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Airlines' 'action' on climate change means doubling emissions

Deforestation in airlines' carbon offset projects is stark warning for industry "carbon neutral growth" claim

(Brussels) November 14, 2017 – The airline industry's flawed plans to offset its carbon emissions are exposed in a briefing published today by forests and rights NGO [Fern](#).

As delegates from the UN's aviation agency, the [International Civil Aviation Organisation \(ICAO\)](#), gather in Montreal to agree details of an industry-wide carbon offsetting scheme, the dangers of the proposal are revealed in an analysis of carbon offset projects currently being used by Virgin Atlantic, Austrian Airlines and San Diego Airport.

"International aviation contributes more to global warming than [all but nine](#) of the world's nations. Other sectors are being pushed to drastically cut their emissions, but airlines are trying to cheat the climate and dramatically increase global flights. This simply mustn't be allowed to happen," said Julia Christian, forests campaigner at Fern.

In October 2016, ICAO [adopted the 'Carbon Offsetting Reduction Scheme for International Aviation'](#) (CORSIA), which claims to ensure "carbon neutral growth from 2020".

ICAO's "carbon neutral growth" in fact involves [doubling emissions](#) by 2050, [consuming 20%](#) of the carbon we can still emit without exceeding the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. ICAO claims these emissions will be made carbon neutral with mass purchases of carbon offsets—namely paying someone else to prevent emissions elsewhere. Carbon offsets have faced [serious criticism](#) about their actual impact on climate change—particularly when it comes to forest offset projects, which are notoriously difficult to measure and guarantee. Forest offsets have also [come under fire](#) for their grave impacts on local communities.

So far, the airline industry's experience of forest offsets does not bode well. Fern has analysed two forest offset projects currently being offered by major international airlines to passengers wishing to make their flights "carbon neutral"—one in Oddar Meanchey, Cambodia (which Virgin Atlantic [offers](#) to passengers),¹ and the other in Mai N'dombe, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (which [Austrian Airlines](#) and [San Diego Airport](#) offer to passengers)².

¹ [REDD-Monitor](#), which has reported on the dire impacts of the Oddar Meanchey offset project put a detailed series of questions on these allegations to those involved, including Terra Capital Gold, the US based company marketing carbon credits from it. See: <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2014/01/27/some-questions-about-the-oddar-meanchey-redd-project-in-cambodia/> Terra Global Capital's (brief) response is here: <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2014/01/28/a-response-from-terra-global-capital-about-the-oddar-meanchey-redd-project-in-cambodia/>

² Rainforest Foundation UK, an NGO which has done extensive investigations on the Mai N'dombe REDD+ project, put detailed allegations to the project auditors (Verified Carbon Standard, or VCS) in September 2017. See: <http://www.vcsprojectdatabase.org/services/publicViewServices/downloadDocumentById/28497>. VCS' response is here: <http://www.vcsprojectdatabase.org/services/publicViewServices/downloadDocumentById/28776>



Not only have both projects caused serious human rights issues, they have also failed at their central goal of protecting forests—their claims to make flights “carbon neutral” are therefore an illusion.

In Oddar Meanchay, the forest is being clear-cut and local people exploited or kicked off their land; while the Mai N’dombe project has seen deforestation increase since the project began.

These are not isolated cases. Fern’s research shows that forest offset projects in general fail to meet at least six to eight of the criteria that ICAO have proposed to ensure its offsets are actually delivering climate benefits.

“No forest carbon project can guarantee permanent emissions reductions. Forest carbon and fossil fuel carbon are not equivalents. ICAO mustn’t be allowed to pretend they are the same,” Christian added.