

Germany, Norway give \$1.5B to fight deforestation

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European Union Commissioner for Climate Action Connie Hedegaard gestures while talking to the media during a press conference at the EU Commission headquarter in Brussels, Wednesday May 26, 2010. The European Commission presented this Wednesday an analysis of the costs, benefits and options for moving beyond the EU's greenhouse gas reduction target for 2020 from 20 percent below 1990 levels to 30 percent once the conditions are met. (AP Photo/Thierry Charlier)

(AP) -- Germany and Norway will pledge \$1.5 billion to fight deforestation, blamed for releasing some of the carbon dioxide contributing to global warming, Norway's prime minister said Wednesday on the eve of a conference in Oslo.

The contributions give a boost to talks starting Thursday on creating a single international agency for monitoring and financing efforts to help

poor nations protect their forests and [biological diversity](#).

The program - called REDD Plus, for Reducing Emissions from [Deforestation](#) and Degradation - was one of the few plans agreed on during the disappointing climate talks in December in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Germany's pledge of \$500 million brings REDD Plus funding so far to \$4 billion, with France, Norway and four other countries having previously committed \$3.5 billion, Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg said. Thursday's conference is meant to work out the final details of the program.

Norway also said it would give an additional \$1 billion to help Indonesia fight deforestation there. Due to deforestation from logging, crop-growing and [cattle](#) grazing, Indonesia and Brazil have become the world's third- and fourth-largest carbon emitters, after China and the U.S.

While Norway's pledge to Indonesia is not part of the REDD Plus program, it will likely encourage delegates to move the program forward at Thursday's conference, said Mark Tercek, the head of U.S. conservation group the Nature Conservancy who was also attending the Oslo conference.

There is no official target for REDD Plus funding, but Brazilian Environment Minister Carlos Minc said at a March meeting on REDD that he hoped the Oslo conference would generate \$6 billion.

Deforestation - the burning of woodlands or the rotting of felled trees - is thought to account for up to 20 percent of [carbon-dioxide](#) released into the atmosphere - as much as that emitted by all the world's cars, trucks, trains, planes and ships combined.

There are many funding programs in the works, and individual countries also have their own plans to fight deforestation and educate local populations who live off forests - estimated at more than 1 billion worldwide - to do so in a sustainable way.

In many cases, this entails retraining people whose livelihoods are linked to the forest, or its destruction.

Stoltenberg said Norway's agreement with Indonesia will help finance an independent system of monitoring and quantifying greenhouse gas emissions tied to deforestation.

The system will allow Norway to pay Indonesia a fixed sum per ton of CO₂ emissions reduced due to rain [forest](#) preservation, he said, adding that the pay-per-result system encourages accountability.

Norway has had a similar agreement with Brazil since the mid-1990s, and said it planned to work with Mexico also to protect forests in developing countries.

Meanwhile, European governments are looking at other ways to cut greenhouse gas emissions, though a crisis of confidence over the euro and soaring debts has led the European Union to hold off on demanding major action from EU governments.

The economic slowdown has meant, however, that cutting emissions is now possible at a lower cost than estimated two years ago, the European Commission said Wednesday.

The EU pledged in 2008 to reduce its emissions by 20 percent from 1990 levels - and by 30 percent if the United States and others did so, too. At the time, that 20-percent cut had been forecast to cost euro70 billion (\$86 billion) a year by 2020.

Today it would cost euro48 billion a year, as the recession has cut demand and triggered more energy savings, said Connie Hedegaard, the EU commissioner for climate matters. A 30-percent cut would cost an annual euro81 billion by 2020 - or euro11 billion more a year, she said.

But she said now was not the time to push the 27 EU governments into more climate change spending, with low growth prospects and rocketing debt in many EU nations causing stocks to slide and the euro to fall to a four-year low.

"Whether to increase our reduction target for 2020 from 20 percent to 30 percent is a political decision for the EU leaders," Hedegaard said. "The decision is not for now, but I hope our analysis will inspire the debate."

There are several procedural meetings scheduled before the next major U.N. climate conference in December in Cancun, Mexico, where negotiators will work toward deciding how to cut emissions globally and provide aid to help poor nations cope with the affects of climate change.

Greenpeace urged EU governments Wednesday to quickly move to deeper emission cuts, saying Hedegaard's findings debunk industry claims that ambitious targets cut jobs and output.

"This should be a first step toward at least 40 percent emission cuts for all industrialized countries under a global climate agreement," the international environmental group said in a statement.

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