



Statement by the

UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS SECRETARIAT

TO THE

**INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON FOREST GOVERNANCE AND
DECENTRALIZATION IN AFRICA**

Durban, 8 April 2008

Ms. Yako, Director General, Department of Water and Forest Affairs, Chairperson of the Opening Session,

Mr. Mlaba, Mayor of eThekweni,

Ms. September (MP), Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee: Water Affairs and Forestry,

Distinguished Participants,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure for us to be here in the beautiful province of KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa. I would like to thank the organizers and the people of Durban for the warm welcome and hospitality we have been experiencing here. I am particularly delighted to note that this is truly an all-African event, and we have representatives from all over the continent.

The international forest dialogue has always gained immensely from the support of Member States through Country-Led Initiatives like this one. The announcement of this initiative by the Governments of South Africa and Switzerland was particularly timely, at the closing of the milestone seventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests. As the themes of this meeting are directly relevant to the work of UNFF, I believe this workshop provides us with a golden opportunity to highlight lessons learned from the unique perspective of African countries, and identify actions that the international community can consider taking to contribute further to achieving sustainable forest management.

I would like to thank the Government of South Africa for hosting this Initiative, and the Government of Switzerland for its invaluable support to the organization of this meeting. I would also like to express our appreciation to all the Governments who contributed to make this meeting happen, in particular, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States. Finally, I would like to thank CIFOR, GTZ, Intercooperation, and ITTO for their considerable input.

Madam Chairperson,

Recognition of the importance of forests in global sustainable development is steadily growing. Over the past 15 years, the alarming global rate of deforestation and forest degradation, growing international trade in forest products and services, increasing concerns about the health of the global environment and the pressing need to eradicate extreme poverty have all contributed to placing the issue of forests high on international political agendas.

Established eight years ago by the Economic and Social Council, the UNFF has been providing a much-needed global policy forum on forests. The only body besides the General Assembly with universal membership of all the UN Member States, UNFF has the principal task of promoting sustainable management of all types of forests worldwide, and strengthening long-term political commitment to this end. The Forum is supported by a unique interagency cooperation arrangement, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), consisting of 14 international organizations, institutions and instrument secretariats, including our Secretariat.

Madam Chairperson,

We believe 2007 was a turning point in the history of the international forest policy dialogue. In April 2007, the seventh session of the UN Forum on Forests successfully concluded negotiations on the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI), the Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) for the period 2007–2015, and decided to establish a process, to develop and consider, with a view of adopting it at UNFF8 in 2009, a financing mechanism for all types of forests.

The NLBI is truly a milestone agreement, as it is the first time Member States have agreed to an international instrument for sustainable forest management. As a declaration of political commitment, the General Assembly adopted the NLBI on 17 December 2007 and devoted a high-level special event to celebrate this landmark agreement.

I would like to take this opportunity to cordially invite you to join us at an information session this coming Friday, where the Instrument and the work programme of the Forum will be presented in further detail.

Madam Chairperson,

The Instrument offers great potential as a common platform for our efforts towards sustainable forest management. It opens a new era, with a stronger focus on implementation and inter- and intra-regional cooperation than ever before. It provides a new framework for collaboration, and for translating policies and decisions into clear actions for achieving sustainable forest management and the Global Objectives on Forests.

The Instrument offers an articulation of sustainable forest management (SFM) as the overarching set of principles and objectives. It contains a number of policy proposals intended to assist countries and the international community in SFM implementation. Several of these proposals have cross-cutting character, such as those on strengthening political commitment to SFM, financing for SFM, capacity-building and technology transfer, stakeholder participation and enhanced international cooperation, while others have stronger topical focus, such as forest law enforcement and governance, international trade in forest products, protection of forests, science and research, public awareness and education, private sector and industry, indigenous and local communities and monitoring, assessment and reporting.

We cannot emphasize enough just how important the key issues of this meeting are for the implementation of the Instrument. Governance and participatory approaches are, undoubtedly, fundamental components of the enabling environment for SFM. The key elements of decentralization, such as: building consensus through open, transparent and inclusive processes, participatory decision-making, institutional, technical and human capacity-building, provision of adequate financial resources and incentives for investment, and tailoring objectives to local contexts are all among the cross-cutting or topical proposals of the Instrument.

In addition to being the third in a series of CLIs dealing with governance and decentralization issues, it is particularly apt that this meeting is taking place in the continent which is home to some of the world's most valuable and revered ecosystems – from great expanses of rainforests,

to the largest areas of savannah. The inextricable links between forest sustainability and poverty eradication, economic vitality, social stability and development are well-recognized, but it is here in Africa that these links take on an urgent, immediate and practical nature.

While the need for action is pressing, there is already a wealth of positive experiences in Africa, including successful land tenure and legal reforms, which have paved the way toward intense reforestation and sustainable management of forest resources. On the other hand, continuing deforestation and over-exploitation of forest resources, driven by demand for fuel-wood or by conflicts, provide an incentive to continue building on successful experiences and efforts toward furthering sustainable forest management.

By sharing your experiences and exploring future opportunities in governance and decentralization, this workshop has the potential of making a remarkable contribution to facilitating implementation on the ground and enriching the global dialogue.

Madam Chairperson,

Lastly, let me briefly remark on the Forum's Multi-Year Programme of Work, which reflects its new and broadened mandate. This new mandate is a comprehensive one, focusing on achieving the Global Objectives on Forests and on implementing the Instrument. In so doing, it also creates reinforcing links to several other sectors and processes, such as: climate change, biological diversity, desertification and the internationally-agreed development goals. In addition, the Programme of Work provides new opportunities for linking regional and sub-regional experiences and activities on SFM to the global dialogue. The forthcoming sessions of the Forum are built around the environmental, social and economic pillars of SFM, and will also address several cross-cutting issues in the context of these overall themes.

An overall theme for discussion at the next UNFF session in 2009 is "Forests in a changing environment", which includes "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". The other overall theme of UNFF8 is "Means of implementation", which will focus in particular on the means of financing intergovernmental commitments on forests. ECOSOC's bold decision to develop and consider for adoption a concrete global funding mechanism for all types of forests will provide the Forum with a golden opportunity to reach another breakthrough agreement on an area which is critical for sustainable forest management, and remains the driving force behind international negotiations on forests.

Dear Colleagues,

I am convinced that this meeting will provide a robust input to the work of the Forum and the preparations for the forthcoming session, and will facilitate implementation and strengthen commitment to globally agreed actions. It is in this spirit that I wish you all a productive meeting and very successful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.