



Statement by
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TO THE

PREPARATORY MEETING OF THE AFRICAN COUNTRIES
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The UN Forum on Forests, The Way Forward

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Libreville, Gabon

Honorable Minister,

Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me express my sincere appreciation to the Government of Gabon and to all organizers for hosting this important meeting in support of the preparation of the next session of the UN Forum on Forests. I am sorry that due to unforeseen circumstances of a personal nature I will be unable to accompany you personally. Nevertheless, I want to take the opportunity, through this paper, to provide you with my views on the future of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

Introduction

We in the international forest community are well aware of the importance of forests in global sustainable development. There have been more than forty international organizations and more than twenty international agreements related to forests, yet no single international institution or instrument has had the mandate to address holistically all aspects of forest policy, until recently. In 2000, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), with the objective of promoting sustainable forest management (SFM) worldwide, and of strengthening political commitment to this end.

As a global policy-making body with full membership, the Forum is a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, reporting to ECOSOC, and through it, to the General Assembly. UNFF discusses experiences as well as challenges related to SFM, including prevention of deforestation, as well as developing policies for international cooperation and national actions for sustainable forest management. The Forum also provides an effective mechanism for dialogue between government delegates, international organizations and major groups. UNFF has helped keep forests at a high level of political visibility. The latest example of this is the recent decision by the UN General Assembly to declare 2011 as the International Year of Forests.

Outcomes of UNFF6

The decisions of the sixth session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF6) shows much promise for the future. UNFF6 and ECOSOC agreed on four Global Objectives on Forests which aim to reverse the loss of forest cover, improve the contribution of forests to local livelihoods, increase protected areas, and enhance financial support for sustainable forest management.¹ The resolution also calls on the UN Forum on Forests to complete negotiations on the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests at the upcoming Seventh Session next month, from 16-27 April. The instrument is expected to provide a framework for international and national action to achieve the agreed Global Objectives, and, upon adoption by the General Assembly, will provide for strong political commitment to the reduction of deforestation and the enhancement of sustainable forest management, worldwide.

¹ ECOSOC Resolution 2006/49

Global Objectives on Forests

Global Objective 1

Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation;

Global Objective 2

Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people;

Global Objective 3

Increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests; and

Global Objective 4

Reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management and mobilize significantly increased new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management.

Non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests

The added value of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests would be, first and foremost, in its provision of a clearly articulated and practical framework for sustainable forest management at all levels. The instrument can highlight the importance of voluntary national measures, policies, actions and partnerships, and will enable countries to better determine their national targets, goals and policies. Recognizing that there are already a myriad of forest-related agreements, and processes in existence, this new instrument on all types of forests offers a global platform for coordinating these various international efforts.

The work of the ad hoc expert group on the consideration of the content of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, held in December 2006, took into account a compilation of draft indicative elements and other proposals submitted by member States and regional groups. Substantial progress was made at the expert group meeting, as participants completed a first reading of the draft text. Strong support emerged on certain issues within the instrument. These included strengthening national-level policies and measures related to forests, the importance of international trade in forest products and the need for a strengthened scientific basis for forest policy. An issue that gained increased prominence for the first time in these deliberations was the need for public awareness and education on forests. As requested by the participants of the December meeting, the revised draft composite text of the instrument was prepared by the Bureau, with the assistance of the Secretariat, and it has been submitted to member States for further consideration by the Seventh Session of the UN Forum on Forests.

Conceptual Framework of SFM and the International Policy Agenda

The broadened mandate of the UN Forum on Forests and the forthcoming adoption of a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests are the culmination of a steadily growing and evolving negotiation process that is founded on the outcomes of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Chapter 11 of Agenda 21, entitled "Combating Deforestation", and the Forest Principles², adopted by Heads of State, represent the first global consensus on forests.

² Officially named Non-Legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests

Both Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles outline the ecological and socio-economic importance of forests, placing an emphasis on national sovereignty in decision-making, as well as the importance of public participation, capacity-building, and of creating a national and international enabling environment for management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. Together, these agreements represent the beginning of a more nuanced view of sustainability and environmental conservation at the global level, fully cognizant of the tension between protection and development.

The IPF and IFF processes provided a forum for member States to further discuss and build consensus around the critical components of sustainable forest management and reducing deforestation. During these years from 1995 to 1999, member States agreed on 270 Proposals for Action for sustainable forest management that continue to function as the foundation of policy guidance for countries at both the international and national levels.

Increased consensus around forest-related issues, as well as the recognition of a need to increase the political profile of forests, led to the creation by ECOSOC in 2000 of the United Nations Forum on Forests as a full functional commission of ECOSOC. It was foreseen that the UN Forum on Forests would be operating in close relationship with all relevant stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels, in support of implementation of the objectives and principles of sustainable forest management.

Enhanced Cooperation and Collaboration

One of the principal functions of the UNFF and the international arrangement on forests is to enhance cooperation as well as policy and programme coordination on forest-related issues among relevant international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments, as well as to contribute to synergies among them, including coordination among donors.

