



International Symposium on Sustainable Forest Management

Presentation by Mr. Peter Csoka
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Madam Chair, Distinguished Experts, Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to participate in this International Symposium, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to inform you about some recent developments in the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) process.

I think we can all agree that 2007 was a pinnacle year for forests in the global arena. We witnessed a number of remarkable developments, from the adoption of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI) by the UN General Assembly, to the Bali Action Plan, and the Sydney APEC Leaders' Declaration on Climate Change, Energy Security and Clean Development, to mention just a few.

These landmark agreements are not ends in themselves, but rather, represent new opportunities with prospects and benefits for the entire international community. The recent launch of the Asia-Pacific Network (APFNet) for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation is an excellent example of building on these opportunities. It is a strong demonstration of the commitment and resolve in the region towards enhancing capacity-building and strengthening information-sharing in the forest sector. It also signals the region's willingness to seek new and innovative forms of international cooperation to respond to global challenges of sustainable development and sustainable forest management. Here I would like to congratulate the Government of China, together with the Governments of the other co-sponsoring countries, upon the organization of this important meeting.

Madam Chair,

When looking at the three APFNet Objectives, we find very close links to the UNFF process. In this respect, I would like to highlight recent relevant developments of the Forum, and also take this opportunity to invite the APFNet to consider its potential role in contributing to the implementation of the NLBI and the Forum's Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW).

One of the key developments in the UNFF process was the long-awaited adoption of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI). Although the NLBI is not binding in legal terms, it is a significant message of the strong political commitment towards achieving sustainable forest management. Building on years of negotiations in the intergovernmental forest

policy process, the Instrument seeks to achieve the four Global Objectives on Forests, which were first adopted at the sixth session of UNFF, and seeks to provide a framework for national action and international cooperation. These four Objectives aim 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 SFM 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 SFM.

Clearly, there are similarities between the Global Objectives and those of the APFNet which provide us with opportunities to conduct our work in a complimentary manner that would benefit both processes. For example, UNFF Global Objective 1 and APFNet Objective I both focus on SFM in order to increase forest cover and prevent forest degradation. One clear feature in the Network Objective, which could contribute to the Forum's work, is the target of increasing forest cover in the APEC region by at least 20 million hectares by 2020. Progress on this target would be a valuable input from the APEC region to UNFF11 in 2015, when the Forum will be reviewing progress towards the achievement of the Global Objectives. With this in mind, I would also envisage meaningful input deriving from progress on the other APFNet Objectives, since these also set similar aims, as contained in the Global Objectives.

The UNFF work programme, as outlined in the MYPOW, sets out the framework and timeline for operationalizing the Instrument. As you know, one of the new working modalities of the Forum is to have biennial sessions. This has made it all the more important for the Forum to find new and innovative ways to discuss and advance critical policy matters, and effectively support implementation through intersessional activities. In view of this, I have to recognize, in particular, the growing importance of Country- and Region-Led initiatives in support of the Forum's work.

This year, the Forum has benefited from three such initiatives, all of which have proved to be extremely valuable. The first meeting was held in January 2008, in Geneva, and was the first-ever Region-Led Initiative. This meeting focused on regional matters and offered a timely opportunity to share perspectives on interaction and cooperation. It also helped to distill a rich blend of views on regional priorities and challenges related to SFM, as well as opinions on how to integrate Forum topics into regional discussions, and the modalities for regional inputs to the Forum.

The second meeting, held in April in Durban, South Africa, was a Country-Led Initiative on forest governance and decentralization. This was the third in a series of events dealing with this subject - this time with a strong focus on Africa. The meeting created intense interest in the region on this issue, and was very well attended by experts from Member States, international organizations and civil society, and focused on experiences and lessons learned on broader governance reforms in the forest sector in Africa.

The third meeting, the Country-Led Initiative on financing for SFM, was just held this month in Suriname. It was attended by over 200 participants and addressed by the Presidents of Suriname and Guyana. It included a series of presentations from recognized experts, and resulted in a non-

negotiated co-chairs' summary. The meeting identified key challenges of SFM, including the main obstacles and underlying causes of loss or degradation of forest resources. It also put forward options to aid in the design of a potential conceptual framework for a portfolio approach on financing SFM.

The UNFF website includes links to the outcome documents of all the Country- and Region-Led initiatives. I would encourage you to consult these websites, where a wealth of information in the form of presentations, background papers and meeting reports is made available. We also hope these reports will be presented to the UN officially, and thus be made available in all languages as official meeting documents for the eighth session of the Forum.

