe, scientific afforestation, involvement of indigenous communities, and restoration of degraded ecosystems. So far, the world seems to be falling short on all fronts.

Source:<https://weather.com/en-IN/india/climate-change/news/2021-11-09-over-100-countries-pledge-to-curb-deforestation-by-2030>