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Illegal Logging Threatens Survival of Orangutans

By Karen Calabria

Nairobi: The UN warned yesterday that illegal logging by international companies could lead to a 98 per cent loss of Southeast Asia's tropical rainforests by 2022, threatening the habitat of tens of thousands of endangered orangutans.

To supply the growing global demand for timber and biofuels such as palm oil, illegal loggers have begun to raid Indonesia's national parks, resulting in a devastating loss of biodiversity, a report but the Nairobi based UN Environment Program found.

"This is a stark reminder of what we're talking about when we're looking at the degradation of natural resources in the context of globalisation," UNEP chief Achim Steiner said at a UN environment meeting in the Kenyan capital. "The pressure from the global market is leading the illegal logging industry into the national parks".

The report, *The Last Stand of the Orangutan: State of Emergency*, found that more than 73 per cent of all logging in Indonesia was illegal, and that traces of the illicit timber trade had been found in 37 of the country's 41 national parks, the last remaining habitats of the Bornean and Sumatran orangutans.

Up to 98 per cent of the country's tropical rainforests could be destroyed by 2022 if the exploitation of timber continued unabated, the report said.

Urgent action was needed to counter the effects of illegal logging, which the report found to be the work of large multinational corporations, not impoverished local people.

"At the current rate of intrusion, some of these parks may be severely degraded in three to five years," said the lead author of the report, Christian Nellman.

Current estimates put the number of Bornean orangutans at between 45,000 and 69,000, while only 7300 Sumatran orangutans remain in the wild, signifying a 91 per cent decrease in population since the beginning of the 20th century, the report says.

"Orangutan populations are seriously affected when their forest is destroyed or logged, not least because they are often killed for meat or to protect newly planted crops".

Other orangutans are stolen from their habitats while logging occurs and smuggled out of the country – often on the same boats that are transporting the illegal timber.

Efforts are being made to monitor the illegal logging trade in Indonesia, but the government has few resources to use as it attempts to cover the vast areas of forest.