The Legal System of Forests Between Algerian Legislation 23/21 and International Law

النظام القانوني للغابات بين التشريع الجزائري 21/23 والقانون الدولي

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Received: 20/01 */2025* ***Accepted:*** 22/05 */2025* ***Published:*** June */2025*

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بيان المكانة القانونية التي تشغلها الغابات في التشريع الداخلي و القانون الدولي نظرا لما لها من أهمية كبيرة كأساس للتنمية المستدامة، والعمل على خلق التوازن للنظام الأيكلوجي، والحفاظ على المناخ و التنوع البيولوجي، لذلك حظيت الغابة باهتمام كبير على صعيد التشريعات الداخلية كالقانون رقم21/23 المؤرخ في 23 ديسمبر 2023 والمتعلق بالغابات والثروات الغابية،كما للمؤتمرات العالمية دور لا يستهان به في مجال الحفاظ على الغابات و تثمين ثرواتها على الصعيد الدولي

الكلمات المفتاحية: الغابات، التشريع الجزائري، القانون الدولي.

Abstract:

This study aims to demonstrate the legal status of forests in domestic legislation and international law, given their significant importance as a foundation for sustainable development, working towards ecological system balance, and preserving climate and biodiversity. Forests have thus received significant attention in domestic legislations, such as Law No. 23/21 of December 23, 2023, related to forests and forest resources. Moreover, global conferences play a vital role in forest preservation and valuing their resources on the international stage.

Key words: Forests, Algerian Legislation, International Law**.**

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Introduction:

Forests contribute to mitigating the negative effects of climate change by creating a natural ecological balance between living animal and plant species.

Therefore, the Algerian legislator has worked diligently to provide legal provisions that ensure their protection from the violations they face, as well as to support their sustainability for future generations, especially considering the renewable energy resources they provide.

Forests are considered one of the most important renewable natural resources that contribute, directly or indirectly, to the continuity of life on Earth, due to their role in maintaining the natural ecological balance, supporting the national economy with various natural products like wood, water, meat, and fruits.

This has led Algeria to follow the example of other countries that have focused on valuing this important natural resource by issuing several legal provisions. Notably, the most recent amendment to the Forest Law No. 23/21, dated December 23, 2023, related to forests and forest resources.

Forests are not merely vast green covers; they offer significant ecological, economic, and social benefits. They prevent soil degradation and erosion, protect water springs, and maintain mountain stability.

Forests are also a natural habitat for animals and plants, housing two-thirds of the Earth's species. Therefore, they help protect biodiversity from extinction and contribute as a source of energy and raw materials.

Despite the essential roles' forests play, they have been subjected to harmful practices that violate conservation and protection rules, such as the expansion of pastures, over-exploitation of their resources, soil erosion, desertification, and the widespread phenomenon of large fires.

Given these diverse factors, Algeria recognized the need to improve the forestry sector and give it special attention and care.

Did the Algerian legislator succeed in providing a special legal system for forests that is sufficient to protect and preserve them from all threats and ensure their sustainability for future generations, in line with the provisions of international agreements?

This study aims to examine the adequacy and effectiveness of Algerian legal provisions in valuing, preserving, and protecting forests.

addressing the main challenges that hinder the guarantee of continued benefits for future generations, while highlighting the status of forests in international law and the role of international agreements in establishing legal protection for them.

We will attempt to answer this question by reviewing the most important legal provisions outlined in this law, which provides special protection for forests and forest resources, and the provisions found in international conventions.

1- Chapter 1: The Nature of Forests in Domestic Legislation and International Law:

Due to the importance of forests, international efforts have intensified to reduce the risk of indiscriminate use and exploitation of natural resources.

Most countries, including Algeria, have adopted the concept of sustainable development as a fundamental basis for environmental protection, especially in light of the developmental challenges resulting from irrational economic development.

These challenges have caused significant risks leading to environmental and health degradation, which has affected the earth's ability to renew its resources.

This has necessitated the exploration of ways to rationalize human interaction with the environment to ensure that future generations can benefit from its resources.

Section 1: Definition of Forests in Algerian Legislation

A forest is defined as a biological community of trees, shrubs, plants, and animals that coexist or are complexly integrated with the environment, including the soil, climate, and related physiological sciences[1] .

It is also defined as a balanced and integrated life unit containing a variety of trees, shrubs, plants, and many different animals and insects[2] .

