

Deforestation and Climate Change Interparliamentary Conference Stockholm, 27-28 September

On Monday 28 September, Mr Anders Ygeman, Chair of the Committee on Environment and Agriculture of the Swedish Parliament, opened the conference by welcoming all the participants and stressing the importance and urgency of the subject. The conference, which started formally on 27 of September with a visit to Hammarby Sjöstad to look at an eco-friendly housing area in Stockholm City, had drawn over 65 participants from 25 countries.

The chosen theme for the conference was deforestation and climate change. Deforestation has been claimed to be responsible for about 20 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere. Instead of serving as a carbon sink, forests have become a carbon source. The question of how to bring the issues of deforestation and forest degradation into the post-2012 climate agreement will be one of the key issues at the COP15 conference in Copenhagen in December this year¹.

Following the welcoming address, the conference continued with a presentation of the presidency perspective on the topic by Mr Erik Hammarskjöld, the Swedish Government's Environmental Ambassador, in which he emphasised that the issue of deforestation was a key issue for COP15. He also stated that halting deforestation and forest degradation would be the most cost-effective way to reduce emissions. However, many questions would have to be resolved in order to reach an agreement in Copenhagen, and he described the process as slow. In order to facilitate the process, the Swedish Presidency had in particular worked on confidence building. Mr Pierre Schellekens, Head of the Commission Representation in Sweden, then gave Commission's view on deforestation with a view to Copenhagen, stating that the Commission clearly wanted to see the issue of deforestation and forest degradation as part of an agreement and was ready to give financial assistance on certain conditions. He also stressed the fact that a solution to deforestation and forest degradation would be equally important from the point of view of biodiversity. Even though the crux of the matter would be to get the right financial incentives to avoid deforestation, success would be difficult without national strategies and capacities to monitor and implement those strategies in the countries concerned. In the discussion that followed, several speakers brought up the importance of the close link to biodiversity, the issue of desertification, the link with agriculture and technological transfer as well as the importance of a strong EU leadership.

On the topic of deforestation and climate mitigation, Dr Göran Nilsson Axberg from the Stockholm Environment Institute gave a presentation outlining some of the problems with deforestation, the reasons for it and what the solutions could include. He emphasised the need to introduce sustainable forest management and make it a better alternative with regard to land use than deforestation. His experience from Vietnam showed that a combination of measures, including a shift of land to families, large reforestation programmes and forest protection contracts with local people, had increased the forest land. Dr Catherine Potvin, Professor at McGill University in Canada, described the developments from RED (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation) to REDD+ (including the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries) and

¹ For further reading, please see background information for the conference *Deforestation and forest degradation – the REDD initiative*

the possibilities and problems connected with this initiative. She also shared her experience from working on forest projects in Panama and warned about the danger of demanding too much from developing countries with regard to monitoring and measurements. She also stressed that when trying to find solutions to deforestation it would be important to look at issues such as alternative ways of providing a livelihood for local populations (with a special emphasis on a regular cash flow). At the end of the morning session, a lively discussion brought up questions such as illegal logging, corruption, forestry adaptation, financing of the REDD initiative and the need for a culture shift in the western world towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

In the afternoon, Ambassador Hans Brattskar, Director of the Norwegian Government's International Climate and Forest Initiative, presented an options assessment report on how to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. He outlined how a system with financial incentives given to countries in different phases would make it possible to include a broad spectrum of countries and encourage developments with a view to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. The last speaker, Mr Peter Westman, Conservation Director at the World Wildlife Fund in Sweden, also pointed out that we have a lot to win in halting deforestation, not only with regard to biodiversity, but also with regard to cultural heritage. He believed in a national-level approach to REDD, with financial incentives given to countries in different phases and stressed the importance of encouraging changes in policies and measures at national level. After a discussion, where issues such as the possibility of using bilateral agreements, funding and safeguards for biodiversity were raised, Mr Claes Västerteg, Deputy Chair of the Swedish Parliament's Committee on Environment and Agriculture, closed the conference by thanking all the participants and in particular the speakers at the conference. He pointed out that the Swedish Presidency would do everything it could to facilitate an agreement in Copenhagen, but stressed the need to work together within the EU, especially in order to get other countries on board in the fight against climate change.