

**Ministerial Conference on the Protection  
of Forests in Europe**



**FUTURE INTERNATIONAL ARRANGEMENT  
ON FORESTS**

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United Nations  
Forum on Forests

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Hon Minister Podgajniak, Excellencies, distinguished representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to extend my thanks to the Polish Government and to the Liaison Unit for inviting me to this meeting for the preparations of the next MCPFE meeting. It is indeed a pleasure for me to attend the session and to have the opportunity to openly discuss some of the options proposed during Fifth Session of the UN Forum on Forests, aimed at strengthening the International Arrangement on Forests, and in such a way, offer a better understanding of the issues at hand.

As one of the UN Forum on Forests' natural partners for regional implementation and policy and programme coordination, the MCPFE has been an important political initiative which has been active since the start of the international forest policy process. The relation between the global forest policy dialogue and the MCPFE can be described as mutually supportive and stimulating, with an active aim in achieving the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests. The discussions and decisions taken at the global level, through the UN Forum on Forests, have continuously been molded and developed within a pan-European context, and through its signatory countries, the MCPFE has contributed to the deliberations at the global level. The UN Secretariat looks forward to bridging this relationship even closer, as we work towards strengthening the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) with renewed commitments in the future.

Mr. Chairman, I will now present a brief overview of the UN Forum on Forests and the expectations on the future, including its potential regional emphasis and collaboration with other regional partners – without forgetting linkages to C&I processes and the national forest programmes, I wish to start by briefly addressing the importance of improving our understanding of these realities.

Clearly, the existence of the international forest policy process and the dialogue within the UN signals an important role for the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. The process has been evolving and continuously addressing critical questions relevant to international policy. Close to 1.6 billion people depend to varying degrees on forests for their livelihoods. But still – how do we respond to the growing needs of these people and their communities? We know that forests provide subsistence and income to about 350 million people who live within or near forests; that employment through the forest industries covers nearly 100 million people; and still, despite these services and benefits, we continue to face massive forest loss every year due to deforestation and forest degradation.

The UN Forum on Forests was established in 2000 particularly for discussions and policy development on these interlinked social and economic forest-related affairs and to foster cooperation on such cross-sectoral priorities at all levels. As a high-level body under the UN ECOSOC, and having universal membership, UN Forum on Forests pulls together various forest-related international and regional processes, institutions and instruments, as well as stakeholders from civil society.

The task of its substantive Secretariat is to support the intergovernmental negotiations, and to translate the decisions and country information into official UN documentation. The UN Forum on Forests Secretariat functions as the Secretariat of the International Arrangement on Forests – by servicing this UN body and by supporting the collaborative partnership of intergovernmental and international organizations, as a CPF member and as its secretariat.

Implementation of the Forum's political decisions is primarily the responsibility of countries, facilitated by international and regional organizations and instruments and various stakeholder groups. In order to support the work of the UN Forum on Forests, the heads of 14 international organizations have formed a voluntary partnership - Collaborative Partnership on Forests. It

receives guidance from the UN Forum on Forests to support its Member States in the implementation of the decisions made by the Forum and the IPF/IFF proposals for action, including through their technical and financial resources. It also coordinates joint action between the members of the partnership.

At the fifth session, 16 to 27 of May 2005, the UN Forum on Forests faced particularly difficult political and practical problems. There were three major challenges.

- First, how to continue the advancement of the implementation of actions already agreed to by the UN Forum on Forests, the ad hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the ac hoc Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF).
- The second challenge was to assess the performance and effectiveness of the IAF in its first five years and, within this time, to consider with a view to recommending to the ECOSOC and, through it to the General Assembly, the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests.
- And third to chart the way forward for the UN Forum on Forests – to consider its future within the institutional position of the UN system, including the specific agenda items that it might address – and its future method of work and structure.

The Fifth Session of the UN Forum on Forests confronted these tasks from a broad and compelling political context. This context was also framed by the policy decisions and targets set out in the Implementation Plan of the Johannesburg Summit; by the Millennium Development Goals; and by the agreements reached at other UN conferences since the 1990s that have helped to produce a consensus on the wider UN development agenda. This context continues to take shape as we prepare for the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, to be held in New York next week, where countries will assess progress of the Millennium Declaration's implementation.

Nonetheless, several key issues emerged from Fifth Session. There were intense discussions around how to address: means of implementation, working modalities with the incorporation of regional meetings, the parameters of a mandate, the establishment of global goals or targets, and a possible voluntary code or international voluntary guidelines.

The Chairman's bracketed draft omnibus text alludes to the main objective and the validity of the current six principal functions as set out in ECOSOC resolution 2000/35, while introducing two additional functions and four global goals/ strategic objectives for countries. The Session also recognized the need to strengthen the regional dimension within the UN Forum on Forests, and to establish linkages between the global high level policy forum and implementation at regional, sub-regional and national levels. This is a good starting point for negotiations.

As an accredited organization of the Forum, the MCPFE has revealed its close inter-linkages with the global policy dialogue, and has reflected this in its work. The assessment provided by the MCPFE in 2001 displayed the relation between the MCPFE Work Programme and the IPF/IFF proposals for action, making visible the linkages between MCPFE activities and the proposals. Thematic areas were identified but not all of the issues addressed under IPF/IFF programme elements were of the same relevance in the pan-European context. This clearly underlined to us the specificity of the MCPFE as a regional platform for particular European conditions.

This meeting is an opportune event for the MCPFE to discuss what role it can play within the regional component of the IAF, in particular to facilitate implementation of agreed commitments and to feed into the global framework of sustainable forest management under the UN Forum on Forests. We should also bear in mind how it could integrate the existing co-operation between the MCPFE, the FAO European Forestry Commission and the UNECE Timber Committee to the work of the UN Forum on Forests and to continue to address Forum's activities as a recurrent agenda point of the MCPFE work programme.

