

Halting the destruction of rainforests acknowledged as critical to slowing climate change, say consumers

People have a good understanding of the link between the destruction of the rainforests and climate change, but are looking for solutions and leadership from governments, according to a new survey commissioned by The Prince's Rainforests Project (PRP).

The key findings of an independent market research programme carried out by Lippincott in Spring 2008 across the UK, US, France and Germany are:

- **Consumers understand the extent of the effect that deforestation has on climate change** - an average of 56% of people across all countries are aware that it contributes more to greenhouse gas emissions than the entire global transport sector
- **Preserving the rainforests is seen as second only to switching to renewable energy** as having the greatest practical potential in reducing the rate of climate change
- **Two thirds (67%) believe that governments have a key role in developing solutions** to help address the problem of climate change

A summary of the research findings are published on the PRP website, which is newly launched today on World Environment Day at www.princesrainforestsproject.org. The website also provides the full details of PRP's aims and objectives to identify and develop practical solutions to deforestation and informs people about how they can show their support for this initiative. The PRP was set up by The Prince of Wales in 2007 to find solutions to the problem of tropical deforestation.

The Prince of Wales commented: "I was much encouraged by the research that my Project is publishing today which shows an astonishing level of public consensus in the developed world that tropical rainforest destruction must be stopped if we are serious about reducing the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere."

Lord Stern, author of the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change commissioned by the UK Government commented: "With new evidence of increased CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere and the reduction in our oceans' ability to absorb it, the remaining rainforests play an ever more critical role in the fight against climate change. It is vital to the future of humanity that we conserve what is left and it is encouraging that this research indicates that this message is understood."

The PRP, led by a Steering Group comprising sixteen of the world's largest companies and leading experts such as Lord Stern, plans to use the period leading up to the UNFCCC at Copenhagen in December 2009 to find solutions to the problem of tropical deforestation. A priority will be to find financial models to value the tropical rainforests in order to establish how they can become worth more alive than dead.

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If you're interested in finding out more about the PRP and the issue of deforestation, or to register your support, please log-on to: www.princesrainforestsproject.org

Notes to the Editor:

About the PRP

The PRP consists of a team of 20 working out of St. James's Palace who intend to leverage the convening power of The Prince of Wales to work with bodies ranging from Governments, international business and NGOs to the rainforest nations themselves and the people who depend on these forests for their livelihoods.

While some rainforest nations are already working to reduce deforestation, developing countries cannot solve the problems alone as it is the demand from the developed world for products such as palm oil, beef and soya, which often drive deforestation. PRP intends to act as a bridge to facilitate dialogue between all interests and to identify and develop practical solutions to deforestation in the run up to the critical UNFCCC meeting in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Already this year, an historic private meeting was hosted by HRH at St James's Palace at the end of April in which senior Brazilians from government, business, science and the NGO community were matched with experts from around the world to look at deforestation solutions for the Amazonia region.

PRP is being assisted by a Steering Group comprising business leaders from Barclays, BSkyB, Climate Exchange Plc, Deutsche Bank, DLA Piper, Finsbury, Goldman Sachs, KPMG, McDonald's, Man Group plc, Morgan Stanley, Rio Tinto, Shell, Sun Media Group and Virgin Group amongst others.

PRP is also being advised by key figures from the climate change agenda: Kristalina Georgieva (Vice-President, World Bank), Kevin Conrad (Executive Director, Coalition for Rainforest Nations), Barry Gardiner MP, Reijo Kempinen (Head of the European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom), Steve Howard (Chief Executive, The Climate Group), Hylton Murray-Philipson (Global Canopy Programme), Andrew W Mitchell (Global Canopy Programme) and Tony Juniper (Friends of the Earth).

Lippincott market research

The Prince's Rainforests Project undertook market research with Lippincott so it could better understand the appetite for action in preserving the world's rainforests and also current consumer understanding of the issue. From the end of March 2008 to early April 2008 Lippincott interviewed a nationally representative sample of 4,000 people in the UK, US, Germany and France (1,000 participants each). The findings clearly showed the need to move on the climate change debate, as more than half the people who took part recognised that deforestation is contributing more to greenhouse gas emissions than the whole transport sector. PRP and other environmental charities have worked very hard to educate consumers on the issues of deforestation and the global effects on climate change, now we need to establish and provide solutions to the problem.

This research follows previous research into people's attitudes to climate change by Lippincott on behalf of, and published by, The Climate Group, The World Business Council for Sustainable Development and HSBC (Climate Confidence Index).

About Rainforests

Where and what are they?

Tropical rainforests lie at the heart of the world, straddling the equator in a green belt. They occupy around 5% of the Earth's land surface, an area the size of Australia. The tropical rainforests are home to over half the world's species of plants and animals. Many millions of the world's poorest people depend on these forests for their livelihoods. Tropical rainforests are present in 40 countries with over a half of the remaining coverage in Brazil.

What do they do?

The world's tropical rainforests act as the lungs of the Earth; regulating our climate, storing vast amounts of carbon, conserving soil and water and generating rainfall. The Amazon forests alone provide storage for over half the Earth's freshwater, releasing 20 billion tonnes of water into the atmosphere every day. Without rainforests continually recycling the world's water, droughts, famine and disease would become more widespread.

The rainforests' enormous biodiversity is only beginning to be understood as are their benefits to medicine – 25% of known medicines originate from them.

What's happening to them?

In the past 50 years over a third of the world's rainforests have been felled and burned and the rate of destruction is increasing.

In many parts of the world they are being cleared for agriculture, pasture, logging or mining, or simply to provide wood fuel for burgeoning populations. Increasingly deforestation is enterprise-driven rather than the result of subsistence agriculture – a function of growing global demand for soya, palm oil, beef and timber. The problem is exacerbated by our growing demand for biofuels. At the current rate of deforestation tropical rainforests will be largely exhausted by mid-century.

Why does it matter?

Since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference in Bali in December 2007, rainforest protection has been placed firmly on the international climate change agenda.

The scale of the problem is huge: every day an area of rainforest the size of Greater London is destroyed. When the rainforests are cut down and burnt the huge amount of carbon they store is released into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. The 2006 Stern Report estimated that the share of CO₂ emissions caused by deforestation is larger than that contributed by the entire global transportation sector and is second only to energy generation. New technologies to slow climate change are emerging but are unlikely to make a significant contribution in the short to medium term. In addition to being vitally important in its own right, stopping deforestation buys us valuable time to allow these technologies to be developed.