

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL, PRINCIPAL BENCH,
NEW DELHI**

ORIGINAL APPLICATION NO. 555/2024

IN THE MATTER OF:

News item titled "India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 Global Forest Watch" appearing in The Indian Express date 13.04.2024.

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Respondent No.33

Through



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Standing Counsel (UOI)

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06.04.2025

BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL, PRINCIPAL BENCH,
NEW DELHI

ORIGINAL APPLICATION NO. 555/2024

IN THE MATTER OF:

News item titled "India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 Global Forest Watch" appearing in The Indian Express date 13.04.2024

REPLY ON BEHALF OF RESPONDENT NO. 33 ANDAMAN AND
NICOBAR ISLANDS, DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND
FORESTS.

Most Respectfully Showeth:

I, Shabu Kannapara Thomas, S/o Late Thomas Kunju Kunju Aged about 59 years working as Conservator of Forest (Headquarter) having Office at office of the PCCF, ANI, Haddo, Sri Vijaya Puram the deponent herein do hereby solemnly affirm and state on oath as under: -

1. That I am competent to swear the present counter affidavit on behalf of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Department of Environment and Forests and I am aware of the facts and circumstances of the case based on record.
2. That, I have perused the contents of the above captioned O.A. and I am duly authorized to depose by way of the present affidavit.
3. That the instant original application OA. 555/2024 is registered *suo-motu* on the basis of the news item titled "India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover

Shabu Kannapara Thomas



since 2000 Global Forest Watch" appearing in The Indian Express date 13.04.2024.

4. That the news article raises the issue that the forests are both a sink and a source for carbon, removing carbon dioxide from the air when standing or re-growing and emitting it when cleared or degraded. Loss of forests, thus, accelerates climate change. Tree cover loss is not always deforestation, which typically refers to human-caused, permanent removal of natural forest cover. It includes both human-caused loss and natural disturbances. Examples of tree cover loss that may not meet the definition of deforestation include loss from logging, fire, disease or storm damage. The data showed that 95 per cent of the tree cover loss in India from 2013 to 2023 occurred within natural forests.
5. That the Hon'ble Tribunal vide its order dated 20.05.2024 observed that the news item raises substantial issue relating to compliance of the environmental norms and implementation of the provisions of scheduled enactment and it indicates violation of the provisions of Forest Conservation Act, 1980, Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and the Environment Protection Act, 1986.
6. That the Hon'ble Tribunal vide its order dated 18.11.2024 impleaded the answering respondent as Respondent no. 33 i.e. Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Department of Environment and Forests, and issued notice and directed to file reply/responses with complete information regarding Forest Cover, Tree Cover etc. for the period from the year 2001 to 2021 before this hon'ble Tribunal.

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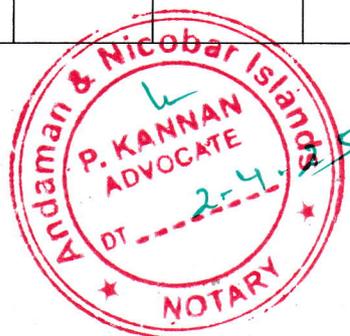
7. It is respectfully submitted that the forest cover assessment of all the States and UTs is done biennially by the Forest Survey of India under Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change since 1987 and publish the forest cover details alongwith changes therein.
8. That the forest cover as reported in India State Forest Report includes all patches of land with a tree canopy density of more than 10% and with area having more than 01 ha irrespective of land use ownership and species of trees.
9. It is submitted that the forest cover mapping is presented on a scale of 1:50000 scale in three canopy density classes viz very dense forest (canopy density more than 70%), moderately dense forest (canopy density 40% to 70%) and open forest (canopy density 10% to 40%).
10. That the tree cover comprises tree patches outside the recorded forest area exclusive of forest cover and less than 1 ha.
11. That the forest cover detail and tree cover data in respect of A&N Islands as drawn from the Indian State Forest Report published in the year 2001, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2021 and presented in a tabular form:

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Year	Forest Cover (KM ²)			Total	Net Change	Remarks
	VDF	MDF	OF			
2001	6593	NA	337	6930	-	MDF Data not Available in the ISFR-2001
2003	3397	2777	633	6807	-123	
2005	3779	2414	470	6663	-144	The loss in forest cover has occurred due to tsunami, which struck the island territory in December 2004
2007	3762	2405	495	6662	-1	ISFR not Published in 2007 and data is taken from ISFR 2009.
2009	3762	2405	495	6662	0	-
2011	3761	2416	547	6724	62	(a)The forest areas lost during tsunami have recovered and are showing upon satellite imagery. (b) Mangrove areas were found to be extending in Andaman district.
2013	3754	2413	544	6711	-13	Main reason for the change in forest cover is drying up of Mangroves due to upliftment of some

S. Thomas



						parts of Andaman after the 2004 tsunami
2015	5686	685	380	6751	40	Increase in forest cover is mainly due to conservation/ protection activities and increase in mangrove cover.
2017	5678	684	380	6742	-9	-
2019	5677.52	683.89	381.37	6742.78	0.78	Increase in forest cover is due to Plantation and conservation activities as well as improvement in interpretation.
2021	5677.98	683.07	382.97	6744.02	1.24	-

12. That below table depict the values of tree cover per kilometer Square:

TREE COVER (KM ²)											Remarks
2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	
83	33	53	NA	44	39	10	37	35	41	23	Data on tree cover is not available in the 2007 ISFR.

NA- Not Available

VDF- Very Dense Forest

MDF- Moderately Dense Forest

OF- Open Forest

13. It is respectfully submitted that the loss/change of forest cover, specifically the drying up of mangroves, occurred as a consequence of the tsunami that

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impacted the island territory. Satellite imagery analysis indicates that the forest areas lost during the tsunami have since regenerated, with mangrove coverage expanding in the Andaman district. Furthermore, the observed increase in forest cover is attributable to adoption of afforestation and conservation initiatives.

14. That the present Reply by way affidavit may kindly be taken on record and into consideration and the Hon'ble Tribunal may pass appropriate order(s), direction(s) as deemed fit and proper under the facts and circumstances of the present case.
15. That the Answering Respondent seeks leave to make additional submissions, if required, during the course of the proceedings as and when directed by this Hon'ble Tribunal.




DEPONENT
मुख्यालय
Conservator of Forests
Headquarters

Verification

I, Shabu Kannapara Thomas, S/o Late Thomas Kunju Kunju Aged about 59 years, do hereby verify 1 to 15 at the contents of the above paragraphs which are true to my own knowledge and/or are in the nature of legal submissions which I believe to be true and no material has been suppressed herewith.



Noted and Registered
at Serial Number: 248
Dated: 2.4.25

Shabu Kannapara Thomas
DEPONENT
मुख्यालय
Conservator of Forests
Headquarters

Affirmed before me after the contents
were read over & explained in simple
Hiv 2.

P. Kannan 2.4.25
P. KANNAN
ADVOCATE
NOTARY PUBLIC
PORT BLAIR, A & N ISLANDS