Additionally, it has been defined as a plant gathering consisting of one or more species of trees, shrubs, or herbaceous plants in pure or mixed form, with a shrub density of no less than 10%, whether this gathering is natural or planted[3] .

It is also described as a vast area.

Subsection 2: The Legal Definition

The Algerian legislator has given significant attention to forests, providing them with a special definition within the legislative system. According to Article 20 of Law 23/21, dated December 23, 2023, concerning forests and forest resources, a forest is defined as

: "Any land, regardless of its legal nature, covered with forest species in the form of a forest gathering with a density of no less than 100 trees per hectare in dry and semi-dry areas, and 300 trees per hectare in humid and semi-humid areas.

This gathering consists of one or more types of forests, either naturally occurring or through afforestation or reforestation, and spans an area of 10 hectares or more in one piece[4]"

From this article, we infer that the Algerian legislator has based the definition of forests on two main criteria:

A/ Geographic and Climatic Criterion

B/ Numerical Criterion (number of trees)

Section 2: The Definition of Forests in International Law and the Early International Interest

International law does not define forests; rather, many international conventions have focused on outlining procedures for their protection and conservation.

However, there are some conventions that have defined forests, as well as some international organizations, as will be clarified.

Subsection 1: The Definition of Forests in International Law.

The UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) Conference of the Parties, in its seventh session, defined a forest as land with a minimum area of 0.5 to

1.0 hectares, covered by trees at a density of 10-30%, with trees potentially reaching a minimum height of 2-5 meters at maturity[5].

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines forests as land covering more than 0.5 hectares with trees taller than 5 meters, with a canopy cover exceeding 10%, or trees capable of reaching this height at the site. It does not include agricultural land or land used for urban purposes[6.]

Subsection 2: Early International Interest in Forests

Forests have received significant attention in international law, with increased awareness of their role in maintaining ecological balance. Starting in 1907, international recognition grew regarding the scarcity of natural resources and the environmental damage caused by waste production, which negatively affected human life and other living organisms, as acknowledged by some international organizations.

This situation led to higher emissions of gases causing environmental problems, impacting the Earth's climate due to the actions of major nations.

This poses a threat to forests, which are the only ecosystems capable of mitigating the greenhouse effect by absorbing carbon dioxide[7.]

Thus, preserving forests became a priority at the international level. This priority was clearly reflected in the call for international conferences and the signing of treaties, starting with the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the 1982 World Charter for Nature, and culminating in the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Conference, which marked a significant turning point.

The conference helped shed light on the importance of forests and their role in achieving environmental sustainability.

This led to the 1994 International Tropical Timber Conference and continued international efforts to preserve sustainable forest heritage, including organizing exploitation processes and establishing protective principles[8.]

Chapter 2: Legal Protection Frameworks for Forests in Algerian Legislation and International Law

Domestic legislation, including Algerian law, has given significant attention to forests, enacting legal provisions to establish frameworks for legal protection at the national level. Additionally, forests have garnered international attention through conferences and the signing of general and specialized treaties, as will be clarified below.

Section 1: Protection of Forests in Algerian Legislation

The Forest Law 23/21, dated December 23, 2023, concerning forests and forest resources, represents a real turning point in giving forests more attention and providing more effective legal protection than was provided under previous laws.

As a result, forests have received both special protection and general protection, as established by environmental laws.

Subsection 1: General Protection under Law 03/10

The Algerian legislator has issued numerous legal texts to regulate forest resources, manage them, and ensure their existence and continuity for future generations.

Among the most important of these texts is Law No. 03-10, which concerns environmental protection within the framework of sustainable development[9.]

This law incorporates environmental aspects into sustainable development, ensuring that the needs of future generations are met.

This approach has positively influenced other legislative texts issued or amended thereafter, which have a direct or indirect connection to forest resources.

In this context, the legislator has surrounded the issue of forest resource sustainability with a series of measures to prevent risks that could cause long-term damage to forest resources, which may be irreversible and affect the rights of future generations.

Among the most important of these measures are the prevention of fires, prevention of diseases, and administrative control over forests.

Law 03/10 introduced key general principles aimed at protecting the environment, including forests and forest products.

These principles are drawn from international environmental agreements that emphasize the need to prioritize environmental protection within domestic laws.

1. Principle of Preserving Forest Biodiversity:

Biodiversity is defined as "the variation of living organisms from all sources, including terrestrial, marine, and aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are part, including the diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems[10].."

2. Principle of Non-Degradation of Natural Resources (Forest Resources):

This principle aims to avoid damage to natural resources such as water, air, land, and subsoil, as they are integral parts of the development process. They must not be treated in isolation when achieving sustainable development[11.]

