

# Deforestation conference to turn plans to action

March 11 2010, By ELAINE GANLEY , Associated Press Writer

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French President Nicolas Sarkozy, right, takes leave of Armenia President Serge Sarkissian, following their working lunch at the Elysee Palace in Paris, Wednesday March 10, 2010. (AP Photo/Remy de la Mauviniere)

(AP) -- French President Nicolas Sarkozy will open a daylong conference Thursday of some 40 nations to start turning plans into action to save the world's forests and help rein in the noxious gases blamed for climate change.

Ministers from countries of the Amazon and Congo river basins and Indonesia - whose massive forests, most at risk, are at the heart of efforts to end [deforestation](#) - were among those attending the one-day conference. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for May in Oslo, Norway.

"The [forest](#) in danger. Massive planet-wide destruction continues," France's influential environment minister Jean-Louis Borloo said to reporters Wednesday ahead of the conference.

The conference, with closed-door working groups, is looking to translate measures adopted at the U.N. [climate summit](#) in Copenhagen in December into concrete mechanisms - and funds.

World Bank representatives and lending nations were also attending the meeting.

To simply inventory the forests - counting the fauna and flora - is a necessary but hugely expensive "mammoth project," said Henri Djombo, the Republic of Congo's sustainable development and environment minister.

Deforestation, which involves the burning of trees to clear land and the natural rotting of trees, is thought to account for up to 20 percent of carbon dioxide sent into the atmosphere - as much as that emitted by all the world's cars, trucks, trains, planes and ships combined. Reducing deforestation is one of the most effective ways to reduce the emissions responsible for climate change.

Indonesia and Brazil are the world's third- and fourth-largest carbon emitters, after China and the United States. Deforestation for logging, growing crops or making room for cattle grazing, are the prime causes.

A plan to help protect [tropical forests](#) by having rich nations pay the countries concerned fell apart in Copenhagen, though the forest program, known as REDD - for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation - survived.

A portion of the \$30 billion that world leaders agreed to spend over the

next three years to help poor nations could go toward the forest program. World leaders agreed to spend a total of \$100 billion by 2020.

Finding mechanisms to disburse those funds quickly and fairly is among the tasks at the conference.

Djombo and two other African ministers present with Borloo on Wednesday were unanimous that not enough money has been committed to the fight against deforestation - and they said the money earmarked so far should be funneled quickly to the relevant countries.

They emphasized that the task at hand is enormous, and long-term. Forest management must become participative, putting people who live off the forest at the heart of the program, the ministers said.

Gabon's environment minister, Martin Mabala, said the world and indigenous populations need to view the forest differently. For example, he said the term "wood cutter" should be replaced by the term "forest manager."

"Forests are a planetary asset and no longer the concern of individual countries," Mabala said. "This is the business of all humanity."

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