

Panel Discussion
Chairpersons of the Functional Commissions
with ECOSOC Members

ECOSOC Coordinating Segment, New York

7th July 2005

Statement by

H. E. Mrs. Judith Mbula Bahemuka
Bureau Member of the Sixth Session of the United Nations
Forum on Forests

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) to sit on this panel during the Council's coordination segment.

Allow me today to briefly describe the UNFF and how it has been contributing to the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals and to the work of ECOSOC in promoting integrated and coordinated implementation.

Forests and trees play a critical role in supporting the livelihoods of people, particularly the world's poor. Many of these people depend fully, or in part, on forest resources to meet daily subsistence needs. Sustainable forest management contributes to developing economies in many ways. It provides income, employment, health needs, food security, energy and better housing where it is most needed, particularly for the poor who inhabit forest areas.

Finding ways to balance these human livelihood needs with concerns on the sustainability of forest resources is the very essence of sustainable forest management. It is our responsibility to ensure that the benefits that forests provide are reaped without endangering their long-term sustainability. Sustainable forest management can be used to contribute to a more equitable distribution of wealth within the community.

Poverty eradication and sustainable development is at the heart of the challenge to sustainable forest management, and finding solutions to alleviate poverty will be crucial for both achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable management of all types of forests.

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) is the ideal arena for discussions and policy development on this issue. Recognizing the importance of forests at the global level, ECOSOC established UNFF in the year 2000 as its subsidiary body under the rules of procedure of the functional commissions. As a high-level body under the Council, with universal membership and a mandate to address sustainable management of all types of forests, it has the ability to pull together the various forest-related international and regional processes, institutions and instruments and integrate all of these pieces into a unified, global vision for action for forests and for people.

At its Fifth session, the UNFF held a high-level segment with a policy dialogue between Ministers and heads of CPF member organizations. A Report of the Secretary-General was prepared for that session on the "Linkages between forests and the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration". The focus of the Report included the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; health; environmental sustainability; sustainable consumption and production patterns; and energy. Linkages between forests and the establishment of an enabling environment, and means of implementation, for achieving these goals were also highlighted.

Allow me to emphasize some of the key points made in that Report, and also featured in the Ministerial Policy Dialogue: -

- Sustainable forest management contributes substantially towards achieving many of the internationally agreed development goals. Setting clear objectives for international forest policy and linking sustainable forest management more closely to these internationally agreed development goals are avenues that warrant careful consideration.
- In addressing poverty, hunger and health, it was suggested that attention should be given to the opportunities afforded by trees and forests to help meet the needs of forest-dependent people.
- To ensure coherent efforts at the national level, clear linkages between national forest programmes and other national plans, including poverty reduction strategy papers are essential. It is suggested that national forest programmes should identify the relevance and potential role of trees and forests in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and highlight opportunities for scaling-up good initiatives.
- The strong linkages between forests and ensuring environmental sustainability have already been highlighted in the Millennium Declaration. However, the alarming rate of deforestation continues to warrant international attention. Several options could be explored to raise this attention, such as setting global goals or objectives in this regard may serve as a catalyst for action at all levels and encourage countries to set their own national targets to fulfill this commitment.
- Forest resources can trigger off conflict but they can also be used to help promote peace and stability, playing an integral role in reconstruction and peace building. Efforts should therefore be made to improve law enforcement at national and international levels and to curb illegal forest-related activities, which often result in the destruction of ecosystems and deprive forest-dependent communities of their livelihoods.
- Finance is an integral element of the global partnership for development. Reforms in the forest sector, good governance and the creation of a stable and sound institutional and policy environment are recommended in order to help attract more international finance, including ODA, and the mobilization of domestic resources, which can contribute to the self-financing of the sector.
- The Report also argues that there is a need to promote economic development through investment in forest-related industries and a fair multilateral trading system, and addressing the external debt problem, which would allow all countries to take advantage of economic opportunities in the forest sector.

As you know, UNFF will hold its sixth session next year from 13-24 February 2006 to complete the review of progress and consideration of future actions, which were started at the Forum's fifth session. This sixth session will be of paramount importance as it encourages the international community to come together to foster a new paradigm, highlighting forests in the broader development agenda, as well as the contribution of full achievement of internationally agreed development goals, agree on a future arrangement and providing directions on urgent priorities, including the follow-up to the major UN conferences and summits in the areas of economic, social and environment development.

The United Nations Forum on Forests put high priority to the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits in its work programme. One of the common items at each of its sessions is "Enhanced cooperation and policy and programme coordination". Under this agenda item, the Forum deliberates, among others, on the follow-up to major conferences and summits that have linkages to forests and forest policy. The Forum is ready to continue working closely with ECOSOC and its sister functional commissions in areas of mutual interests.

I am fully confident that the distinguished panelists will bring their knowledge to our advantage today. I hope that this panel discussion will be rich and meaningful, and will enhance our understanding of the role of the forests and its linkage with other priority issues, in the context of broader development goals. This, in turn, will certainly enrich the work of the Forum.

Thank you for your attention.