3. Principle of Preventive Activity and Prioritization of Correcting Environmental Damage at the Source:

This involves using the best available techniques at an acceptable economic cost to prevent or correct environmental damage before it occurs[12.]

4. Principle of Integration:

Environmental protection measures should be integrated with other processes that are less harmful to the environment, even if these measures are more costly, as long as they align with environmental values[13.]

5. Principle of Substitution:

This involves replacing harmful environmental activities with those that are less harmful. The chosen alternative should, even if costly, be suitable for the environmental values being protected.

6. Principle of Preventive Action and Prioritization of Correcting Environmental Damage at the Source:

The aim is to use the best available techniques to correct environmental damage at the source and ensure that individuals whose activities might cause significant environmental harm consider the interests of others before acting[14]

7. Precautionary Principle:

The precautionary principle is based on the need for scientific information that encourages countries and decision-makers to take necessary precautions against potential

damages that may or may not occur[15]. This means addressing unknown or poorly understood risks[16].

These principles are considered to emerge from the Rio Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, where the Algerian legislator was influenced by the declarations of principles adopted by this global conference, which seeks to draw up international legal frameworks for countries to follow in order to maintain ecological balance and achieve sustainable development.

Subsection 2: Forest Protection under Law 23/21 Concerning Forests and Forest Resources

Law No. 23/21, dated December 23, 2023, concerns forests and forest resources and aims to provide a more effective legal framework for forest protection than previous laws. This law addresses both special and general protection measures for forests, taking into account environmental and sustainable development goals.

The law 23/21 related to forests and forest wealth was issued on December 23, 2023, and it represents a long-awaited legal gain to reconsider the old forest legislation that no longer keeps pace with developments in terms of protection frameworks and their implementation methods.

The goal of this law is to define and regulate the legal rules related to the management, protection, expansion, and development of national forest wealth within the framework of sustainable development, the exploitation of forests and forested lands, and their protection from all forms of erosion and landslides.

It also aims to protect wildlife and plants, preserve lands, combat desertification, and enhance forests and forest resources with the contribution of other sectors[17].

This law includes a section on general provisions, the second chapter deals with the management of public forest property and sustainable management of national forest wealth, the third chapter addresses the protection of national forest wealth, the fourth chapter concerns the enhancement of forests, while the fifth chapter outlines criminal provisions[18]

Section 02: Forest Protection in International Law

Forests have received special protection at the international law level, and it is evident that this protection is derived from the texts of specific and general international environmental agreements, as well as decisions and principles from global conference declarations held on this matter.

Sub-Section 01: Forest Protection in International Agreements

International agreements have played a significant role in forest protection. Among these agreements are, for example:

1. Ramsar Convention 1971

The Ramsar Convention was adopted to classify wetland areas. It is the first modern convention aimed at preserving natural resources globally and conserving wetlands worldwide, protecting biodiversity, and ensuring their sustainable use[19]

It was adopted on February 2, 1971, in Ramsar, Iran, and entered into force on December 21, 1975.

Its main goal, according to the increasing loss of wetland areas, is to promote conservation and rational use of wetlands through actions taken at the national or regional

level[20]

After studies by UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the importance of wetlands as natural habitats for waterfowl threatened by urban and agricultural expansion was confirmed.

Due to their ecological functions as regulators of water systems and habitats for plant and animal life, especially for swimming waterfowl, the convention obligates its parties to designate important wetland areas.

2. UNESCO World Heritage Convention 1972

This convention was adopted on November 16, 1972. 190 countries have joined this agreement, which is known as the "World Heritage Convention.

" Currently, the list includes 157 countries and 962 sites, divided as follows: 745 cultural sites, 188 natural sites, and 29 mixed sites.

The UNESCO Convention is unprecedented because it combines the concepts of natural protection and preservation of cultural sites in a single document[21].

3. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) 1973

The CITES convention was signed in Washington on March 3, 1973, amended on June 22, 1979, and amended again in Gaborone on April 30, 1983.

The agreement entered into force on July 1, 1975, and has since been amended, with 157 countries currently participating. This convention regulates international trade in species of wild animals and plants, including the export and retrieval of live and dead animals, plants, parts, and derivatives.

These annexes are as follows:

A. Annex I: Contains species of animals and plants threatened with extinction, which are only permitted under exceptional circumstances. These species are strictly regulated, and the list includes 800 animals and plants.

