



UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS

Global Partnership: For Forests, For People

Fact sheet 1

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a growing concern around the world about the state of the world's forests and the alarming rates of deforestation in some countries. In 1992, heads of State met at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the "Earth Summit", in Rio de Janeiro. High on their agenda was the issue of forests and deforestation. However, at the Earth Summit, the hoped-for legally binding instrument on forests similar to conventions on climate change, biological diversity and desertification could not be launched. Nonetheless, at the Summit, the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests was adopted by more than 178 Governments together with Agenda 21, which included a chapter commonly referred to as Chapter 11 on Combating Deforestation. The guiding objective of these principles is to contribute to the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests and to provide for their multiple and complementary functions and uses.

Significant progress has been made since the Earth Summit. Following the Earth Summit, the United Nations established the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and its successor, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), to implement the Forest Principles and Chapter 11 of Agenda 21. From 1995 to 2000, the IPF/IFF processes dealt with such issues as the underlying causes of deforestation, traditional forest-related knowledge, international cooperation in financial assistance and technology transfer, the development of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, and trade and environment. The IPF/IFF processes resulted in a comprehensive set of 270 proposals for action for the promotion of the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

The creation of the United Nations Forum on Forests

It became evident that the international dialogue on forests needed a more permanent home. Governments were looking for a forum that would address all issues related to forests in a coherent and comprehensive manner and a forum that would facilitate the exchange of experiences in the implementation of sustainable forest management practices by Governments and stakeholders. In 2000, the United Nations Economic and Social Council established the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF).

Within UNFF, three broad constituencies are central to the Forum's work: the member States of UNFF, major intergovernmental agencies working in forest issues and the major groups as defined in Agenda 21.

When UNFF was established, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) was also formed to cooperate on forest issues and support the work of the UNFF. The Partnership is currently composed of 14 international organizations (see box).



How does UNFF work?

UNFF meets annually for two weeks. All Member States of the United Nations and States members of specialized agencies participate in the annual sessions. At each UNFF session, countries voluntarily report on their efforts to implement the IPF/IFF proposals for action. Together with analytical and substantive reports presented at each session, this national reporting results in:

- ❖ Assessments of progress in implementation;
- ❖ Analyses of lessons learned;
- ❖ Identification of gaps and obstacles at the country level;
- ❖ Catalysing enhanced cooperation and coordination on forests among government agencies and other stakeholders in the country;
- ❖ Increased understanding of emerging and urgent issues affecting forests all around the world.

In 2005, UNFF will review the effectiveness of its work and consider future actions on forests.

In the interval between annual sessions, UNFF organizes “intersessional” meetings—ad hoc expert group meetings. The meetings deliberate and provide advice on scientific and technical issues related to forests, as well as advancing the objectives of UNFF. So far, UNFF has held two ad hoc expert groups to support the work of the Forum, and it will hold a third in September 2004.

The three expert groups cover the following topics:

- ❖ Approaches and mechanisms for monitoring, assessment and reporting;
- ❖ Finance and transfer of environmentally sound technologies;
- ❖ Consideration with a view to recommending the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests.

UNFF also welcomes and encourages initiatives by countries and CPF members to organize expert group meetings in support of UNFF, where complex and politically sensitive issues are discussed and analysed and tabled at UNFF sessions for further deliberations and decisions. These expert group meetings are referred to as Country-led Initiatives.

Who participates in UNFF?

Active participation of a wide range of forest-related stakeholders in UNFF activities is key to sustainable management of forests. Governments, international organizations, instruments and processes, and civil society are actively involved in UNFF and its programmes.

Members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests

Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)
International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO)
Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
Secretariat of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF)
Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)
Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFFS)
Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF)
World Bank
World Conservation Union (IUCN)