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CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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Canada's Commitment to Sustainable Forest Management

Achieving sustainable management of Canada's and the world's forests is clearly one of the most important and challenging environmental foreign policy issues now facing Canada. It is an issue driven as much by our domestic economic and social interests as by environmental concerns. The importance of forests to our domestic economy is well-known; valued at approximately \$20 billion annually, Canada's forest products are the largest net contributor to our balance of trade and hence are a major contributor to our nation's prosperity. From an environmental perspective, forests play an important role in slowing climate change, maintaining biodiversity, and protecting watersheds. Beyond the link to social well-being through economic viability, forests are part of the cultural fabric of Aboriginal communities and indeed Canadian society as a whole.

The events over the past year in the Clayoquot Sound region of the Canadian province of British Columbia demonstrate the difficulty of merging these different visions and perspectives into a land management regime that satisfies all those concerned. At the same time, there is no broadly agreed international yardstick to measure the B.C. land decision for Clayoquot Sound, or to assist governments in attempting to achieve a reasonable balance among competing interests.

The challenges facing Canada and the Government of British Columbia extend equally to the international arena, because forests represent different values in different countries. For some countries, forests are a link to a bygone age of unexplored wilderness, while for others they are the basis for a significant part of a modern economy, like Canada. Again

for other countries, they are an important source of fuel and shelter, and a means of rapid economic development.

The foundation of Canadian environmental foreign policy suggests that forests must be managed in a sustainable manner, ensuring that the multiple values of forests are respected.

Canada's diplomatic efforts are aimed at building a shared understanding of sustainable forest management that takes into consideration the different circumstances of all nations. At present, while there are many visions of what constitutes sustainable forest management, there is no clear, scientifically based, broadly agreed definition of how to manage forests sustainably.

At home, Canada has a new National Forest Strategy, entitled "Sustainable Forests: A Canadian Commitment", to achieve its goal of sustainable forest management. It was developed through extensive public discussion. This five-year strategy contains over 90 commitments to action, and has been endorsed by over 30 organizations including provincial and federal governments, representatives of industry, wildlife, nature and conservation non governmental organizations (NGOs), Aboriginal groups and foresters.

Agreement on the many and diverse aspects of the global forests issues can only be reached through a global commitment to work together. The adoption of the Guiding Principles on Forests at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro is an important step toward this agreement. Since then,

there has been a proliferation of forests-related initiatives, and this trend will accelerate as the 1995 review of forests at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) approaches.

This issue of Global Agenda focuses on where and how Canada is active on global forests issues. Highlighted is our role in the global dialogue on forests at the CSD, and in the technical dialogue on forests starting with the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) Seminar on Temperate and Boreal Forests, hosted by Canada in Montréal in September 1993. Also highlighted is how Canada is working at a practical level with other countries to establish a global network of "model forests" as a channel to share information and technology on sustainable forest management. All of these efforts are geared toward stronger international agreement and co-operation on sustainable forest management, to preserve global forests resources and to set out predictable and environmentally sound rules on their commercial exploitation.

The debate on how to define and implement sustainable forest management will influence related discussions on trade and environment, development and environment, and conservation and exploitation. The debate is being carried out in the United Nations, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and on bilateral agendas. In all these venues, Canada's goal is to reach a shared understanding of the competing interests and philosophical visions about where forests fit into our social, cultural, environmental and economic lives. 

