

HISAR SCHOOL

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“Protecting Freedom in the Global Age ”



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Forum: Environmental Committee

Issue: Deforestation in the Amazon

Student Officer: Ece Doğramacı

Introduction

The Amazon River Basin is home to the largest rainforest on Earth. The basin covers around 40 percent of the South American continent and includes parts of eight South American countries: Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, and Suriname, as well as French Guiana.

The Amazon Rainforest has a long history of human settlement, but in recent decades the pace of change has accelerated due to an increase in the human population, the introduction of mechanized agriculture, and the integration of the Amazon region into the global economy. This shift has had substantial impacts on the Amazon and has been a driver of deforestation in one of the most important ecosystems of Earth. According to official data, deforestation in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil has hit its highest rate in a decade. Preventing deforestation in the Amazon Rainforest has become one of the most crucial issues in today's South America and is to be discussed by the delegates of the Environmental Committee.

Definition of Key Terms

Cattle grazing/ranching: The occupation of a large piece of land by farmers to raise livestock, usually cattle.

Infrastructure: Infrastructure is the fundamental facilities and systems serving a country, city, or another area necessary for its economy to function. Example: Buildings, roads, power supplies...

Mechanized agriculture: Mechanized agriculture is the process of using machines to greatly increase farm worker productivity. In modern times, powered machinery has replaced many farm jobs formerly carried out by manual labor or by working animals such as oxen, horses, and mules.

Global economy: The global economy is the worldwide economy. It is the system of trade and industry across the world that has emerged due to globalization. In other words, a global economy is a way in which countries' economies have been developing to operate collectively as one big system.

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General Overview

Reflecting environmental conditions as well as past human influence, the Amazon is made up of a mosaic of ecosystems and vegetation types including rainforests, seasonal forests, deciduous forests, flooded forests, and savannas. The basin is drained by the Amazon River, the world's largest river in terms of discharge, and the second-longest river in the world after the Nile. The river system is the lifeline of the forest and its history plays an important part in the development of its rainforests.

The biggest issue facing the rainforest right now is deforestation, which occurs when huge areas of land are completely cleared of trees. Every few minutes, an area the size of 200 football fields is cleared. Over the last 40 years, close to 20% of the Amazon has been destroyed. Although Amazon is a protected area, the IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources) is severely understaffed and ill-equipped to deal with all of the illegal activities contributing to deforestation.

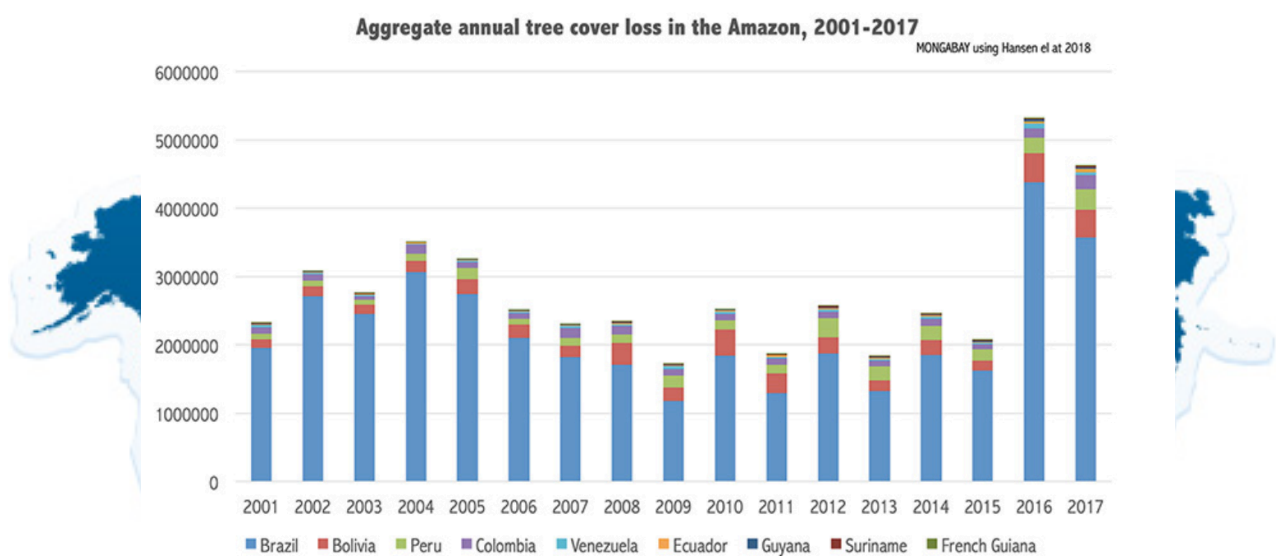
Deforestation is a particular concern in tropical rain forests because these forests are home to much of the world's biodiversity. Deforestation in the Amazon region is particularly rampant near more populated areas, roads, and rivers, but even remote areas have been encroached upon when valuable mahogany, gold, and oil are discovered.

