



**Opening Statement by Mr. Pekka Patosaari,
Director, The UN Forum on Forests Secretariat
at the opening of the International Expert Meeting on
“Scoping for a Future Agreement on Forests”
Berlin, 16 November 2005**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Experts,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the Government of Germany for hosting this important country-led initiative meeting here in Berlin, and all the sponsors for making such broad participation possible. This beautiful capital city of Germany symbolizes, to me, hope and the passion for unity. Let us anticipate that our gathering here in Berlin inspires all of us to build common ground, so that consensus can be reached on the Sixth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

We all know that now, more than ever, there is a need for the continuation and strengthening of the high-level forest policy dialogue and development mechanism within the United Nations system. Let's always keep in mind the plight of more than 1.6 billion people around the world who depend, to varying degrees, on forests for their livelihoods and their subsistence. They should be the main focus of our high-level forest policy mechanism and the people affected by it. I'm sure you would agree with me that concrete actions are needed right away to improve the quality of life of those forest-dependent people and communities. On the other hand, millions of hectares of forests are being lost every year due to deforestation and forests degradation, affecting everybody who lives both near and far from forests. There is an urgent need to decide on policies, such as maintaining forest cover, the introduction and establishment of sustainable forest management, as well as on the combined operations of low-impact harvesting, restoration at the landscape level and conservation efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

I cannot stress enough the urgent need for action and the fact that Sustainable Forest Management is the best approach to successfully tackle our current challenges.

We need to continue developing international policies, backed by appropriate programmes and adequate means of implementation, to ensure a sustainable future for our children and grandchildren. Future generations have the same rights that we do for access to forests and the benefits derived from them. Moreover, management and conservation policies and programmes on forests should be clearly linked and aligned with poverty-reduction strategies and integrated national development plans.

The United Nations Forum on Forests, the only subsidiary organ of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with universal membership, is the ideal forum for fostering the international cooperation, and implementation of intergovernmental decisions for addressing forest and human sustainability issues, that I mentioned above.

Of course, UNFF is not alone in this endeavor. The Collaborative Partnership on Forests has been supporting, and will continue to support, the work of the Forum, its Member States and the Forum Secretariat. ECOSOC Resolution 2000/35, which created the International Arrangement on Forests, as well as subsequent Forum resolutions, call for an even more focused guidance to the Partnership, so that we all, together, can continue to promote Sustainable Forest Management for all types of forests.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UN Forum on Forests, at its Sixth Session, will also continue to pursue a broad mutual understanding, by completing its review of the performance and the effectiveness of the Arrangement. This assessment includes a concept on the institutional position of the Forum within the United Nations system, which is a very important and timely exercise in view of the output of the 2005 UN World Summit and the ongoing review of the mandates.

Moreover, the negotiations at the Sixth Session will take place in a broad and compelling political context, with a mixture of many politically sensitive, as well as complex operational issues, such as working modalities, the role of possible regional meetings and strategic issues, such as global goals and national targets. Clarity is needed on how and when to address the pending issues related to the “instrument” on forests, and ultimately, on how to better articulate our common vision and understanding of the SFM concept - highly desirable in a post-Johannesburg and World Summit era.

It was very reassuring to see that, at the Fifth Session of the Forum, Member States seemed to share the view that the main objective and the six principal functions of the Arrangement, as spelled out in ECOSOC Resolution 2000/35, are still valid. But it is very clear that linking the regional agenda, the work programs of other intergovernmental bodies, the development of new consensus elements of change and political vigor to the global program of work will be a major undertaking. The question to be posed, in my opinion, is: how to strengthen the Arrangement and its institutional framework, with formal and informal agreements, and with clear commitments and incentives to make the change happen?

We have to be mindful that the gaps and shortcomings in national forest policies are fundamentally driven by forces outside the forest sector, such as globalization, international mega-trends, the growing demand for timber and other forest products and services, land conversion, international trade and, sadly, multi-billion-dollar businesses involving illegally-harvested timber.

We also know that much can be done at the national and local levels, and that we should build on lessons learned, as well as improve our efforts to build the knowledge capacity of local institutions. Yes, there is clear need for a “stronger” international arrangement, but how can we achieve that and still preserve the notion of national territorial sovereignty? This is a very difficult challenge, indeed.

The issues of human and property rights, or addressing the needs of all interest groups of society, particularly women and the rural poor, of proper financing and access to technology and markets, are fundamental in the new architecture of the future of the arrangement. This demands a serious exchange of ideas and the determination of experts in the field from all around the world.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I just mentioned a few challenges we encounter. The problems are many and complex, and that is why we now need unity and understanding – unity of all stakeholders, to set aside obvious but often short-sighted political gains and interests, in the interest of the collective good. To begin with, we should all engage ourselves in articulating the broadly acceptable common interpretation of the Sustainable Forest Management concept, and in actively promoting it worldwide. I believe that future consensus can and should be built around this fundamental element, as a cornerstone of a new solid consensus on forests.

An effective international forest regime does not need to be overwhelmingly complicated - it should be a catalytic instrument for coherent and effective forest policy at the global and national levels. However, any agreement can only be as effective as the parties would commit to make it. This conviction makes me confident that all our problems can be solved, and that consensus is very possible and near. It just depends on us.

Thank you very much.