



**African Agriculture in the 21st Century:
Meeting the Challenges, Making a Sustainable Green Revolution**

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H. E. Ms. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Minister of Environment and Tourism of Namibia,

H.E. Ms. Gerda Verburg, Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality of the Netherlands,

H.E. Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor to participate in this High-Level Meeting in support of the Commission on Sustainable Development and to have the opportunity to address this distinguished audience. I would like to thank the Government of Namibia for their gracious hospitality; it is my first time here and I am confident that our surroundings will inspire us and contribute to our successful discussions. On a personal note, having grown up here in Africa, it is always a pleasure to be back on the continent that I still consider home.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The global agriculture sector is currently facing tremendously difficult choices: how to increase productivity and competitiveness, while facing a financial, food and environmental crisis; how to be profitable and alleviate poverty. Balancing these choices is particularly difficult in the African context. While short term solutions might focus on maximizing profit over long term sustainability; I am convinced that integrating sustainable forest management throughout the continent is part of the long term solution and will put Africa in its rightful place as a leader in greening the globe.

At the last session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, reflected his concern over unsustainable land use. Agricultural productivity is slowing, soils are becoming depleted and less fertile, water is growing scarcer, and good agricultural land is being degraded and lost to other uses. The Secretary-General also emphasized the need to prepare our agricultural systems to withstand the effects of climate change, to prevent impacts on agricultural and land productivity, especially in Africa. Side by side, our global forest cover continues to decrease at an alarming rate, often due to unsustainable management and strong competition from other land uses.

In this context, I would like to touch upon the connections between forests and agricultural land, and the work of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF). Land fertility is dependent directly and indirectly upon trees and forests, and sustainable forest management translates into sustainable farming and sustainable livelihoods. UNFF was established to promote sustainable forest management for all types of forests around the world. The Forum has universal membership of the 192 countries in the UN - and countries from Africa have always led the way in their support of global forest issues. One of the themes for the Forum's upcoming session taking place in New York from 20 April to 1 May this year is "Forests in a

changing environment”. This theme covers three interlinked sub-themes: “Forests and climate change”, “Reversing the loss of forest cover, preventing forest degradation in all types of forests and combating desertification, including low forest cover countries” and “Forests and biodiversity conservation, including protected areas”.

As you know, climate change and human-induced land use changes, such as deforestation and forest degradation, act synergistically in affecting forests and their biodiversity. Green house gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation can contribute to climate change, just as sustainable management of forests can help mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration. We believe sustainable management and conservation of forests is a prerequisite for protecting much of our planet’s terrestrial biodiversity.

Deforestation and forest degradation, interacting with global warming, generally leads to land degradation and, subsequently, to desertification. The socio-economic impacts of these environmental changes can be devastating, causing loss of productivity, greater food insecurity, displacement of populations, social instability and social unrest and conflict, among many others. This was well captured in the 2008 Beijing Statement on Combating Desertification and Promoting Sustainable Development which underlined that desertification is a global issue, with serious implications for worldwide eco-safety, food security, socio-economic stability, and sustainable development. We are currently working closely with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification on these issues.

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In April 2007, a historic step was taken by the Forum with the adoption of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests, which we call the forest instrument, and subsequently adopted, by the General Assembly in December 2007. The Forest Instrument is a significant political commitment to achieving global sustainable forest management. Building on 16 years of negotiations in the intergovernmental forest policy process, the forest instrument seeks to achieve four Global Objectives on Forests, which provide a framework for national action and international cooperation. These four Objectives are to: 1) reverse the loss of forest cover and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation; 2) enhance multiple benefits derived from forests and improve livelihoods of forest-dependent people; 3) increase protected and other areas under sustainable forest management and the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests; and 4) reverse the decline of official development assistance and mobilize new and additional financial resources for sustainable forest management.

It is clear to us that unless the Forest Instrument is effectively implemented, it will have no value. And for its effective implementation, we need means of implementation – in particular, financial resources. In this regard, I would like to call your attention to the second and perhaps, most important issue on the agenda for the upcoming UNFF session - “Means of implementation for sustainable forest management”. The Forum is poised to take a decision on a financing architecture for sustainable forest management. To prepare for this issue, a country-led initiative (as an international expert meeting) and an open-ended ad hoc expert group were held late last year.

