

# Fight climate change with bamboo, says campaign group



- *AFP/File – A migratory Common Kingfisher resting on a bamboo tree at a wildlife sanctuary in Singapore. World leaders ...*

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CANCUN, Mexico (AFP) – World leaders pondering the conundrum of climate change should think of bamboo, a group promoting the versatile grass said at the UN talks in Cancun on Wednesday.

Cheap, fast-growing and immensely strong, bamboo provides an answer to surging carbon emissions, generates income for the rural poor and helps tackle housing shortages, the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) said.

"Bamboo is a remarkable resource for driving economic development, and is readily available in many of the world's poorest countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America," said Coosje Hoogendoorn, INBAR's director general.

"It helps support the livelihoods of more than 1.5 billion people, generates more than five billion dollars in annual trade and can grow up to one meter (3.25 feet) a day."

"Bamboo housing has been around for centuries, but many people don't understand its full potential and still see it as the poor man's timber," said Alvaro Cabrera, INBAR's regional coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean.

"In fact, bamboo is stronger for its weight than steel, it's cheaper than timber, uses far less energy in processing than concrete and can dance in earthquakes... Bamboo should be referred to as the wise man's timber."

INBAR, a 13-year-old organisation based in China, is an inter-government organisation, gathering 36 countries under a treaty, that also fosters fair-trade and development schemes involving bamboo and rattan.

It made its pitch on the sidelines of the November 29-December 10 UN talks in Cancun, where countries are wrestling for solutions to climate change.

In addition to providing livelihoods for people, bamboo forests would be an invaluable weapon against carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), the principal greenhouse gas, through photosynthesis, INBAR said.

Some species of bamboo can suck up CO<sub>2</sub> at least as fast as Chinese fir and eucalyptus, among the swiftest-growing commercial species of trees, according to a scientific report presented last month.

In addition, bamboo roots reduce soil erosion, preventing hillsides and riverbanks from washing away in floods and landslides.

Hoogendoorn told AFP that the group was working on a certification scheme whereby bamboo would be sold with a label proving that it came from a sustainable plantation and allowed other species to thrive.

Even so, certification "is complex and very difficult," she admitted.

One of the biggest destroyers of biodiversity is monoculture crops grown on huge spaces on soil treated with pesticides and fertilizers.

Natural bamboo forests, as opposed to plantations, are a haven for many species of wildlife, including the giant panda.

World trade in bamboo and rattan is more than five billion dollars a year, with China, Indonesia and Vietnam the three biggest sources, INBAR said.