

Forum: Environment Commission II

Issue: Addressing the burning of forests in South East Asia

Student Officer: Ho Gun Kim

Position: Chair of Environment Commission II

Introduction

Especially in recent days, burning of forests is one of the most threatening environmental disasters. There are two major kinds of forest fires: natural ones and human-caused ones. Most of human-caused fires are caused by unintended ignition, uncontrolled land clearing, and mismanaged agricultural methods such as the slash-and-burn farming. Forest fire is intertwined with other numerous environmental disasters; therefore, approaches to protect and preserve forests are necessary, especially for the ones in South East Asia. For example, deforestation of the extinction of various fauna and flora inhabiting in South East Asian forests has been accelerated by 30% along with deforestation.

Even though 1,112,000 square miles of forest cover South East Asia, it is losing its forest in the fastest pace among the equatorial region due to forest fires. Some experts predict that substantial portion of South East Asian will be destroyed through the next decade. Intermittent forest fires struck numerous South Eastern Asian territories, such as Indonesia or Malaysia, burning forests, inhabiting animals, and farms.

Addressing the South East Asian forest fire should not stop on the losses, but on its recovery and sustainable development. If the support for resource conservation and incentives for sustainable production practices by multiple organization bodies are given to the residents, deforestation may be slowed down.

Definition of Key Terms

Slash-and-burn method

An agricultural practice of clearing forests through cutting or burning; done in order to expand farming territory.

El Niño

An environmental phenomenon that causes irregular and complex climatic changes through atypical currents of warm water, especially in December.

Sustainable development

An approach that aspires to satisfy human needs within the limit that environmental resources may be preserved for the future.

General Overview

Natural Forest Fires

Natural forest fires occur when an ignition source, such as the sun is brought into contact with dry materials, such as wood and shrubs. There are multiple types of natural forest fires: ground, crawling or surface, ladder, and canopy fires. These all differentiate in the positioning and the susceptibility of burning, with ground fires being the most usual and easiest to be ignited, to canopy fires which have to have a combination of ground, crawling, and ladder fires in order to ignite. Weather also plays a deciding role, as weather effects such as El Niño or drought increase the chance of wildfires being started.

Industrialization

As mentioned above, forest fires may be caused through human interference, often represented through human ignition and excessive logging. During September and October of 1991, multiple forest fires burnt 200 square miles of Indonesian forest. World Resources Institute estimated that 12.5% of Indonesian tropical forests would be destroyed in the next ten years if the situation continues. Excessive logging caused this series of fire; the debris of logging made the forests vulnerable to fire.

Environmental Problems

Gas emissions

Deforestation is one of the greatest contributors for greenhouse gas emissions, occupying 26-35% along with agriculture. This situation, however, issue of carbon cap may improve as residents effectively manage rain forests, its adjacent lands, and natural resource management through help of NGOs.

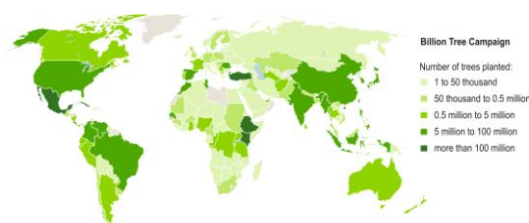
Endangered species

Not only do wildfires damage trees and plants, but also put endangered animals into an even harder position. Animals such as the giant panda, the Bonobo, and the orangutan rely on plants that are often burned by wildfires. This would also cause the feeding patterns of endangered species to stray into human populated areas, such as the case of the lions of the

African, the prairie dogs of the Midwestern United States, and the Asian elephants of South East Asia. Not only does this raises the chance of the animal being killed, but also raises the chance of the human population getting killed by these animals.

Possible Solutions

Support for South East Asian forest fires can be classified into several categories: support of technology, emergency responses, combating fire capacities, and global collaboration. For example, United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) successfully set up its relief coordination branch along with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1994. UNEP has been carrying out projects, such as the Billion Tree Campaign. Other UN-affiliated NGOs include: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). FAO primarily aids to establish fire management capabilities and relieves victim nations of lost properties and natural resources, and pollution.



Caption #1: An update of UNEP Billion Tree Campaign (2008)

Timeline of Events

| Date | Description of event |
|-------------------|---|
| Aug-Nov, 1997 | Several Indonesian regions suffered from forest fires |
| September 8, 2000 | United Nations Millennium Declaration announced |
| December 20, 2000 | A/RES/55/198 announced from the General Assembly |

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- International institutional arrangements related to environment and development (**A/RES/53/186**)
- United Nations Millennium Declaration, 8 September 2000 (**A/RES/55/2**)
- Enhancing complementarities among international instruments related to environment and sustainable development, 20 December 2000 (**A/RES/55/198**)

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