

BRIEFING NOTE: SMOKE ON WATER: COUNTERING GLOBAL THREATS FROM PEATLAND LOSS AND DEGRADATION: 15 NOVEMBER 2017

This event convened on 15 November 2017, in Bonn, Germany, on the sidelines of the 23rd session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 23) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Organized by UN Environment, the event launched the rapid response assessment ‘Smoke on Water – Countering Global Threats from Peatland Loss and Degradation’ and heard case studies from Indonesia, the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

OPENING

Tim Christophersen, UN Environment, moderated the event. Erik Solheim, Executive Director, UN Environment, introduced the session, explaining that peatlands are the main historical carbon stock, yet they have only recently come into the spotlight. He noted that scientists recently discovered the world’s largest tropical peatland in the Congo Basin, which holds the equivalent carbon storage of three years of global emissions. He acknowledged the Global Peatlands Initiative, a partnership between the Governments of Indonesia, the Republic of the Congo, DRC and Peru, and called on the private sector to invest in peatland conservation and restoration.

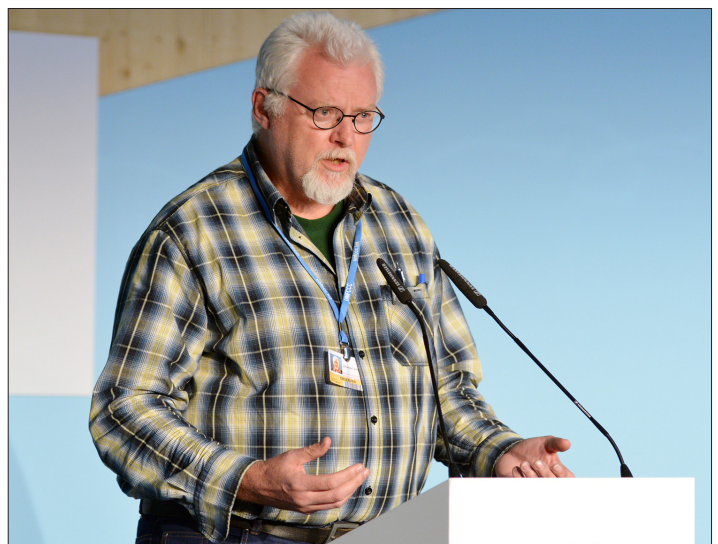


Tim Christophersen, UN Environment, said that it was more cost-effective to conserve peatlands intact than to restore them.

Hans Joosten, Greifswald Mire Centre, underscored the importance of peatlands in climate, water and biodiversity, and in providing livelihood opportunities. He warned against damaging peatlands, noting they are rich in organic material, and their destruction would result in land subsidence.



Erik Solheim, Executive Director, UN Environment, said that peatlands are the main historical carbon stock.



Hans Joosten, Greifswald Mire Centre, urged to “keep peatlands wet.”



L–R: **Tim Christophersen**, UN Environment; **Arlette Soudan-Nonault**, Minister of Tourism and Sustainable Development, Republic of the Congo; **Siti Nurbaya Bakar**, Minister of Environment and Forestry, Indonesia; and **Amy Ambatobe Nyongolo**, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, DRC

PANEL DISCUSSION

Siti Nurbaya Bakar, Minister of Environment and Forestry, Indonesia, underscored that good global peatland governance will strengthen economic, social and ecosystem resilience. She noted the experience of peatland conservation in her country, highlighting government regulation and enforcement, as well as restoration of two million hectares of peatland that was destroyed by a fire in 2015. She called for stakeholder involvement to conserve peatlands and other ecosystems.

Amy Ambatobe Nyongolo, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, DRC, explained that the existence of peatlands was unknown in his country until a year ago when the discovery was made in the Congo Basin. He referred to this discovery as “an important opportunity” for dialogue and to deepen understanding of the role of peatlands in climate. He referred to finance as the “main challenge” for peatland conservation in his country, as petroleum is found within many peatland sites and compensation would be necessary to make up for economic loss.

Arlette Soudan-Nonault, Minister of Tourism and Environment, Republic of the Congo, explained that her country is one of the top ten oil producing nations, and, as in the DRC, peatland conservation would require economic compensation. She underscored the importance of peatland conservation, not only for their role as carbon sinks, but also for providing livelihood opportunities to indigenous peoples in her country.

Bernd Hofer, Chair, International Peatland Society, noted that his organization has over 4,000 members around the world, promoting and disseminating knowledge exchange on peatlands. He highlighted a monitoring system established for the tropical peatland sector.

During the ensuing discussion, panelists addressed examples of government incentives to generate the sustainable production of palm oil.

CLOSING

During the closing, Christophersen reminded panelists that their countries have the support of the international community.



Participants listen to panelists discuss the importance of peatland preservation.