In ECOSOC Resolution 2006/49, member States devoted one specific section of the Resolution to the issue of enhancing cooperation and policy and programme coordination. The Resolution demonstrates the strong commitment of member States, with specific actions directed towards countries, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and relevant multi-lateral agreements, instruments, processes and United Nations bodies, aimed at improved implementation of the shared Global Objectives on Forests, and more efficient collaboration and cooperation with the UN Forum on Forests and its Secretariat.

Accordingly, this renewed emphasis on enhanced cooperation will be an important part of the new multi-year programme of work for the Forum in order for it to appropriately meet the shared Global Objectives on Forests, and ensure that the role of forests in contributing to the international development agenda and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are realized. Moreover, the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, which will provide the principal policy and conceptual framework for achieving the Global Objectives on Forests and sustainable forest management, will depend greatly on strengthened cooperation and collaboration with existing instruments and processes at the regional and global levels.

The Resolution further calls upon members of the CPF to support the UN Forum on Forests and to strengthen collaboration and coordination among its members, in order to foster progress towards sustainable forest management at all levels.

In addressing linkages at the regional and sub-regional levels, the UN Forum on Forests has been continually addressing the relationship between forests and the internationally agreed development goals. My view is that this emphasis should be equally important in regional and sub-regional implementation of the Global Objectives on Forests, within the context of sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

The UN Forum on Forests could facilitate the incorporation of forest-related issues more effectively as part of the work of regional organizations, conventions or processes, such as the United Nations Regional Economic and Social Commissions, and enable closer collaboration and work with other international regional agencies and processes, such as regional treaty bodies, the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions and regional development banks.

Means of Implementation

Apart from explicit policy guidance, the United Nations Forum on Forests has also supported a number of other means of ensuring sustainable forest management. Agenda 21 and the decisions of the IPF/IFF and UNFF place strong importance on the means of implementation for ensuring that inter-governmental decisions are translated into action on the ground. The three primary means of implementation are financing, transfer of environmentally sound technology and capacity-building. Many countries report difficulties in implementing the agreed decisions of UNFF, because of a lack of such means.

National Forest Programmes (NFP) were conceived as a tool for policy implementation in the context of the UNCED. They have proven quite effective in facilitating cross-sectoral analysis and a participatory approach to identifying problems, as well as formulating, implementing and monitoring policies, strategies and actions. It is hoped that they would also contribute to and be in line with national poverty reduction strategies.

Substantial efforts have also been made to create criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management through nine regional processes, involving more than 140 countries. Such processes are useful in helping to create region-specific conceptualizations of what it means for a forest management system to be sustainable, as well as in monitoring and assessing changes in the forests and the effectiveness of policy interventions.

At its sixth session, the UNFF identified a comprehensive, but not exhaustive, assessment of the means required to help implement the Global Objectives on Forests and to further promote sustainable forest management³. Member States highlighted the importance of further developing national forest programmes, increasing efforts at capacity-building, expanding research and improving transfer of environmentally sound technology.

Member States also agreed to reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management; strengthen existing forest-related funds including the National Forest Programme facility (hosted by the FAO), the Programme on Forests (hosted by the World Bank) and the Bali Partnership Fund of the ITTO; mobilize and provide significant new and additional resources for sustainable forest management; and develop innovative financial mechanisms for generating revenue to support sustainable forest management.

The creation of a funding mechanism for the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests could be one way of fulfilling this commitment in developing countries. Successful implementation of the instrument hinges on the early establishment of a facilitative mechanism, which would enable effective use and coordination of existing channels of funding for sustainable forest management.

Multi-Year Programme of Work

Both ECOSOC resolution 2000/35 and the new 2006/49 resolution of ECOSOC emphasized the need for a focused multi-year programme of work (MYPOW). The new MYPOW will include a description and scheduling of key tasks that the Forum will undertake during the period 2007-2015, including policy issues for deliberation at each UNFF session and activities between sessions. With its adoption, the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests will become the centerpiece of the MYPOW.

A country-led initiative (CLI) on the Multi Year Programme of Work of UNFF was co-hosted by the Governments of Indonesia and Germany, in February 2007. The meeting helped to explore, elaborate and develop a broader understanding of the concept and elements of the new multi-year program of work of UNFF and the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests. The experts at the CLI discussed three main broad issues: themes of the UNFF biennial sessions, modalities of the MYPOW, and possible approaches to enhance regional and sub-regional dimensions in the MYPOW.

³ E/CN.18/2006/18, paragraphs 5-6

A proposed structure for each two-year cycle was discussed, in order to clarify the need for some topics to be covered at each session, and other topics to be discussed at one of the three sessions. There was a general preference to base the discussions around themes, taking into account cross-cutting issues in every session. Following considerable discussion about how best to organize these topics, it was agreed to cluster the topics and, during this process, three different optional clusters were identified.

