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**Panel Discussion of the Chairpersons of the Functional Commissions  
ECOSOC, Palais de Nations, Geneva, 7 July 2006, 3 – 6:00pm**

**United Nations Forum on Forests: People for Forests, Forests for People**

- ◆ Our focus is, and should be, an improved implementation of the development agenda. Forests play a crucial part in this agenda. The issues of poverty reduction and of deforestation both rank highly on the current international agenda, and are strongly interlinked. Poverty is seen as a cause of forest loss worldwide, and forest loss contributes toward maintaining or even increasing poverty. On the positive side of the equation, economic development and poverty reduction will help improve forest conditions, and vice-versa.
- ◆ According to the latest FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA, 2005), deforestation continues at an alarmingly high rate – about 13 million hectares per year. Sustainable management of forests (SFM) is a crucial method in our collective fight to alleviate poverty worldwide.
- ◆ The Conferences and Summits of the last fifteen years have provided the foundation for the work of the UN Forum on Forests. The implementation of decisions taken in Rio at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, as well as at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, is the primary goal of our process. In this sense, the Forum has aimed to put implementation of the UN Development Agenda at the forefront of all our work.

**Challenges Ahead**

- ◆ Having said this, the current system of international governance of forestry issues presents a range of challenges which need to be addressed, to fully capitalize on the possibility of strengthening the link between forest policy issues and the development agenda. In the context of today's session, I would like to share with you three key challenges which need our attention:
- ◆ *Challenge 1: Strengthening of international governance*  
In the field of SFM, there are many organizations engaged in international governance in many different places worldwide, sometimes with overlapping mandates and duplication of work and programmes. This is the same for more issues within the Development Agenda.

Improved cooperation, and coordination between the bureaus and the ECOSOC bureau, for example, via regular joined bureau meetings, as well as improved coordination and cooperation between governing bodies, could improve the

implementation of the different agendas, including our development agenda, and will improve coherence within the UN system.

◆ *Challenge 2: Strengthening of the use of resources*

The concern raised in the field of SFM is that the system as a whole seems to have substantial, though insufficient, resources, but the duplication and lack of coordination can mean that resources are not always used most efficiently. Multi-year programmes of work, interlinked with the development agenda, could and should strive for a more efficient and effective use of available resources. Coordinated implementation and coordinated review of the implementation should be a cornerstone in this respect.

◆ *Challenge 3: Strengthening of participation of civil society*

The institutions engaged in SFM are more or less designed to be state-centric. However, civil society actors, such as environmental NGOs and businesses, are playing an increasingly large role in forest issues worldwide. *NGOs* have played important roles in the preparation and implementation of many decisions of the Forum. Furthermore, the *private sector* is becoming increasingly engaged in forest issues through voluntary commitments and public-private partnerships. The challenge for the future is to be creative, and to create additional institutional space to allow these stakeholders to realize their full potential.

## **The Way Forward**

- ◆ In our efforts to reassess the effectiveness and focus of our work, as well as our methods of work, the UNFF, in its sixth session earlier this year, decided through a draft resolution for ECOSOC's consideration, to adopt four Global Objectives on Forests, the pursuit of which, we feel, provides a more clear and concise path toward the accomplishment of the development goals regarding environmental sustainability and poverty alleviation. These are:

a) Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management (SFM), including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation;

b) Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people;

c) Increase significantly the area of sustainably managed forests, including protected forests, and increase the proportion of forest products derived from sustainably managed forests; and

d) Reverse the decline in official development assistance for SFM and mobilize significantly increased new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management.

- ◆ Member States also added three new principal functions to the mandate of the Forum, one of which is to enhance the contribution of forests to the achievement of internationally-agreed development goals, including the MDGs. The UNFF seeks to adjust its focus to changing needs and aligns its priorities with those of the international development agenda.
- ◆ In order to effectively deliver on the mandate and functions of the Forum, the Forum will adopt a new dynamic multi-year programme of work in its next session in April 2007, for the period ending in 2015. The Forum puts high value on enhanced cooperation and policy and programme coordination. I am confident that the new multi-year programme of work of the Forum would adequately reflect the spirit of the outcome of the World Summit and guidance of the Council.
- ◆ I would also like to take this opportunity to inform the Council that the Forum has agreed, in its draft resolution for ECOSOC's consideration, to conclude and adopt a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests in the Forum's seventh session in 2007. The finalization of these deliberations next April would strengthen the International Arrangement on Forests considerably. In light of the challenges addressed earlier, several tasks will need to be carried out to secure long-term political commitment to the realm of forestry and development. This will support the implementation of the development agenda even more strongly. Increased participation of stakeholders is essential to increased financing for SFM from a variety of sources. A shared idea on the strengthening of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its governing bodies is instrumental to the implementation of SFM. And lastly, to address the coherence challenge I briefly touched upon earlier, improved coordination mechanisms are needed amongst international organizations, with a mandate on forests and development.

### **A Last Word**

- ◆ I have focused my attention in this brief introduction on the most important steps that need to and can be taken in the short-term, to link UNFF more effectively and efficiently to the development agenda.
- ◆ On this note, we strongly support the decision of the General Assembly which calls upon ECOSOC to hold a Development Cooperation Forum biennially. The UNFF has traditionally reviewed cooperation among implementing agencies working on forest issues. I am certain that if the Development Cooperation Forums are held during the same years that the UNFF will hold its global meetings, we would be able to contribute assessments of such cooperation, to be further discussed during ECOSOC. Along the same lines, our planned biennial Ministerial sessions would undoubtedly be able to transmit messages on the

implementation of various aspects of our mandate to the Annual Ministerial Review.

- ◆ In addition, we strongly support the prospect of working closely with other Functional Commissions to enhance the understanding of our mutually inter-related concerns. We have already established a relationship with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, with our Chairs periodically addressing each other's sessions, and we would welcome increased collaboration with other Commissions.