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## Biofuel demand leading to human rights abuses, report claims

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Palm kernels, harvested in countries such as Indonesia for the oil which is a rich source of biofuel. Photograph: Tengku Bahar/AFP/Getty

EU politicians should reject targets for expanding the use of biofuels because the demand for palm oil is leading to human rights abuses in Indonesia, a coalition of international environmental groups claimed today.

A new report, published by Friends of the Earth and indigenous rights groups LifeMosaic and Sawit Watch, said that increasing demands for palm oil for food and biofuels was causing millions of hectares of forests to be cleared for plantations and destroying the livelihoods of indigenous peoples.

The report, *Losing Ground*, said many of the 60-90 million people in Indonesia who depend on the forests are losing their land to the palm oil companies.

Pollution from pesticides, fertilisers and the pressing process is also leaving some villages without clean water.

"The unsustainable expansion of Indonesia's palm oil industry is leaving many indigenous communities without land, water or adequate livelihoods. Previously self-sufficient communities find themselves in debt or struggling to afford education and food. Traditional customs and culture are being damaged alongside Indonesia's forests and wildlife," the report reads.

It claims that oil palm companies often use violent tactics as they move in to convert the land to plantations.

"Human rights – including the right to water, to health, the right to work, cultural rights and the right to be protected from ill-treatment and arbitrary arrest – are being denied in some communities.

"If palm oil is to be produced sustainably, the damaging effects of unjust policies and practices in the Indonesian plantation sector must be addressed," the report said.

The alleged human rights abuses come after several recent reports have highlighted the environmental problems caused by the conversion of land for farming palm oil.

Last week a study by the University of Minnesota and Nature Conservancy, published in *Science*, found that the carbon lost through the clearance of forests, peat lands or even grasslands far outweighs the greenhouse gas savings that can come from biofuels.

Conversion of land for corn, sugarcane, palm oil or soybeans released 17 to 420 times more carbon than the annual savings from replacing fossil fuels with bioethanol or biodiesel, the researchers said.

Last month the Commons environmental audit committee called for a

The EU currently wants biofuels such as bioethanol and biodiesel to make up 10% of transport fuel by 2020. Britain has a separate target of 5% of biofuels in petrol and diesel by 2010.

In its energy directive last month, the commission proposed the introduction of sustainability criteria because of fears about the environmental impact of growing fuel crops.

But Friends of the Earth and LifeMosaic said the targets would drive a huge increase in palm oil in Indonesia, adding there were plans for a further 20m hectares of plantations by 2020 – an area the size of England, the Netherlands and Switzerland combined.

Friends of the Earth biofuels campaigner, Hannah Griffiths, said: "As well as being bad for the environment, biofuels from palm oil are a disaster for people.

"MEPs should listen to the evidence and use the forthcoming debate on this in the European parliament to reject the 10% target.

"Instead of introducing targets for more biofuels the EU should insist that all new cars are designed to be super-efficient.

"The UK government must also take a strong position against the 10% target in Europe and do its bit to reduce transport emissions by improving public transport and making it easier for people to walk and cycle," she added.

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