

# Prince Charles wages 'green' war to protect rain forests

Britain's Prince Charles unveiled an awareness campaign Tuesday to save rain forests as a way to absorb carbon dioxide and combat global warming.

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He gave USA TODAY's Traci Watson exclusive written answers to questions about the forests and his foray into social media tools, such as MySpace, to promote his cause. Here are his answers, in full:

Q: Fossil fuels are largely to blame for the global-warming problem, so why are your climate change efforts focused on saving the rain forest?

A: The reason is very simple. While you are quite right that fossil fuels are largely the cause of global warming, there is no way, I am afraid, that we can wean ourselves off them in time to arrest catastrophic climate change. Think of this. We have, according to the experts, less than 100 months to tackle climate change. That is nothing. So we need to buy ourselves time so that we can build the low-carbon economies that are central to our very survival and the best way we can do that is to stop deforestation, because in doing so we can have an immediate effect on global emissions. Did you know that the destruction and burning of the tropical rain forests — and we are losing the equivalent of Central Park every half-hour — emits more CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere than the entire global transport sector?

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At the same time, the rain forests provide the rainfall that helps crops grow around the world as well as cleaning the air that we breathe and absorbing carbon on a vast scale. They are also the repository of a vast array of biodiversity, without which humanity cannot survive on this planet. Quite simply, they are a massive global utility helping to sustain life as we know it. If we lose the rain forests, and the essential ecosystem services they provide to the planet, then the economic costs we will all face — not just those who live in the rain forest nations — will be far, far greater than anything we are seeing today.

We must also not forget that some 1.4 billion of the poorest people in the world depend for their livelihoods upon the rain forests, so financial support to maintain the forests is essential to help these vulnerable communities and to establish better-integrated rural development projects.

And, apart from anything else, since the developed half of the world has helped, albeit unwittingly, to bring about the problem in the first place, not only by emitting vast quantities of carbon into the atmosphere, but also by creating the demand for soya, palm oil and timber which is causing the rain forests to be destroyed so rapidly, it surely has to be fair that it should now help to pay for the vital services provided by the rain forests. After all, we pay for our water, gas and electricity — so now we need to see the rain forests as a giant global utility where the trees are infinitely more valuable alive than dead. At present it's the

other way 'round. And we must never forget that it is the health and stability of the global environment that sustains our economy and not the other way 'round.

Q: Precisely who or what convinced you of the urgency of saving forests to help stave off climate change? And when?

A: I have been very lucky in my life to visit a number of rain forests. I think my first was over 40 years ago in Papua New Guinea. I had known for many years that they were severely threatened, but it was about two years ago, having listened to the urgent pleas of deeply concerned experts, that I felt I had to do all in my power to help find some kind of solution to this incredibly complex issue before it was all too late, and that is when I decided to set up my Prince's Rainforests Project. This was on a "nothing ventured, nothing gained" basis and in the interests of all our grandchildren. I also felt that after spending some 24 years of my life working with the private sector to encourage corporate social and environmental responsibility and to build partnerships between the private, public and NGO sectors (or non-governmental organizations), I could perhaps use this experience to build an even bigger partnership to tackle this issue before it is all too late.

Q: In March, you called on developed nations to make emergency payments to rain forest nations in exchange for halting the destruction of the rain forests. What impact will the recession have on such a program?

A: What we have done is to consult as widely as possible over the past 18 months in order to see whether my Rainforests Project team could come up with an innovative solution to an immensely complicated, but urgent, problem. Encouragingly, proposals are beginning to emerge as to how the \$10 billion to \$15 billion dollars needed to make a significant impact might be raised. One of the proposals being considered is my project's own idea for the issuing of new, government-backed rain forest bonds, which would raise money to support sustainable forms of economic development that do not involve destroying the rain forests. The bonds would be offered to the investment community and could provide companies in, for example, the pensions and insurance sectors with guaranteed returns while, at the same time, making available some of the significant resources needed to help slow down deforestation. It is perfectly possible to structure such bonds so that the repayment to the investors by governments is deferred, to everyone's benefit, to a future date. This would be helpful to governments currently grappling with the recession. I think it is important to note that the use of a Rainforest Bond means that it would be possible to raise much larger sums from the private sector now than would ever normally be provided from traditional overseas aid budgets.

Crucially, the payments of money from the bonds would be linked to agreed targets for forest conservation and countries would only be paid if the rain forests stayed intact. This would place a substantial value on the standing forests and create strong incentives for governments, communities and individuals in rain forest nations to address the drivers of deforestation, while giving them the means to pursue sustainable, low-carbon development. The meeting I held at St. James's Palace a month ago with Secretary (Hillary Rodham) Clinton, Chancellor (Angela) Merkel of Germany, President (Susilo Bambang) Yudhoyono of Indonesia and other international leaders before the G-20 summit led to an agreement to work further on these and other proposals so that they could initially be considered at the G-8 meeting in July with a final assessment and, I hope, commitment to action by the time of the World Bank annual meeting in October. If such a commitment emerges, then I believe it could lead to a significant and rapid reduction in

tropical deforestation and the carbon emissions that that entails. But, so far, no nation has committed itself to any proposal.