The Forum has a multitude of issues to discuss at its next session, and the above Initiatives play a crucial role in contributing to the preparations for the discussion at UNFF8 in 2009. As decided by the MYPOW, the Forum will discuss means of implementation for SFM, with a particular emphasis on the politically sensitive issue of finance. To prepare for the discussions on finance, the Secretariat invited members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) with robust experience and expertise in the subject to form an Advisory Group on Finance. This Group includes FAO, the GEF, ITTO, the UNFCCC Secretariat and the World Bank, besides our Secretariat. Its main focus is to help develop proposals for a voluntary global financing mechanism/ portfolio approach/ forest financing framework, and to support the preparations for the Forum's open-ended Ad Hoc Expert Group (AHEG) meeting, to be held from 10 - 14 November 2008, in Vienna, Austria.

As part of these preparations, the Advisory Group conducted an analysis reviewing those existing and newly-emerging funding mechanisms with potential to address the provisions of the NLBI. The preliminary findings of this analysis were presented at the Country-Led Initiative in Suriname, for feedback and further input from experts participating in that meeting. The complete study will be made available on the UNFF website in October.

At the eighth session of the Forum, the discussions on finance will be center stage, together with the second overall theme of the session - "Forests in a changing environment" - which encompasses issues related to climate change, biodiversity, deforestation and desertification. This presents the Forum with the opportunity to reinforce its interactions with several other processes and sectors, while being mindful of also linking efforts to contribute to the internationally agreed development goals.

The timing of these negotiations is particularly relevant: as the only session within the time-frame of the Bali Action Plan of UNFCCC; as the only session before the review of the 2010 biodiversity target at COP10 of the CBD and the celebration of the International Year of Biodiversity; and as the first session after the adoption of the ten-year Strategy of the UNCCD the eighth session could provide an opportunity to contribute to these processes.

To illustrate the complexity of the UNFF8 discussions, let me mention that the pre-session forecast totals 23 documents: nine official Secretary-General Reports, the provisional agenda and annotations for UNFF8, the CPF Framework and 12 Secretariat notes. No other session of the Forum has ever required so many documents. The Secretariat has already begun to work on the

documentation for the three themes under “Forests in a Changing Environment”. Building on the close cooperation with the secretariats of the Rio Conventions and other CPF members, and benefiting from their technical and political expertise, the Forum Secretariat has carried out background analyses on several themes to help inform the UNFF8 Secretary-General Reports. As part of our information-gathering activities, we have also hosted a series of web-forums to enable open discussion and inputs on these themes. A diverse range of views was obtained through these web-forums, especially with input coming from major group representatives.

To help the Forum implement its primary task of reviewing progress, and to ensure that the experiences of Member States are fully utilized, the Forum Secretariat called for national reports on the implementation of the NLBI and the progress towards the achievement of the Global Objectives. This is in accordance with the monitoring, assessment and reporting tasks of the Forum’s MYPOW. In this respect, I would encourage those of you who still have not submitted your contribution, to do so, and to consider the signaled deadline of 30 September.

One new element in UNFF8 is the addition of the regional component, through the call for regional and sub-regional inputs and the organization of dialogues on regional priorities. The Secretariat has prepared a suggested format to facilitate voluntary submissions of information by regional instruments, processes and organizations, which is expected to showcase new approaches in forest policy integration, and experiences in SFM implementation. APFNet’s work would undoubtedly provide a relevant reference link between global policy deliberations and regional specificities. Through the Network, I can also envisage beneficial cooperation with existing regional partners to support reporting on progress in the achievement of forest-related objectives. We very much look forward to receiving inputs from relevant regional entities by 30 October.

Let me close by mentioning that the decisions of UNFF7 gave new impetus to the work within the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. The CPF Strategy Meeting in February 2008 decided to revitalize ongoing activities, such as the streamlining of forest-related reporting, and also decided to launch new ones. Besides the work on finance, mentioned previously, the CPF has also started to elaborate a strategy for a coordinated forestry response to climate change. This strategy will first be presented at COP14 in Poznan in December 2008, then at COFO and UNFF8 in 2009. In addition, CPF has agreed to strengthen its collective support to forest law enforcement and governance processes, including those outside CPF. It has also been decided that CPF will support the effective use of technical and scientific knowledge in international forest-related processes. As a first step in this regard, a IUFRO-led joint initiative was established, and an expert panel was created, to review the most-recent scientific information related to adaptation, and to also prepare a special report to support the UNFF8 discussions on climate change.

I hope that I have succeeded in providing a quick overview of the wide range of issues to be addressed by the forthcoming session of the Forum in April next year, and highlighted the new opportunities for regional-global interactions and synergies that lie ahead. We believe that the APFNet will be an important contributor to the global forest policy process; and in this spirit I wish you all success, and thank you for your attention.