

Mr. Pekka Patosaari
Director, United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Opening Ceremony Remarks
Beijing, People's Republic of China
3 August 2005

Honorable Minister Zhu Lieke, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to have this opportunity to address the opening ceremony of the first meeting of the National Forest Dialogue Forum of China and to underscore with genuine recognition the contribution of The People's Republic of China to the work of the intergovernmental forest policy process of the UN.

It goes without saying that at the high-level segment of UNFF5, on May 26 2005, Mr. Vice-Minister, Zhu Lieke emphasized several key points that highlighted the role of sustainable forest management as the foundation for social, economic and ecological sustainable development, not only for China but also for the rest of the world. At that high-level segment he also conveyed a very important message to the international community, which resonated in the Trusteeship Council Chamber of the UN: *Now, it is time to strengthen the United Nations Forum on Forests.*

I also applaud your Government for the efforts taken to transform its actions on forests, to an emphasis on restoring and conserving forests as ecosystems, and thus enabling forests' contribution to a set of broader development goals. This is a reflection of your Government's strong commitment to sustainable forest management, magnifying the potential of forests to ensure environmental sustainability, sustainable livelihoods, as well as income and employment opportunities for millions of forest dependent people.

As we prepare for next year's Sixth Session of the UNFF, we are looking forward to your Government's continued leadership role on forests, demonstrated by such initiatives at the national level, to further raise the political agenda of forests and of sustainable forest management at all levels.

I wish to congratulate the State Forestry Administration of China for the excellent preparatory work for this discussion, which I hope will lead towards a renewed commitment to concrete and meaningful action to improve the performance of the forest sector and likewise, to work with other countries, to strengthen the work of the UNFF.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr. Pekka Patosaari
Director, United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Key Note Address
Beijing, People's Republic of China
3 August 2005

UNFF: Standing Objectives and Future Goals

As I present an overview of the UNFF and the expectations on the future of the International Arrangement on Forests, I wish to briefly touch upon the importance of forests in the international political agenda of the United Nations.

The existence of the international forest policy process and dialogue within the UN signals an important role for the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. The policy dialogue initiated at the Rio Summit in 1992, and subsequently continued through the IPF and IFF, led us to the establishment of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), in 2000, as a permanent subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC).

After adopting the Forest Principles and Chapter 11 of Agenda 21, almost 13 years ago, we still face many challenges in halting deforestation and land degradation. Globalization and the fast development pace in several parts of the world also present new pressures on forests, as well as new prospects to help solve critical socio-economic and environmental challenges.

Over the last few years the international community has steered its attention away from compartmentalizing single subjects, to jointly tackling urgent issues on the international agenda in a more integrated manner. The alarming rates of deforestation are one of many competing concerns, including poverty, HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, illiteracy, inequity, terrorism, peace and human rights. All of these issues are important and the challenges that we face today are perhaps more interlinked than ever.

Finding ways to help stop these social adversities and to ensure that forests benefit present and future generations is the very essence of sustainable forest management. And it is our responsibility to ensure that. In fact, sustainable forest management has become one of the major challenges of the world. It remains an essential element of sustainable development, playing a key role in meeting several critical objectives, including safeguarding functions aimed at achieving climatic stability, protecting watersheds, maintaining soil quality and coastlines, preserving biological diversity, promoting environmental sustainability generally, and eradicating poverty. In other words, we understand the need to stop deforestation worldwide and reverse the trend of forest and land degradation as one of our most urgent and far-reaching responsibilities.

In this effort, the United Nations Forum on Forests is an indispensable tool. In 2000, the Economic and Social Council established the Forum as the central component of the international arrangement on forests: to promote sustainable forest management worldwide and to strengthen political commitment toward sustainable forest management. The Forum is a unique, innovative intergovernmental body on forest policy issues, with universal state membership.

The United Nations Forum on Forests was established particularly for discussions and policy development on these interlinked forest-related issues and to foster cooperation on such cross-sectoral priorities at all levels. In recognition of the importance of forests at the global level within the UN system, ECOSOC established the UNFF. As a high-level body under the Council, with universal membership and a mandate to address sustainable management of all types of forests, UNFF has pulled together various forest-related international and regional processes, institutions and instruments, as well as stakeholders from civil society, and integrated these pieces into an international arrangement for action, for forests and for people.

Implementation of these policies is primarily the responsibility of countries, facilitated by international and regional organizations and instruments and various stakeholder groups. To support the work of the UNFF, the heads of other international organizations have formed a voluntary partnership - Collaborative Partnership on Forests. This voluntary Partnership has particularly supported the UNFF and its Member States in the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action, including through their technical and financial resources.

In this, its fifth session, held from 16 to 27 of May 2005, the UN Forum on Forests faced three significant tasks. The first was to continue to advance the implementation of actions already agreed on by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests. The second was to assess the performance and effectiveness of the Forum in its first five years. And the third was to chart the way forward for the Forum – to consider its future within the institutional framework of the UN system, including the specific agenda items that it might address – and its future method of work and structure, including the specific agenda items that it will address.

The Forum confronted these tasks from within a broad and compelling political context. This context is framed by the policy decisions and targets set out in the Implementation Plan of the Johannesburg Summit; by the Millennium Development Goals; and by the agreements reached at all the UN conferences since the 1990s that have helped to produce a consensus on the wider UN development agenda. This context continues to take shape, as we prepare for the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly in September 2005, where we will assess progress on the Millennium Declaration's implementation.

Several key issues emerged from UNFF 5. There were intense discussions around how to address: means of implementation, working modalities with the incorporation of regional meetings, the establishment of global goals or targets, and a possible voluntary code or international guidelines on the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests in the future Arrangement.

UNFF 5's high-level policy segment between Ministers and heads of CPF member organizations also marked a strong commitment to forests and the work of the UNFF. The high-level panel segments signaled the recognition of the contribution of forests to improving human life, reducing poverty, enhancing economic development through trade in legally harvested forest products, and maintaining important restoration functions, among others. To capture these benefits, it was noted that a considerable strengthening of the International Arrangement on Forests was essential.

While there were differences of opinion at UNFF5 on the future shape of the International Arrangement on Forests, including on the desirability of a legally binding international instrument and how often the UNFF should meet, it is evident from the draft omnibus resolution that most countries agreed that the Forum itself should focus on the high-level

policy dialogue and integrated coordination; while the CPF and regional-level initiatives should be encouraged and guided by the Forum to promote the implementation of existing objectives.

However, different expectations among countries on how, and what is required to strengthen the Arrangement, might have contributed to the resulting lack of agreement. As such, deliberations on the International Arrangement on Forests and its strengthening will be continued at the UNFF 6, to be held in New York from 13-24 February 2006. For your information, the Report of UNFF 5 is already available on the UNFF website.

Mr. Chairman,

The international forest community is ready to reach higher. To secure the long-term political commitment and accountability on forests, a clear agenda for the future, to which all countries wholeheartedly commit themselves to, is needed. At the sixth session of the UNFF, you have the opportunity to strengthen the International Arrangement on Forest, with leadership, vision and determination, which would ensure that forests remain on the international agenda in the future.

It is likely that the UNFF6 Bureau may wish to consider holding preparatory meetings in the format of informal consultations before the end of this year. This would allow Member States' representatives to speak in a relatively official manner, and to reach some clarity on pending key issues. With intensive and effective work done by the Bureau and the Secretariat, between now and February 2006, and mindful of the need to foster a common understanding among negotiating parties, UNFF6 most certainly will be successful.

I thank you for your attention.