



## STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH All of God's Creation

Social Justice Committee, Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Airy, June 23, 2024

### *Forests Need Our Protection Now*

Who doesn't like chocolate? "Americans eat an estimated 12 pounds of chocolate per year per person. We spend \$22 billion annually on chocolate." (Linda Searing, *Washington Post*, February 10, 2018)

But did you know that planting cacao -- the main ingredient in chocolate -- is driving deforestation around the world? ... "Typically grown as a monoculture, where cocoa trees are planted over large areas, rainforests are often cleared to make space for the crops. However, there is a positive response to this. **Chocolate companies can protect tropical forests by committing to grow chocolate more sustainably. And chocolate lovers can help by purchasing chocolate from sustainable companies.**" (*Environment America*, 6/10/24) Look for certifications like Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, UTZ, or Direct Trade on the packaging. Certification indicates that the chocolate meets certain standards, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and environmental stewardship.

**"In 2022, the world lost more than 16 million acres of forest—an area bigger than West Virginia—**according to the 2023 Forest Declaration Assessment. Forests are home to most of the world's terrestrial biodiversity. They provide more than 86 million green jobs and resources such as food and fuel that support the livelihoods of billions of people. They are also critical for absorbing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere....

The conversion of native forests, peatlands, grasslands, and other ecosystems often goes hand in hand with violations of human rights, threatening the territories, livelihoods, and lives of Indigenous peoples and local communities. **Eliminating deforestation and conversion from agricultural supply chains is a critical step toward protecting intact ecosystems, good jobs, and healthy communities for the future....** To curb the worst impacts of the climate crisis and keep a 1.5 degrees Celsius future within reach, emissions from the food system must decline by about 80% by 2050. This requires halting deforestation and conversion.

Many private and public sector organizations have committed to eliminating deforestation and conversion from supply chains. Unfortunately, this has not resulted in significant changes on the ground.... The US is one of the world's leading destinations for products resulting from the deforestation and conversion of forests. **Legislation and US leadership are essential to driving deforestation and conversion-free supply chains and creating a level playing field for all businesses.**" (*World Wildlife Fund*) [Watch this short video](#) on the case for conversion-free food.

Urge your legislators to [support the FOREST Act](#). This bipartisan bill is designed to stem deforestation in the Amazon and in other critical ecosystems by barring imports into the U.S. of goods sourced through illegal deforestation, especially cattle, cocoa, palm oil, rubber, and soy (Sisters of Mercy, *Mercy Justice Team*, 4/25/24). The bill is supported by a wide range of US environmental, human rights, and faith-based civil society organizations. Thank you for adding your support.

Comments on this column may be directed to the Social Justice Committee at [socialjustice@holycrossphl.org](mailto:socialjustice@holycrossphl.org).