

08/08/2000

Lack of consensus towards sustainable forest management

Ariff Awang

SUSTAINABLE forest management should be promoted through mutually supportive trade and environmental policies, not through boycotts and ban on forest products, particularly tropical forest products, or linking stringent environmental standards to market access, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said such actions will only render forests valueless and will result in them being cleared for other purposes.

"Trade and environmental restrictions will not reduce deforestation. In fact, greater market access will help promote sustainable forest management by providing the much needed revenues for this purpose.

"At present, there is a lack of consensus regarding the necessity of a legally binding instrument due to the impasse concerning critical issues such as finance, transfer of technology and trade," he said at the official opening of the 21st International Union of Forestry Organisations (IUFRO) World Congress in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

His speech was read by the Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik.

Dr Mahathir urged developed countries to re-affirm and put into action their commitments to provide concrete financial assistance and technologies to developing countries to achieve sustainable management of their forests.

He said forestry is important to a nation's economy and its society, as well as to the national and global environment. Consequently, it has become a dominant issue in both the domestic and national agenda of many countries.

There is, however, still a glaring vacuum in the global agenda on forestry relating to a legal instrument on forests.

"We are only too aware of the arguments that did not allow for such an instrument to be developed in time for Rio, but now, eight years down the road from Rio, and after extensive and intensive debates, the issue of a legal instrument on forests has yet to be resolved. We are still no closer to a legal instrument than before," he said.

He said Malaysia's position is that a legally binding instrument on all types of forests is a necessity for addressing a whole range of issues on forestry and timber, in holistic, integrated and comprehensive manner.

Such a legal instrument will facilitate the achievement of sustainable forest management by providing a legal transparent framework and equal treatment for all forests, compared with the present ad hoc non-legally binding international environment which can be a hindrance to the best forestry practices.

"We also believe that such an instrument will enable international level action to be taken to address underlying factors for forest shrinkage and degradation in transboundary areas, such as international debt and unsustainable consumption patterns," he said, adding that the instrument will also encourage and accelerate cooperation in the transfer of technology.

(END)