There seems to be a broad understanding that the new MYPOW should place a strong emphasis on implementation and the achievement of the non-legally binding instrument, including the Global Objectives on Forests. A number of issues were also viewed as crucial ones: Means of implementation, including finance, capacity-building and technology transfer, as well as governance, participation and rule of law, were emphasized by some participants. Some of these were also recognized as emerging issues which should be given sufficient prominence.

The nine UNFF principal functions should be also adequately covered in the MYPOW. Other issues included the contribution of forests to poverty alleviation and livelihoods, as well as the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; monitoring, assessment and reporting and the related seven thematic elements of sustainable forest management; forests and water; forests and energy, and climate change.

Preparatory work for the biennial UNFF sessions is essential for an appropriate execution of all the challenges in-between the sessions. Intergovernmental Preparatory Meetings (IPM) would offer a mechanism to carry this out. These meetings could also serve to distill the various inputs received from regions, sub-regions, CPF members, major groups and other stakeholders. The inputs should relate to the themes of the upcoming session, implementation of SFM and other relevant issues. The IPM could serve as a mechanism for the global/regional interface.

The CPF needs continual guidance from the UN Forum on Forests. How to assess the responses of CPF, and how to strengthen a more coherent role for CPF in supporting the UNFF and enhancing cooperation and coordination among the members of the partnership, are important issues. CPF members should be encouraged to provide focused, substantive inputs related to the session themes, and they could also facilitate regional activities in support of SFM.

In the future, the UNFF should incorporate lessons learned and best practices through, *inter alia*, North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation and bilateral agreements. A number of organizations and countries have a wealth of experience in developing and implementing forest-related policies and strategies. Developing and implementing national forest programmes could help to link national activities to regional and global processes.

Stakeholders from civil society and other major groups can bring creative ideas and experience to the Forum, particularly in the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument and the achievement of the Global Objectives on Forests, raising awareness and networks between stakeholders at global, regional, sub-regional and national levels that contribute to the work of the UNFF.

Country reports would continue to be important, but the reporting on progress made in the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument and the achievement of the Global Objectives on Forests, including the seven thematic elements of SFM, would form the basis and serve as the reference framework for SFM. However, every effort must be made to streamline reporting and to reduce the reporting burden on countries and major groups.

Regional Involvement

One highly relevant issue for you to consider: How to organize the so-called “regionalization” of the UN Forum on Forests? The UN Forum on Forests has been discussing and gradually developing mechanisms addressing regionalization. The starting point is, that the existing forest-related regional and sub-regional mechanisms should be used to the maximum extent. We should be drawing from examples, since there is a multitude of ongoing forest-related cooperation and activities at the regional and sub-regional levels. However, challenges in each region and sub-region vary.

Regional mechanisms should be used horizontally and vertically when channeling global topics to national and regional implementation, and vice versa. Political commitment needs to be strengthened to raise the profile of regional and sub-regional forest cooperation, for example, at the future high-level segments of the UNFF and regional mechanisms.

As stated before, the existing forest-related regional and sub-regional mechanisms in each region are quite different, as are the approaches used for coordination. At present, it is unlikely that forest-related regional and sub-regional mechanisms could provide a regionally coordinated input to UNFF sessions. But I would encourage a regionally coordinated approach and balanced regional inputs. The basic requirement for this would be improved communication and interaction of the UNFF Secretariat with relevant forest-related regional and sub-regional processes, organizations, bodies and instruments.

Similarly, we should also accept that different regions would have individual approaches, drawing from their existing regional and sub-regional mechanisms, when submitting inputs to the UN Forum on Forests, such as the potential inputs of UN regional economic commissions and FAO regional forestry commissions. It would certainly be important to use the UN regional geographic groupings to organize regional forest-related inputs to the UNFF. We could also explore other options, such as a strict geographical approach.

The UN Forum on Forests meetings, both the regular sessions and intersessional preparatory meetings, should devote enough time for the regional dimension, in order to enhance cooperation between regional and sub-regional mechanisms, and to facilitate effective implementation of SFM, including addressing emerging regional issues, exchanging information on best practices and sharing experiences. The deliberations could also benefit from voluntary reports from the different secretariats of forest-related sub-regional and regional bodies and/or regional focal points from a region.

Concluding Remarks

Every year, millions of hectares of natural forests are still being lost, largely as a result of human activities related to conversion of forested areas to agricultural land, unsustainable harvesting of timber, unsound land management practices, and the need for new human settlements.

Through a stronger and more implementation-focused international consensus, we now have the opportunity to bring these issues to the fore, together with this long history of international forest policy recommendations, into one framework that can guide us in our efforts toward SFM. We are at a juncture where we have an opportunity to revisit past decisions, re-evaluate our priorities, and define a strategy for accomplishing our common Global Objectives on Forests.

I would like to wish you a highly productive meeting. This preparatory meeting provides an excellent opportunity to clarify technical and policy issues, and to enhance the understanding of African countries, and will certainly be a concrete contribution to the expected outcome of UNFF at its seventh session next month.

Thank you.