Vast quantities of commodities produced in the Amazon — cattle beef and leather, timber, soy, oil and gas, and minerals, to name a few — are exported today to China, Europe, the U.S., and other countries. Transition to a global economy has resulted in large-scale deforestation and forest degradation in the Amazon — more than 1.4 million hectares of forest have been cleared since the 1970s.

Conversion for cattle grazing is the biggest single direct driver of deforestation. In Brazil, more than 60 percent of cleared land ends up as pasture, most of which have low productivity. Across much of the Amazon, the primary objective for cattle ranching is to establish land claims, rather than produce beef or leather. But market-oriented cattle production has nonetheless expanded rapidly during the past decade. Mining, subsistence agriculture, dams, urban expansion, agricultural fires, and timber plantations also result in significant forest loss in the Amazon. Another factor is the expansion of infrastructure projects, including roads and hydroelectric plants. The Brazilian state that suffered the greatest deforestation last month was Pará, which is home to the BR163 road through the Amazon and the Belo Monte dam.

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Deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon surged last month to the highest May level since the current monitoring method began, prompting concerns that president Jair Bolsonaro is giving a free pass to illegal logging, farming, and mining. Unless the government sends a clear signal it will not tolerate a further acceleration, environmentalists fear there will be an increase in the coming months that could make 2019 one of the worst years for deforestation in recent memory.



Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The IBAMA is Brazil's environmental protection service, the group tasked with monitoring, catching and punishing those responsible for the plunder of the Amazon rainforest. Although the IBAMA is continuing their work on preventing deforestation in the Amazon to this day, the newly-elected president Jair Bolsonaro's administration has launched policies that undermine IBAMA and ICMBio (The Chico Mendes Institute) which protects the nation's federal conservation units by effectively dismantling environmental law enforcement and allowing deforestation to proceed unchecked.

Fines imposed for illegal deforestation between Jan. 1 and May 15 this year were down 34 percent from the same period in 2018, the largest percentage drop ever recorded. It was also the smallest number of fines ever imposed (850), compared to 1,290 in the same period last year. Bolsonaro has defanged deforestation enforcement further by firing or not replacing top environmental officials. This includes 21 out of 27 IBAMA state superintendents responsible for imposing most of the deforestation fines. Also, 47 of Brazil's

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conservation units now lack directors, leaving a combined area greater than the size of England without conservation leadership.

Possible Solutions

The prevention of deforestation in the Amazon goes through the governments themselves. The relevant South American governments should ensure fair enforcement of forest conservation rules. Illegal logging, cattle ranching, and unsustainable forest management should be steeply fined by local governments.

Beyond the rule of law, South American leaders need to embrace ambitious domestic and international forest conservation policies based on the latest science. Globally, commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation should be made in developing nations.

It is also time for companies to make an impact by introducing “zero deforestation” policies that clean up their supply chains. That means holding their suppliers accountable for producing commodities like timber, beef, soy, palm oil and paper in a way that does not fuel deforestation and has a minimal impact on the climate. Companies should also set targets to maximize the use of recycled wood, pulp, paper and fiber in their products.

It is important to ensure that these companies and governments are following their anti-deforestation policies. The creation of non-governmental organizations to investigate, expose and confront environmental abuse is a huge step on the way to end deforestation in the Amazon Rainforest.

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