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Forum on Forests



International Experts Meet to Consider Legal Options for Managing the World's Forests

(New York, 3 September 2004) – The world's forests continue to disappear at an alarming rate despite a host of mostly voluntary or non-binding regional agreements and international conventions. A new legally binding international convention on forests is one of the options proposed by countries which will be considered by experts at a United Nations meeting next week.

For example, according to Brazilian authorities earlier this year, destruction of the Amazon rainforest, the world's largest forest, occurred at a rate of over 40 square kilometers per day in 2003.

The meeting of more than 70 international experts to consider options for the future management of the world's forests will take place at United Nations Headquarters from 7 to 10 September 2004 as part of the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

Mr. Pekka Patosaari, the Coordinator and Head of the UNFF Secretariat points out that there are currently 40 legally binding instruments relevant to forests: 19 at the global level and 21 at the regional and sub-regional levels. These include international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International Tropical Timber Agreement, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

“All the 19 global instruments deal with forests only as part of another agenda or cover only part of the world. Three of the regional instruments deal exclusively with forests, while forests are a significant feature of several others,” comments Mr Patosaari.

Various options for a future international arrangement on forests have been proposed by countries ranging from further strengthening and improving the present international arrangement on forests, to the development of a new legally binding international convention on forests or to creating specific measures or protocols on forests under existing international treaties.

Management of the world's forests is essential for reducing poverty as well as for maintenance and conservation of natural habitats. The UNFF and the Johannesburg World Summit have recognized that sustainable forest management and strong international, regional and national action to implement this principle are of paramount importance to eradicating poverty, reducing deforestation, halting the loss of biodiversity, improving food security, increasing access to safe drinking water and affordable energy and in establishing sustainable land use practices.

The recommendations of the meeting of experts will be a valuable contribution to be considered by the United Nations Forum on Forests at its fifth session in May 2005.

The Forum was established in 2000 as an intergovernmental body to promote management, conservation and sustainable development of the world's forests and to strengthen political commitment to sustainable forest management worldwide. This meeting is the third in a series of ad hoc expert groups to provide scientific and technical advice to the Forum, which is a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

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