B. Annex II: Covers species that are not currently threatened with extinction but require trade regulation to prevent their extinction.

C. Annex III: Includes species subject to regulation in the territories of a party state to the International Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The annex lists of the International Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora are important for protecting species from extinction and preserving biodiversity[22].

Additionally, only 26 types of trees are used for their timber, some of which have medicinal purposes. However, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity emphasized that some forest trees may be threatened due to underutilization and international trade.

This convention aims to contribute to biodiversity conservation by supporting the Council of Europe in establishing the European Nature Conservation Committee and managing environmental resources to combat the threats to wildlife and their natural habitats through cooperation.

Second Section: International Forest Protection in Global Conferences

The main international conferences that have granted international protection to forests include:

First: The Rio de Janeiro Conference, 1992

The Rio Conference took place from June 3 to June 14, 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and is known as the "Earth Summt[23].

" It is one of the most significant international events in environmental protection and the development of international environmental law by formulating its basic principles.

The reasons for holding this conference included protecting the atmosphere and the ozone layer, combating deforestation, addressing desertification, and preserving biodiversity.

The Rio Forestry Conference aims to achieve the following goals:

- Protecting forests and ensuring the continuity of their environmental, economic and social services.
- Ensuring that forests are used in a sustainable manner.
- Reducing the rate of deforestation and rehabilitating degraded lands.
- Strengthening international cooperation in the field of forest protection

The conference led to a series of agreements, including:

- **The Convention on Biological Diversity**: This aims to protect endangered animal and plant species.
- **Earth Climate Convention**: This relates to climate change and combating the rise in temperatures by reducing the emission of greenhouse gases that cause global warming.
- **Forest Treaty**: Aims to preserve and protect green spaces, whether tropical or temperate.

The Earth Charter and the Agenda for the 21st Century also emerged from this conference, both addressing a set of humanitarian and legal measures aimed at protecting the environment, including biodiversity.

The Forest Protection Charter emphasized that maintaining the integrity of ecosystems is the foundation of protecting biodiversity elements. Since forests are home to many living organisms, their protection is essential for preserving and safeguarding biodiversity[24]

Second: Johannesburg Conference, 2002

The World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from August 26 to September 4, 2002[25]. The conference was convened due to gaps identified in the results of the Agenda 21, which included 54 recommendations and objectives aimed at reconciling economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice[26].

It also sought to achieve the proposals outlined in the agenda 21.

It was considered the largest and first UN environmental conference of the 21st century, reaffirming the world's commitment to sustainable development and the need to continue the global movement for environmental protection and ensuring a better future for future generations.

Its goals include eliminating poverty, protecting natural resources, and changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

These goals are fundamental requirements for achieving sustainable development. The conference covered numerous documents and reports on various topics revolving around

sustainable development, though the principles of the conference would address environmental issues[27].

Third Section: The Role of International Organizations in Forest Protection

International specialized and non-governmental organizations, alongside the United Nations, have contributed significantly to mitigating the risks threatening forests.

Their efforts include conducting specialized studies, issuing guidelines, regulations, and recommendations to address these challenges.

First: Specialized International Organizations

Specialized international organizations, in collaboration with the United Nations, play an essential role in forest protection and promoting sustainable development.

Among these organizations:

1. The World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO works diligently to assist developing countries in combating epidemic diseases and reducing high mortality rates.

The organization assesses the health impacts of pollution and other environmental hazards, establishing standards that define the maximum levels of human exposure to such pollutants, as stipulated in Article 19 of its Constitution[28].

The WHO has developed a global strategy that serves as a comprehensive framework for the international community's response to protecting health from climate change. This strategy includes[29]:

1. Providing technical expertise on health-related issues raised during discussions at Conferences of the Parties (COP) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
2. Participating in the Nairobi Work Programme, organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) under the UNFCCC.
3. Collaborating with other specialized agencies and programs, such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to implement projects that deliver enhanced health-related information, guidance, and public health protection.
4. Partnering with the UNDP on a project to establish a specialized system for health protection in the context of climate change, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). This projectis being implemented acrossseven countries worldwide.

2. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The FAO is a specialized intergovernmental organization under the United Nations, established in 1945. Its primary role is to ensure food production and agriculture while achieving the goals of self-sufficiency and food security[30].

Its main functions in the field of forestry include:

- Developing a global strategy for sustainable forest management.

To this end, the Forestry Department was established alongside the Committee on Forestry to work towards balancing environmental and social considerations with the economic demands for forest products.