In September 2008, the Government of Suriname, together with the Netherlands and the United States, organized a Country-Led Initiative on Financing for Sustainable Forest Management in Paramaribo. This international meeting, attended by some 230 forest and finance experts, discussed opportunities to significantly enhance financing for sustainable forest management. It concluded that there was an urgent need for financing from all sources, with official development assistance playing a catalytic role; a need to focus on building an enabling policy, legal and institutional environment at national and sub-national levels; and a need for more coherence and streamlining of mechanisms, procedures and processes.

Two months later, in Vienna, the Forum convened an open-ended ad hoc expert group to Develop Proposals for the Development of a Voluntary Global Financial Mechanism/Portfolio Approach/Forest Financing Framework. It was attended by 128 participants from 62 Member States, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and other Intergovernmental Organizations, UNFF-recognized regional organizations/processes, Treaty Body Secretariats and Major Groups representatives. The experts recommended the consideration of two main concepts for financing for forests: a dedicated forest fund and a facilitative mechanism.

Experts at the Vienna meeting noted that there are significant funding gaps in financial flows in support of sustainable forest management and recognized additional challenges presented by the recent downturn in the world economy. According to one estimate, opportunity costs of preventing deforestation or forest degradation, coupled with investments needed to manage existing forests sustainably, will cost about US\$20 billion per year. This estimate did not include the investment costs of afforestation and reforestation.

In geographical terms, funding gaps include low forest cover countries, some countries with high or medium forest cover, many small or medium-sized countries with large forests and Small Island Developing States. It was noted that Africa is lagging behind other regions in this regard.

There was considerable discussion about the potential funding of sustainable forest management through mechanisms currently under consideration related to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD). Experts highlighted the importance of ensuring that these mechanisms, while achieving their primary aim of mitigating climate change, also recognize the holistic concept of sustainable forest management which incorporates adaptation benefits from forests. Some experts noted that considerable uncertainties remain on technical aspects and tenure arrangements, in terms of a potential development of a market that generates revenue for sustainable forest management. We are pleased to work in close partnership with the United Nations Convention to Combat Climate Change in addressing these issues.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Forum's new multi-year programme of work sets out the framework and timeline for the implementation of the forest instrument. As you know, one of the new working modalities of the Forum is to have biennial sessions and this has made our intersessional activities all the more important. I have to recognize, in particular, the growing importance of Country- and Region-Led initiatives in support of the Forum's work. I referred earlier to the Paramaribo Country-Led Initiative, but I would now like to mention our appreciation for the Government of the neighboring Republic of South Africa for hosting together with Switzerland the Durban Country-Led Initiative on forest governance and decentralization in April last year. The meeting was very well attended and focused on experiences and lessons learned on broader governance reforms in the forest sector in Africa.

Through its new work programme, the Forum has further enhanced its regional component. Forest issues are a high priority in the work of many African regional organizations. Significant attention is being drawn to the region's challenges and priorities on sustainable forest management, as well as approaches in forest policy integration to achieve sustainable development and address poverty concerns. More than 29 regional groups provided substantive input to the upcoming UNFF session, and a majority of these inputs were from Africa.

In this regard, key aspects in support of African development have been brought to the Forum's attention by, among others, the FAO African Forestry and Wildlife Commission, the AFF, the Southern African Development Community, the COMIFAC and the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. The UN Economic

Commission for Africa provided a thorough report linking forests to their work on combating land degradation undertaken with NEPAD, as well as related efforts to achieve the MDG goal on ensuring environmental sustainability. In other cases, forests were addressed with other regional priorities. The Community of Sahel- Saharan States, for instance, addressed the relationship between social migration and the pressures of desertification, forest degradation and climate change. The West African Economic and Monetary Union highlighted impacts from desertification on the production of food and the rise of food insecurity. It is our intention to host a panel event during our upcoming UNFF session to present these rich and diverse regional and sub-regional perspectives and experiences related to forests.

Let me close by reaffirming my conviction that Africa has and will continue to play a very important role in the global forest policy process; and in this spirit I wish us all success in our deliberations.

Thank you.