Of course, the recession is rightly occupying everyone's minds at the moment — it is causing real hardship to many people across the world. But, the crucial point is — and I think it is one that many political leaders are now grasping — that whatever the consequences of the global financial crisis, it will be as nothing to the full effects of climate change. Only the other day, Lord Stern, the world-renowned British economist whose seminal report in 2006 was a turning point in the debate on climate change, gave his starkest analysis yet of the problem. He said that wars, famines, floods and hurricanes would wreak havoc unless greenhouse-gas emissions were controlled. His view is that society has not even begun to understand the extent of the problem. He predicts that a 4- or 5-degree rise in temperatures over the next 100 years, which is now looking more likely unless urgent action is taken, would result in collapses in crop yields, rivers drying up and perhaps billions — just think about this — billions of people being forced to leave their homes, and then where will they go? The recession will pass, but climate change is here to stay unless we do something about it now.

Indeed, many countries, including the United States of America, are beginning to recognize that developing low-carbon technologies can actually be a solution to the financial situation, and there can be no doubt that there is a huge economic and environmental prize to be won.

Q: How much money per year would it take, and for how long, to keep the forests intact?

A: Estimates vary on the cost of halting tropical deforestation. Lord Stern, in his report "The Economics of Climate Change," estimated it might cost around \$15 billion per year to halve global deforestation by 2030. And, of course, if we need to outcompete the drivers of rain forest destruction, then the cost is greatly affected by the demand for beef, soy, palm oil and other products derived from the rain forests. But the truth is that, even at double Lord Stern's estimate, this is still one of the most cost-effective ways of slowing climate change, as I have tried to indicate earlier, and to buy crucial time. The transfer of funds to the rain forest countries to help them reorient their economies away from destroying the forests would have to last indefinitely, or until market mechanisms can be put in place instead. But if we see all this as paying for a giant global utility that is vital for our own survival, as well as for our global economy, then perhaps it makes more sense. And when you think that the cost of halting deforestation is a tiny fraction of the \$3,500 billion spent annually on insurance premiums around the globe, then surely it puts it all into perspective?

Q: There has been alarm about tropical deforestation for decades — yet it continues. What makes you think you can succeed?

A: I have no doubt that had I started this project even just a year earlier it would not have got very far. But, rather late in the day, there is now a growing global realization from political and business leaders that climate change is happening — we are increasingly seeing its effects all around us with more severe and frequent storms, increasing droughts and erratic weather extremes, not to mention the rapid retreat of glaciers and the melting of the Arctic and Antarctic ice caps. While there is no magic bullet to solve the problem of climate change, halting deforestation is in fact the cheapest, quickest, easiest way of buying a little more time to build the low-carbon economies that are essential. This isn't just what common sense tells us; it is what the scientific and economic experts are telling

us. I am certainly encouraged by the experts with whom my Project has worked — and by the reaction of others in the private, public and NGO sectors — to believe that our proposal has real validity. Will it succeed? I don't know, but all I can say is that the omens look vastly more heartening now than they did when I started this whole exercise two years ago and the chances of success would be greatly enhanced if we can create a global campaign to save the rainforests in the run-up to the Copenhagen summit in December.

Q: You reportedly told friends that you hoped to see significant progress on this initiative by the time you turned 60. That was in November. How would you describe the progress so far?

A: What I actually said was that the best 60th birthday present I could possibly be given would be the halting of tropical rain forest deforestation. We might not have quite achieved that yet, but the all-important Copenhagen summit falls just after my 61st birthday and I am more than happy to wait one more year for this particular birthday present!

Q: You said in March that the world has only 100 months — now 98 — to address this problem. Why 98 months?

A: Because climate-change experts believe that we have only eight to 10 years left to reverse the progress of climate change if we are to have a good chance of keeping within the levels of greenhouse-gas concentration in our atmosphere that will avoid catastrophic consequences. We cannot further delay unless we want to risk overshooting concentration levels that are likely to result in global warming in excess of 2 degrees Celsius. Under those conditions we could well lose the ability to control the process entirely, despite all our clever technologies. For me, that is an unacceptable risk and one I am afraid I am not prepared to take on behalf of our descendants. What on Earth is the point of testing the world to destruction, only to find that all the warnings of the scientists were absolutely correct? By then, there will be no chance of sorting out the mess.

Q: Why have you decided to use social media tools to promote your message?

A: I have to admit that I am not a great user of online social networks! But my sons and their friends are and I am only too aware of the popularity of the Internet and, in particular, its power to unite people around a common cause or interest. As we are facing an emergency, I want to tap into that power and use social media to spread the message about the link between deforestation and climate change, about the severe threat to the integrity and stability of entire ecosystems on which we all depend for our very existence, but which we take for granted, and the need for urgent action to slow the destruction of our precious rain forests. The whole point is that we simply have to create a global consensus on this issue in the run-up to the Copenhagen meeting so that political leaders understand they have the support of the largest possible number of people in tackling deforestation and making the right decisions. And if your readers are wondering if it really matters, then I would just ask them this one question: Do they really want their children and grandchildren asking them, "Why didn't you do something when it was possible to make a difference and when you knew what was happening?" At the very least, I want to be able to say that I did my utmost to leave a planet fit for them to live on.