

## **Protecting Forests and as way of Slowing down Climate Change. Bali 2007**

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**REDD (reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) is shaping up to be a major topic at the UN Conference on Climate Change here in Cancun. I wrote the article below at the Bali COP in 2007. At that stage I had a particular interest in REDD as I explain in the article. Apart from the carbon sequestration dimension of REDD, I also saw in it a major potential for reforesting countries such as the Philippines which had been denuded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I encouraged Catholic Development Agencies such as Caritas Internationalis, CAFOD and Trocaire to get involved in REDD. Since Bali I have been following other areas involved in the Convention, such as Adaptation. But this year REDD is back again. I am going to leave the 2007 article intact but will add a sequel, also in bold print at the end.**

### **Bali 2007**

My interest in ecology stems for my experience of working with the T'boli people in South Cotabato from 1980 to 1992. Within a few months of arriving in Lake Sebu, where the T'bolis live, I was convinced that protecting what remained of the tropical forest in the area was vital for the well being of the T'boli and also the settlers who lived in the lowlands.

Tropical deforestation has taken a huge toll on the Philippines. When the Spaniards left the Philippines at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century almost 75% of the tropical forests were still intact. The onslaught on the forests began in earnest after World War II. Companies (**initially, Foreign companies**

**U.S. Japanese, Korean with connections with Filipino elite families)** were given permission to clear-cut large tracts of forests. **Legal commitments to reforest were seldom honoured, without any sanctions against the company or its owners.** The tribal peoples, who lived in the areas, were never asked for permission to destroy their habitats, which they had managed for hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of years. A few people made enormous fortunes, while the majority of the Filipinos, **especially Tribal Filipinos** and the environment suffered. Today, less than 10% of the Philippines is covered with tropical forests. Sustainable agriculture in a tropical archipelago like the Philippines demands about 50% forest cover. Without it, soil erosion will increase dramatically and expensive irrigation systems will become useless, because the forests will not secrete water slowly into the rivers to sustain the flow during the dry season. **(Extreme weather associated with climate change will worsen all these outcomes in the coming years).**

The legacy of that plunder is now evident every time a typhoon causes flooding, massive landslides and terrible loss of life, especially among the poor. Filipinos could have managed their forests in a sustainable way and, in doing so, have secured long-term employment for hundreds of thousands of Filipino families.

What happened in the Philippines is mirrored world wide. Between 2000 and 2005 tropical forests disappeared at approximately 10.4 million hectares each year. These forests contain about 70% of the world's biodiversity, and, about 60 million people, many of who are among the poorest of the poor on the planet.

A last minute reprieve for tropical forests may emerge here in discussions around the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The IPCC scientists reckon that 20% of greenhouse emissions globally currently come from forest destruction. So, stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere at safe levels requires significant reduction in the current rate of deforestation.

One initiative which is being pursued here in Bali is called REDD. The initials stand for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation. Apart of sequestering carbon, the REDD initiative has a number of priorities. It aims at preserving forests which contain significant levels of biodiversity, or are important for what is now called, ecosystems services (I find this term, which attempts to put a money value on everything, particularly inappropriate when referring to the living world. **But it is now widely used even by some people such as Dr. Edward O Wilson, formerly of Harvard University, who has so much through his research and writings to sensitize people to the overwhelming importance of protecting biodiversity** ). These include water regulation, flood control and the protection of local species.

If verifiable and credible emission reductions can be generated, then the carbon markets could provide some revenue for REDD initiatives. According to Urip Hudiono writing for *The Jakarta Post* November 30<sup>th</sup> , Indonesia could net US\$2 billion in potential annual revenues from preserving the country's forests and offering them as a carbon dioxide sink on the global carbon market.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Urip Hudiono, "Indonesia could net US\$2 billion from forest conservation", *The Jakarta Post*, November 30, 2007, page 13.

**CANCUN 2010.** (I have taken a fairly jaundiced view of carbon markets from the very beginning. Market-based mechanisms to promote climate change were introduced into the Kyoto Protocol process by the U.S. in 1997. At that time, there was a feeling among elites across the globe that Markets, if properly structured, could do anything, and were much better instruments for promoting policies, than governmental regulations. Light touch regulation is in vogue! Viewed from the perspective of 2010, we all know that light touch regulation was responsible for the collapse of the financial markets in 2008.

On my way to Cancun I picked up the current edition of *The New Yorker*, (November 29, 2010). In 10 page article entitled, “WHAT GOOD IS WALL STREET? John Cassidy wrote a searing critique of markets. One of his main conclusions is that “much of what investment bankers do is socially worthless.” The same critique applies to the carbon market which is growing, except that almost all it does is ecologically worthless. In fact it is worse, because it fuels an acquisitive drive and takes attention away from real, concrete efforts which will be necessary to reduce emissions. I remember attending a lecture at Nairobi (2006) which was sponsored by an international financial services company. Afterwards a carbon trader approached me and encouraged me invest in the carbon market if I wanted to get a real good return on my money.

