



Green gold, national treasure, lungs of the earth – forests have many names that convey their importance to humankind and life on our planet. Yet, despite their vital importance, forests all over the world have come increasingly under threat because of human activities.

To raise awareness of the crucial role of all types of forests, the United Nations marks [International Day of Forests](#) on 21 March.

Although the global rate of deforestation has slowed down some 50 % in the last 25 years, the area covered by forests is still in rapid decline with an area roughly the size of Denmark being lost each year, the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO estimates](#) .

Globally, several factors contribute to deforestation. In [Central and Southern America](#) , rainforests are being burnt down in order to make space for cattle ranching. Vast areas of forest are also cut down to make way for plantations where valuable crops such as palm oil, sugar cane and coffee are grown.

The consequences of this kind of “slash and burn” farming are devastating: the soil in rainforests cannot sustain crops and cattle for long, so before long the farmers have to cut down more rainforest for new plantations and cattle pastures.

Trees are also being cut down to be used as raw material for valuable furniture, as well as for exposing land for mining for minerals and metals, and extracting oil deposits from the soil below rainforests. And, as urbanization intensifies, forests are being cut down to make more land available for [housing](#) .

Deforestation bears serious consequences for all life on earth. Forests sustain whole ecosystems by providing a home for the vast majority of flora and fauna living on land: when forests are lost, biodiversity is lost with them. Also some [70 million](#) indigenous people around the world depend on forests for their livelihood and traditional way of life.

However, the conservation of forests, woodlands and trees doesn't concern merely rural or isolated areas. Also cities and urban areas have an important role to play in promoting a greener – as well as cleaner – environment.

For this reason, this year's International Day of Forests concentrates on highlighting the importance of forests from the point of view of sustainable cities.

Urban trees help [mitigate](#) the effects of pollution and climate change: they store carbon, remove harmful pollutants from the air and help regulate air temperatures in urban areas which in turn can significantly reduce the need for both heating and air conditioning.

In addition, urban green spaces contribute to making cities more vibrant and livable: they encourage healthy lifestyles and socializing with people, and as such have a positive effect on mental as well as physical wellbeing.

Forests cover [30 %](#) of the Earth's surface, host [80 %](#) of the world's terrestrial flora and fauna,

and have an impact on all of our lives. Sustainable development requires healthy forests and balanced ecosystems – as long as forests are under threat, all life on earth is under threat.