



24th Session of the North American Forestry Commission
Statement by the UNFF Secretariat
San Juan, Puerto Rico
9 June 2008

Dear Commissioners,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by congratulating the US Forest Service on the organization of this meeting and thanking FAO for the kind invitation. The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) Secretariat attaches great importance to the next days' discussions, and thank you for the opportunity to update you on relevant aspects of ongoing preparations for the Forum's Eighth Session (UNFF8), in 2009.

In particular, I wish to focus on upcoming international meetings, which will be relevant to deliberations at UNFF8, specifically on the issue of financing for sustainable forest management. In late 2007, the Secretariat invited members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) with robust experience and expertise in forest finance to form an Advisory Group on Finance. Its main focus is to help develop proposals for a voluntary global financing mechanism/ portfolio approach/ forest financing framework and to support preparations for the Forum's open-ended Ad Hoc Expert Group (AHEG) meeting to be held from 3 to 7 November 2008 in Vienna, Austria.

The Advisory Group plans to review existing and potential/ evolving funding mechanisms (e.g., in the UNFCCC negotiations) to address the provisions of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument (NLBI) on all Types of Forests. The preliminary findings of this analysis (so-called "mapping exercise") may be presented to the Country-Led Initiative "International Dialogue on Financing Sustainable Forest Management", to be held from 8-12 September 2008, in Paramaribo, Suriname, for feedback and further input from experts participating in that meeting.

In preparation for the Forum's Eighth Session, the Secretariat has also been working on the documentation for the three themes under "Forests in a Changing Environment". Building on the close cooperation with the Secretariats of the Rio Conventions, and other CPF members, the Forum Secretariat is carrying out background analyses on all three themes to help inform the UNFF 8 Secretary- General Reports.

As part of our information-gathering activities, we are hosting a series of three web-forums to enable open discussion and inputs on these issues. The first in this series, namely, the UNFF web-forum on “Reversing the loss of forest cover, preventing forest degradation in all types of forests and combating desertification, including in low forest cover countries” took place during the month of May. Currently we are hosting a web-forum on “Forests and Biodiversity Conservation, including Protected Areas”, and then in July, the theme will be “Forests and Climate Change”. We hope that all stakeholders will take advantage of this opportunity to voice their opinions and share their valuable experiences on the themes.

I also wish to mention two Initiatives which took place earlier this year: first, the Region-Led Initiative in support of UNFF, which was held in Geneva, in January 2008. This meeting helped distill a rich blend of views on regional priorities and challenges related to SFM, as well as opinions on how to further integrate Forum topics into regional discussions, and modalities for regional inputs to the Forum.

The second initiative held this April in Durban, South Africa, was the Country-Led Initiative on Forest Governance and Decentralization in Africa. This meeting, which focused on experiences and lessons learned on broader governance reforms in the forest sector in Africa, was very well attended by representatives of Member States, international organizations and civil society.

In the recent months, additional meetings and events have been convened by Member States, CPF members and our other institutional partners on issues that are directly relevant to the UNFF agenda. Each of these meetings provided an excellent opportunity for the Secretariat to exchange information and raise awareness on the various avenues for input to the Forum.

In this regard, I would like to mention the meetings of the FAO regional forestry commissions, as well as the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and Caribbean, all attended by the UNFF Secretariat. Also the Beijing International Conference on Combating Desertification co-hosted by DESA and the Government of China in January 2008, in the context of the preparations of the Commission on Sustainable Development, had strong forest-related discussions and reaffirmed closer interaction to the Forum’s work.

In closing, I would like to reaffirm our belief that regional cooperation and information exchange is an increasingly significant part of the Forum’s work. The FAO regional forestry commissions provide an excellent forum to enhance the dialogue with and among Member States. I seize this opportunity to reiterate the Forum’s invitation to relevant regional and sub-regional entities to address issues and agenda items planned for each Forum session, as well as to submit a concise summary of their deliberations to the Forum secretariat. We look forward to receiving your input.

I wish us all a very productive meeting and thank you for your attention.