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Enhanced cooperation vital to protect forests from extreme weather – UN



Storm damage in Slovakia

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Several United Nations agencies and their partners are calling for greater cooperation to tackle the threat posed to the world's forests from extreme weather events and natural disasters.

Extreme weather events that greatly impact the health of forests include cyclones, floods, landslides, tornadoes, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions – so-called “abiotic disturbances,” according to a [news release](#) issued by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), which is among 14 international bodies that form the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

“Disturbances are expected to continue to increase in intensity, quantity and frequency,” said Eduardo Rojas-Briales, FAO's Assistant Director-General for Forestry and Chair of the Partnership.

“Adaptive forest management involving all sectors and stakeholders is therefore essential to protect the world's forest resources. And since such disturbances do not respect borders, regional or international cooperation is badly required,” he stated.

According to the FAO report – “Abiotic disturbances and their influence on forest health” – almost 4,000 abiotic disturbances occurred between 2000 and 2009 worldwide, and recently they have also included man-made events such as radioactive contamination and oil spills.

Examples of abiotic disturbances and their impacts on forests include: a major storm in Sweden in 2005, which uprooted or damaged trees in over 1.2 million hectares of forest, and Tropical Cyclone Sidr, which hit Bangladesh in 2007 and affected almost nine million people and damaged nearly 1.5 million houses and some four million trees.

Another example is the 2010 earthquake and subsequent tsunami in central Chile, which killed more than 700 people and caused up to \$30 billion in economic losses to the country.

To tackle the threat from such events, the partnership is calling on forest managers to apply forest policies such as diversifying species, using windbreaks and mixed cropping patterns to protect forests from disasters, minimizing the risks and impacts of extreme events.

In November, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is scheduled to release a special report on managing the risks of extreme events and disasters to advance climate change adaptation.

In advance of the report, the partnership is calling on forest managers to develop strategies to adapt to future drought events by reducing tree density to ease competition, selecting plants with improved drought resistance, and shifting from monoculture plantations to species-rich forests.

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