

**CHALLENGES TO INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION ON SUSTAINABLE FOREST
MANAGEMENT**



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Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Director General of FAO for convening this important meeting. I would also like to thank FAO and Mr. Hosny El-Lakany, Assistant-Director-General, for inviting me to address this meeting. I am very grateful to Mr. El-Lakany's personal dedication to the United Nations Forum on Forests and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests over the last few years.

It is 2005.

It is the 60th anniversary of the United Nations.

It is the 5th anniversary of the Millennium Declaration

It is the 5th anniversary of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

It is the year of responsibility. It is the year of reviewing and setting future actions on forests.

In three short months governments will meet in New York to review progress towards sustainable forest management and the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests. In three short months Ministers responsible for the forests around the world will meet during the UNFF high-level segment to set the future course of the international forest policy dialogue. In three short months there will be a golden opportunity to set a global goal on forests, which could also be associated with national targets, to renew our pledge towards sustainable forest management and ensure the relevance of the forest sector in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the last few years the international community has shifted its attention away from combating deforestation to tackle other pressing issues on the international agenda. The alarming rates of deforestation are only one of so many other 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. Poverty, environmental degradation and armed conflict contribute to each other in a vicious cycle, posing serious threats to peace and security in many parts of the world.

The United Nations Forum on Forests was set up for discussions and policy development on these interlinked issues. As a high-level body under the Economic and Social Council, with a universal mandate to address forest-related issues, it pulls together the various forest-related international and regional processes, institutions and instruments and integrates all of these pieces into a unified, global vision for action for forests and for people.

UNFF is neither an implementing body nor a financing mechanism to support national level implementation. Implementation is primarily the responsibility of countries, facilitated by international and regional organizations and instruments and various stakeholder groups. This is where the Collaborative Partnership on Forests - CPF comes in. This voluntary Partnership has actively supported the UNFF and its Member States in the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action, including through their technical and financial resources. FAO is one of its founding members and is chairing the Partnership. Within the Partnership, FAO is leading some of CPF's joint initiatives, such as streamlining forest-related reporting and making information on sources of funds readily accessible and available.

Our common objectives of sustainable forest management provide for ample opportunities to foster synergies between UNFF and FAO. In this regard, I welcome the decisions from the sixteenth Committee on Forestry, which recommended, amongst other things, that Regional Forestry Commissions should facilitate the assessment and implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action and the flow of information between the UNFF and countries. These Regional Commissions and other regional bodies and processes can play an important role in bridging between the international forest policy dialogue and countries effort to implement forest actions, particularly through their national forest programmes.

FAO and many other CPF members are well positioned to assist countries in forest fire management and post-tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation, which are some of the themes for this meeting and COFO following in the next few days.

Mr. Chairman,

In closing, the international forest community is standing at cross-roads. At the high-level segment at the fifth session on the UNFF you have a golden opportunity to strengthen international arrangement on forest, which would ensure that forests would remain on the international agenda in the future. I invite you all to come to New York to be part of this milestone event.

I thank you for your attention.