- Assisting countries in developing, coordinating, planning, and implementing their forestry programs.

The FAO's specialization in forest management is carried out through several bodies under its supervision, including:

1. **The Committee on Forestry (COFO):**

This committee aims to protect forests of all types[31].

2. **The Near East Forestry and Range Commission:**

3. Established in 1953, this commission is one of the FAO's regional forestry committees. Its objectives include:

o Providing a policy forum to discuss and address forestry-related issues at a regional level.

3. The World Forestry Congress

The World Forestry Congress is a major global forum that brings together all stakeholders concerned with forests. It is organized periodically every six years.

The first congress was held in 1926 by the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome.

Since 1946, the FAO has taken responsibility for organizing the World Forestry Congresses, following its assumption of the functions of the International Institute of Agriculture[32].

Second: International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Among the NGOs that have contributed to forest conservation are:

1. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN):

Established in 1997 under the auspices of UNESCO, the IUCN is headquartered in Switzerland. It is the only environmental institution with observer status in the United Nations and is dedicated to the protection of the world's natural resources[33].

The union represents a unique partnership of states, government institutions, and voluntary environmental organizations.

The IUCN has focused on forest conservation through its efforts to promote sustainable management of forest resources, notably via the World Conservation Congress.

In 2016, the Congress recommended ensuring forest conservation, including the preservation of their landscapes. Its objectives include:

- Encouraging committees to conserve primary forests.
- Highlighting the importance and benefits of primary forests.
- Raising awareness about the significance of forests.

2. Greenpeace:

It was established in 1971 and headquartered in Amsterdam, Netherlands, is an international non-profit organization dedicated to shifting public opinion and lifestyles toward environmentally sustainable practices and promoting peace.

The organization plays a pivotal role in environmental protection, summarized as follows:

- Advocating for a revolution in energy production and investment to address the most significant threats facing our planet, including the preservation of ancient forests and the defense of plants and animals.
- Protecting biodiversity in all its forms, preventing pollution, and safeguarding the Earth's land, air, oceans, and freshwater resources[34].

Conclusion:

Forest protection is the responsibility of everyone, both at the national and international levels, and thus national and international efforts must collaborate to provide some form of protection for them.

Countries have sought, through their internal legislation, to enact laws that provide legal protection due to the importance of forests in maintaining ecological balance in nature.

They thus serve as a unified force in combating global warming, preserving the climate, and safeguarding biodiversity.

At the international level, we must point out that despite the absence of an international agreement specifically for the protection of forests and forest wealth, there are international agreements for the protection of the environment that work to provide a type of international protection.

In addition to the various international conferences through which countries sought to create a kind of cooperation to preserve the forest, without forgetting the role of international and specialized international organizations and even non-governmental organizations that had a major role in preparing various studies and reports on forests.

From our study, we can conclude a set of results and suggestions, which can be summarized as follows:

First: Results

At the national level:

- **Rationalizing the irrational exploitation of forest resources** in line with the legislator's objectives of protecting the environment within the framework of sustainable development.
- **Clarifying the importance of forests** in human life and integrating them into educational curricula through academic subjects dedicated to them.
- **Implementing legal texts that protect forests** on the ground.
- **Supporting the departments responsible for managing and protecting forest wealth** with the necessary resources (material, human, and legal) to implement national plans for preserving current forest resources and working on their renewal to ensure their continuity for future generations.

At the international level:

- **The inadequacy of international legal mechanisms** capable of protecting and managing forests in a rational and wise manner due to the absence of a binding international agreement for forest protection.
- **Existence of obstacles and challenges** preventing the accountability of countries for their harmful actions toward forests, thus violating international rules that protect them.
- **The role of international conferences** in emphasizing the importance of forests and their close connection to the environment, which is why they have received protection as an essential resource for achieving sustainable development.

Second: Suggestions

- **The necessity of concluding an international agreement** specifically for forest protection, which embodies the principle of sustainable development and the sovereignty of states over their natural resources.

- **Activating the role of international organizations** in forest protection by intensifying reports on violations of forest protection rules at the international level.

At the national level, we suggest:

- **Raising awareness among individuals about the value of forest wealth** in both the short and long term and its impact on the ecosystem by instilling a sense of shared responsibility and encouraging solidarity and volunteerism to protect and preserve forest wealth, integrating it into educational curricula in schools.
- **Strengthening criminal penalties** for those violating forest protection laws by introducing prison sentences and financial fines.

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