



**Opening Statement by Mr. Pekka Patosaari,
Director, UN Forum on Forests Secretariat**

**Expert Meeting on Traditional Forest-Related Knowledge and the
Implementation of Related International Commitments
San Jose, Costa Rica 8-10 December 2004**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to join you today for the opening of this important Organization-Led Initiative in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests. The decisions taken at the global policy level on forest management have a direct impact on the lives of many indigenous communities as well as all the people that live in or depend on forests. Your active participation in the international dialogue is crucial in ensuring that your voices and concerns are heard and understood.

This meeting is an outstanding effort on the part of the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropics to ensure that your contribution to UNFF is relevant and meaningful. I thank the International Alliance and Ixcavqa for all of their hard work in planning and preparing this meeting and I especially thank the government of Costa Rica for inviting us to this beautiful and peaceful country.

I see from the agenda that you have set ambitious goals for today so I will not take too much time this morning. I will tell you briefly about our plans for the forthcoming session of the UNFF and explain a number of ways in which we are seeking your substantive contribution.

The United Nations Forum on Forests was established to serve as the key intergovernmental body for comprehensive, international forest policy formulation and implementation. The alarming rate of deforestation and forest degradation in the tropics were the key catalysts of the international debate on forests. Since its inception, the UNFF has considered a wide

range of issues relating to the various economic, social, and environmental aspects of forest management.

The UNFF is facing a crucial year. At the fifth session, to take place in New York in May 2005, the UNFF will review the effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forests and review progress in implementation of sustainable forest management principles and the IPF/IFF proposals for action. This review will inform the creation of the objectives, institutional setting and mandate for the future work of the UNFF.

As you know, there are a number of Proposals for Action that relate to indigenous and forest dependent communities and traditional forest-related knowledge. The case studies drafted in preparation of this meeting are an excellent first step in reviewing implementation of these international agreements. The fourth session of the UNFF brought to the fore the high political sensitivity around the issue of Traditional Forest Related Knowledge, which is so very important for ensuring the livelihoods of millions of forest-dwelling indigenous peoples. Issues of land tenure, equitable sharing of the benefits and efficient sharing of traditional knowledge would enable us to better manage forests for economic development and in support of our increasingly vulnerable forest-dependent communities. The outcomes of your deliberations at this meeting will be a substantial contribution to the review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests at the fifth session and we hope it will inform decisions on future action.

The fifth session of the UNFF will also include a high level ministerial segment that will incorporate dialogue with heads of intergovernmental and civil society organizations. The Bureau of UNFF has decided to hold the Ministerial segment over two days, on the 25th and 26th of May 2005, the Wednesday and Thursday of the last week of the session. The high-level segment will address the role of forests in meeting internationally agreed development goals including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. There will be two roundtable discussions: the first on "Restoring the World's Forests" and the second on "Forest, Conflict and Governance". The ministers will also address the outcomes of the Review and decide on future actions as regards the international arrangement on forests.

Although participation of representatives of Indigenous Peoples will be important at the session itself, I believe that the potential for the greatest impact lies within the next five months. It is from now until May of next year that governments will be debating their national positions and holding bi-lateral and regional meetings to begin the processes of consensus building. In order to promote the adoption of action oriented policy decisions at UNFF5, the focal points of our eight major groups, of which Indigenous Peoples is one, have decided to compile priority areas for action and propose achievable goals and targets. They are encouraging organizations and communities to take stock of the progress in sustainable forest management at the national level and use this experience to identify priorities and goals for the future. Such priority areas could include:

- Ensuring that forest products and services come from sustainable sources, by building adequate capacity and financial incentives and by implementing National Forest Programmes or similar strategies;
- Increasing the contribution of forests and trees to human health, soil and water conservation, and other environmental amenities;
- Increasing the contribution of forests and trees to combating poverty and hunger and to that end linking forest management policy objectives to Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers;
- Stable land tenure, property rights and equitable sharing of the benefits support women and local communities to manage and care for the forests, thus providing incentives for sustainable forest management; and
- Promoting an effective institutional framework for law enforcement and good governance in the forest sector that contributes to conflict prevention, post-conflict resolution, reconstruction and peace-building.

We will be holding a Stakeholder Forum just before UNFF5 in New York to discuss these priorities across the Major Groups. We hope that this will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to perhaps find some common ground and voice their common concerns in addition to their individual priorities during the session itself.

I hope that during the next three days, you, as representatives from indigenous communities around the world, will be able to start this process. I hope you will be able to bring together the key actions needed to ensure sustainable forest management and the restoration of the health and vitality of our forests and communities. I hope you will actively engage with your governments at the national level to bring the outcomes of this meeting to their attention and discuss with them the great importance of using UNFF5 as a turning point – a turning point toward stronger commitment and more focused action.

I wish you all the best in the next few days.