**Bali 2007.**

If a significant REDD initiative is to succeed, the financial benefits must be, at least, on a par with the current economic incentives which are

driving deforestation at unprecedented rates. Any REDD initiative must therefore address the needs of rural forest dwellers and indigenous people. In my own experience ownership is a crucial issue. When a community owns the land there is a huge incentive to protect it. It is unrealistic to expect people to protect a forest for the benefit of, either people who live downstream or the global population, unless they have some level of ownership of the forest. On a national level, if countries such as the Philippines are expected to stop deforestation and thus reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they will require additional financial support to achieve such goals.

Many of the NGOs here at Bali argue that REDD should have a stand alone fund, outside bodies such as the World Bank. They are also worried that the new money might be diverting from existing aid flows such as a country's Official Development Assistance (ODA) programme.

REDD could deliver multiple benefits in the area of climate change, protecting biodiversity and securing a sustainable agricultural base for many countries, where food security is becoming a major issue. I am cautiously optimistic that the ground-work for a REDDs initiative could be negotiated here in Bali.

## **CANCUN 2010**

**Some of those issues discussed above are still being debated in Cancun. The Climate Action Network (CAN) an umbrella group for many environment, and development organizations of civil society, has taken a position on REDD at the beginning of the Cancun Conference. For CAN the primary goal of REDD must be to reduce emissions, not to contribute to a carbon market, which can easily**

**take on a life of its own and do little to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. CAN wants all Parties in any agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and the degradation of natural forests in developing countries with the objective of stopping deforestation completely by 2020.**

**Their second objective is that all Parties should collectively aim to conserve existing natural and modified natural forests by 2020. This is also in line with the recently concluded Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) in Nagoya, Japan. More and more people are seeing that issues around climate change, water and biodiversity are all inter-linked.**

**CAN recognizes that these goals are contingent upon adequate, predictable and sustained finance provided in a transparent manner. Such finance could be in terms of quantified commitment. CAN points to a number of independent studies which indicate that the amount of money needed to halve emissions by 2020 would be in the region between, \$15 and \$35 billion by 2020.**

**CAN believes that some funding must be used to train people and build their capacity to manage their forests in a sustainable way. From my own experience of reforestation in Lake Sebu, I know how important capacity building is for the success of a project.**

**The CAN position is also sensitive to both social and cultural factors involved in any reforestation project. As I said in my 2007 article, my own experience is that when people enjoy ownership of a project it is much more likely to be a success in the medium and long-term.**

**The land tenure rights of Indigenous People must be given priority under REDD. These include their rights to land, food sovereignty, biodiversity, cultural practices and their traditional way of life. As it is, most indigenous people are under tremendous cultural and financial pressure in the contemporary world. Tribal people and their languages are also facing extinction. This is a great impoverishment for humankind.**

**As I know from experience in the Philippines, it is important that structures be put in place to avoid elite groups in a country capturing the benefits of REDD. It was these elites (politicians and military) who benefitted from the destruction of the forests in the first instance.**

**CAN is also aware that the destruction of tropical forests is not just an issue for countries of the South. Someone in the North buys the lumber, so CAN is calling on all Parties to address the pressures which drive deforestation and degradation in the South, rather than leaving all the responsibility with Southern countries.**

**On the technical side CAN is suggesting that Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice (SABTA) be asked to give advice on the technical issues so that decisions on REDD can be taken next year in South Africa.**

**The CAN group tracking REDD reported to the daily meeting on October 30<sup>th</sup> 2010, that serious negotiations have not started on REDD issues. I will keep you posted.**

**Rich countries often speak about corruption and the need for good governance in developing countries. CAN is concerned about governance issues and believes that this must be met by the independent and verifiable monitoring of REDD. The sticking point here for many countries of the South is that other interests, such as the World Bank and the General Environment Fund (GEF), would like to play a managing role in disbursing the funds. This is not acceptable to many countries in the South because of their experience of being saddled with horrendous Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s devised by the World Bank/IMF in order to pay off their debts to First World financial institutions and countries. The political economist Susan George pointed out in her book *Debt Boomerang* that, in the period from 1980s till 1992, \$420 billion were transferred from poor countries to rich counties by external debt payments alone! A classic case of the poor subsidizing the rich!!!**

**In my book, *Greening the Church* (1995), I give a number of examples of how SAPs hastened the destruction of tropical forests in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s. Critics of the World Bank point out that it still spends more money funding fossil fuel energy projects in the South and emerging economies than it does on renewable energy. Most Southern countries want the financing of REDD to come under the COP itself, rather than the GEF.**

**It is always good to hear what the other side is saying so I visited the GEF has a stand at the Conference Centre. One of their pamphlets *The GEF incentive Mechanism for Forests: A New REDD+***



***Multilateral Finance Program* touts GEF's competence in financing Sustainable Forest Management. It claims that, since its inception in 1991, the GEF has financed over 300 projects and programmes focusing on forest conservation and management in developing countries. The total GEF allocation to forest initiatives during that period amounted to more than \$1.6 billion. It also helped leverage \$5 billion from other sources. While the amount appear to be significant it is paltry in terms of what needs to happen in the near future if tropical forests are to protected and expanded.**

**MORE ANON AS THE REDD DEBATE HEATS UP**

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