



**Joint NGO Statement on Tokyo 2020 Olympics' "Fake Sustainability"**  
**Organizers called on to learn from & fix procurement failures linked to rainforest destruction**  
**in light of the Olympics postponement**

March 30, 2020

Today, 8 NGOs issued the following joint statement in light of the Olympics postponement, urging Olympics organizers to come to terms with the negative impacts caused by Tokyo 2020's timber procurement practices. The Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee committed to publish [three Sustainability Reports](#) over the course of their Olympic-related activities. But with the postponement of the Games until 2021, publication of the second "Sustainability Pre-Games Report" has now been delayed. This provides a new opportunity for the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee to reassess this report, in order to document missteps and lessons learned, and set a clear roadmap for sustainability for others to follow.

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*We, the signatories to this letter, acknowledge the extraordinary circumstances of this moment, given the terrible impacts of COVID-19 on lives, health, and livelihoods for people around the world, including on the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. The urgent need to respond to the pandemic and resultant economic impact is rightly taking priority. However, the Earth continues to face a dual crisis of rapid climate change and unprecedented biodiversity loss that, like the coronavirus, will require unprecedented global action in solidarity with those most vulnerable. Our hope is to raise public awareness of how these crises have been fueled by Tokyo 2020 so that we can achieve a more sustainable and just future for all of us inhabiting the Earth.*

The organizers of the Tokyo Games made a [promise](#) to deliver a Sustainable Games, but the reality has been a "Fake Sustainability." Tokyo 2020's use of large quantities of tropical plywood linked to rainforest destruction for construction of the Olympic venues was a clear violation of its commitment to sustainability, as embodied in its [Sustainable Sourcing Code](#). However, in the previous [Sustainability Report](#) (published March 26 2019), the organizers failed to confront this timber issue and instead engaged in green-washing to appear as if they were keeping their sustainability promise. The organizers have decided to conveniently interpret their own rules and defy logic in order to dismiss any complaints lodged against them and claim no violations occurred. Moreover, the organizers have failed to demonstrate any willingness to learn from their mistakes. There is a danger that Tokyo 2020 will leave a "harmful legacy" for future generations that tolerates this "fake sustainability."

Given the postponement of the Games, Tokyo 2020 organizers now have the ability to revisit their Pre-Games Report, recognize the Olympics' sustainability failures, and facilitate the implementation of progressive measures that are necessary to protect forests. They should acknowledge and face the fact that the Tokyo Olympics contributed to tropical deforestation, thoroughly examine how the problem occurred, and derive lessons from their mistakes to avoid reoccurrence. An irresponsible response that evaluates only what was done well and neglects what was done poorly is unacceptable. A "true legacy" demands that the organizers sincerely acknowledge the problems that occurred in ensuring sustainability, and present clear solutions in the sustainability reports that can serve as guidelines for sustainable procurement by the city of Tokyo and other local governments, the Japanese Government, as well as the private sector.

Forests, especially tropical forests, play an important role in regulating the global climate and rainfall patterns. Forests absorb and store carbon, help to meet the basic needs of people living in and around the forests such as water and food, and contribute significantly to the conservation of biodiversity. The protection of forests and wildlife habitat is also being increasingly [recognized](#) as an important defense against deadly diseases like Covid-19. It is for these reasons that the UN's [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) Target 15.2 aims to "halt deforestation" by 2020, and Target 15.5 aims to "halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species." Despite Tokyo 2020's [promise](#) to promote the SDGs, its use of substantial quantities of tropical timber has gone in the opposite direction of sustainability. This failure should be spelled out in the Pre-Games Report as well as the Post-Games Report and provide lessons for future sustainable procurement.

### **Signatories**

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TuK INDONESIA, *Indonesia*

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### **<Background Note>**

NGOs have consistently [pointed out](#) the problems associated with Tokyo 2020's timber procurement and its complicity in tropical rainforest destruction. According to information [released](#) by the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee (1), tropical plywood was used to construct every new venue except for the Yumenoshima Park Archery Field. More than 225,000 sheets of formwork plywood (68% of the total) from Indonesia and Malaysia were used to mold concrete as part of the foundation work for the Games' facilities. Of this total, the New National Stadium and the Ariake Arena used close to 120,000 and 10,000 sheets of Indonesian plywood, respectively, which lacked any certification of sustainability. Indonesian wood used for the New National Stadium alone was 36% of the total and equivalent to an estimated 6,731 m<sup>3</sup> in logs, far exceeding the use of 2,000 m<sup>3</sup> of domestic timber used for the Stadium, such as for the roof

(2). The sustainability of the certified wood from Malaysia is also [highly questionable](#). The following are two clear examples of how Tokyo 2020 has broken their sustainability promise.

### **The Use of Unsustainable "Conversion Timber"**

The first example is Tokyo 2020's use of unsustainable "conversion timber" to construct the Olympic venues. In May 2018, NGO [investigations](#) found the use of Indonesian formwork plywood at the construction site of Ariake Arena, a venue under the jurisdiction of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG). Supply chain analysis of the factory that had manufactured this plywood showed that about 40% of the logs used to produce plywood in 2017 came from tropical forests that had been cleared and converted for the development of coal mines and oil palm plantations. Subsequently, Sumitomo Forestry, which had supplied the Indonesian plywood, acknowledged that it had supplied conversion timber to both the Ariake Arena and the New National Stadium, and TMG confirmed that the vast majority of Indonesian plywood used for the Ariake Arena derived from conversion timber.

Because "conversion timber" involves clear-cutting, whereby the entire forest is logged, it was a clear violation of Tokyo 2020's [procurement criteria](#) that stipulates that timber "derives from forests maintained and managed based on mid- to long- term plans or policies." According to scientists, about [two-thirds](#) of all land-based species live in tropical forests; Indonesia has a very rich biodiversity and is said to be home to 10~20% of the planet's species (3). In fact, NGOs found that the tropical forests cleared for the Tokyo Olympics included the destruction of primary forests and habitat for critically endangered Bornean Orangutans. For this reason, Tokyo 2020's substantial use of clear-cut tropical forests also violated a separate procurement criteria of ensuring that logging activity is "considerate toward conservation of the ecosystem."

### **The Dysfunctionality of the Grievance Mechanism**

Based on the evidence above, two complaints were [filed](#) with the Olympic organizers, but their refusal to accept the complaints and efforts to evade responsibility has been yet another example of their broken sustainability promise.

In November 2018, Rainforest Action Network (RAN), on behalf of the Borneo Orangutan and tropical rainforests of Indonesia, [filed](#) grievances with TMG and the Japan Sport Council over violations of the Sustainable Sourcing Code by their use of conversion timber at the Ariake Arena and the New National Stadium, respectively. However, 16 months later, the complaints have not been accepted, and four major problems have been identified in the organizers' response to the complaints (4):

1. TMG's own [grievance procedures](#) stipulate that a complaint would be accepted if there is a suspicion of violating the Sustainable Sourcing Code (5). However, the Tokyo Government has decided to reinterpret its own rules and insist that unless non-compliance is confirmed, the matter will not be accepted as a complaint.
2. While an explicit prohibition on the use of "conversion timber" was [added](#) to the revised timber procurement standards in January 2019, in terms of compliance with existing standards on mid- to long-term forest management, TMG has put forward an absurd re-interpretation that the clear-cutting of forests was compliant as long as

- forests were converted to agricultural land based on a plan and properly managed and utilized.
3. TMG has argued that the [Indonesian Government's assessment of orangutan habitat](#) is insufficient, and that without concrete proof that Orangutans were in the logging area at the time of logging, a complaint over non-compliance would not be recognized.
  4. The Japan Sport Council decided to dismiss the complaint filed against them over their own use of conversion timber, based on TMG's decision to dismiss its complaint.

While last year's Sustainability Progress Report described the grievance mechanism as a tool to ensure the sustainability of the Games, it has become increasingly clear that it is not functioning as intended.

Calls for reform are being echoed by over 30,000 people from around the world, who have supported two petitions submitted today that demand that the organizers accept the complaints brought against them concerning tropical deforestation, investigate the impacts of their procurement practices on the rainforests, and improve their practices going forward. (6)

#### **Notes:**

(1) As of the end of November 2019, the total number of concrete formwork plywood used was 331,700 sheets, which includes 39,500 sheets of Japanese plywood and 66,600 sheets of reused plywood, much of it also of tropical origin. See <https://tokyo2020.org/en/games/sustainability/si-20200110-01>

(2) According to published information referenced in Note 1 above, the New National Stadium used 117,800 sheets of Indonesian concrete formwork plywood. In Japan, the typical size of concrete formwork plywood is 12X900X1800mm ~ 15x910x1820mm, and the factor used to convert the amount of plywood to the amount of logs used in production is 2.3 (Source: UNECE / FAO). This equates to approximately 6,731 m3 in logs (RWE). Information on the amount of Japanese timber used for the New National Stadium is available [here](#) (in Japanese), November 29, 2019; this volume equals 3,333m3 in logs (Source: MAFF).

(3) See, for example, JICA, Project on Improvement of Collection Management and Biodiversity Research Capacity of Research Center for Biology, Indonesian Institute of Sciences, <https://www.jica.go.jp/indonesia/english/activities/activity15.html>; Greenpeace, <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/issues/indonesian-forests-palm-oil/>

(4) Responses outlined in points 1~3 are based on written communications as well as an in person meeting on Feb 7 2020 between RAN and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. The response of the Japan Sport Council is based on written communications with RAN. More information can be found here: RAN blog "Olympic Timber Scandal: Tokyo 2020's Failure of Sustainability & Accountability" Aug 7, 2019 <https://www.ran.org/the-understory/olympic-timber-scandal/>

(5) Equivalent grievance procedures in English are available [here](#), which apply to the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee. More information on the grievance mechanisms can be found [here](#).

(6) RAN initiated two petitions to the Olympic organizers, in [November 2019](#) and [March 2020](#).