Different expectations among countries during Fifth Session might have contributed to the resulting lack of agreement. As such, deliberations on the Arrangement and its strengthening will be continued at Sixth Session to be held in New York from 13-24 February 2006. For your information, the Report of Fifth Session is already available on our website.

Further discussion is now needed on the pending issues, including organizational matters of UN Forum on Forests' working modalities, as well as substantive aspects, such as the topics of the multi-year programme of work, including how to assess implementation and progress, and to provide guidance for further action. We should clearly understand what elements are needed to

strengthen the arrangement and moreover how the elements will help us to achieve a strong political commitment by the member states.

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As with most international agreements, developing and effectively implementing an international policy framework on forests needs to meet the challenge of balancing the territorial sovereignty issue with the cross border nature of most environmental problems. Sovereign rights over forest resources and on their use for national economic development, particularly for poverty reduction, jobs and income generation, has lead among national priorities on forests. While some argue that forest policy is a national issue, others consider it should be internationalized.

The growing concerns for human rights and intellectual property rights, particularly regarding indigenous people and local communities, tension on rural-urban interface, and local-global priorities present another set of challenges. Furthermore, forests have a multitude of interest groups - often with conflicting demands on - uses of forest goods and services. Balancing their concerns in policy and programming for sustainable forest management even at the national level is often complicated enough, and doing so at the global level is even much more challenging.

To this end, the lessons from international environmental regimes indicate that the development of international technical guidelines could be a potential approach. Such voluntary guidelines, or similar other so-called "soft law", are developed in a less formal and incremental manner and can come into effect relatively quickly because they normally do not require national ratifications. However, it also carries an inherent risk of limited or non-compliance by states because of its very nature of informality. If guidelines are to be established, they should be developed in a realistic manner, coupled with specific planning and assured means of implementation. A potential advantage of a soft law approach is its relative transition into a more authoritative instrument as information, experience and political consensus of States increase.

On the other margin, within the past decades the use of the framework-protocol has become the most common of environmental treaty prototypes. The convention-protocol arrangement allows an incremental approach in treaty-making from general agreement to more specific and

concrete obligations in gradual steps. However, such an approach often implies a very long and drawn out negotiation process. In the case of forests, it would be necessary to ensure that its coverage extends to all types of forests; that it respects sovereign rights of nation states consistent with international law; and that it promotes democratic values and human rights of the present and future generations. However, any agreement is only as effective as the parties would commit to make it!

Before establishing the UN Forum on Forests, the sector struggled under the lack of an effective global institutional structure. The plethora of very progressive and useful recommendations that have come out of the two ad hoc processes, IPF and IFF did not have the mechanisms needed to assure and guide their successful implementation nor ways to monitor progress sufficiently.

Now, through this high-level United Nations functional commission, United Nations Forum on Forests, we should complement the Arrangement with a broad based international agreement, with a new framework offering the foundation for coherent and effective forest policy guidance at the global level. It is broadly accepted that, to date, voluntary efforts towards sustainable forest management have not met our collective expectations. So, should forests have a more authoritative stature, such as other related international environmental agreements and conventions?

The new international understanding on forests would be an option for addressing the shortcomings of the status quo. This is however not the only option available for achieving sustainable forest management. Other options would be to strengthen the forest-related components of existing legally binding instruments or to start developing an entirely new voluntary instrument? The question is: Why to initiate negotiations on another voluntary, intergovernmental policy making body when we already have one – at the highest political level?

Yet, existing conventions relevant to forests have been developed with specific objectives that do not necessarily reflect all the priorities to achieve sustainable forest management. This has led us to a situation where different approaches and processes have been piecemeal and fragmentary with many gaps and overlaps. The new international understanding on forests

should be able to overcome this shortcoming. In so doing, it would also complement the existing obligations and enhance their forest-related objectives.

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Now, allow me to reiterate some of the key elements of the future challenges and the work at hand.

First, we need coherent forest policies, which recognize all forest benefits and concerns of all stakeholders. This is a cornerstone for sustainable forest management. These supportive policies together with an enabling environment are instrumental in attracting the socially and environmentally responsible private sector and in creating forest markets and expanding revenues from forest products and services. Strengthening institutional capacity for governance and providing extensive opportunities for education are important factors of a strong local and national economy.

This leads to my second point. Efficient and effective land tenure systems and access to forest resources are crucial for local and indigenous communities and provide an economic incentive for sustainable forest management. When people have control and ownership of forests, they have greater opportunities to capitalize on forest assets, and even greater incentive to sustain the resources. Good land stewardship and clear principles of social responsibility are pre-requisites for sustainable forest management.

But none of these pieces can come together without the third basic tenet of sustainable forest management, that of good governance and strong law enforcement. A lack of economic opportunities combined with weak law enforcement often leads to illegal activities, which can destroy ecosystems and deprive local forest-dependent communities of any possibility towards sustainable livelihoods.

Illegal logging and trade in illegally harvested forest products have been eroding the resource bases of many countries and impacting socio-economic and ecological integrity. We have seen that internal conflicts and illegal harvesting of natural resources, including forest resources, go

hand in hand in many countries. Often, illegally harvested timber is exported to finance violent activities. Such crises are mostly beyond the coping ability of national governments, and require the international community's support.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The overall principal objective of the international arrangement on forest must be to ensure that all of the world's forests are sustainably managed, and for this it should start by setting specific goals and related targets. This should be the basis for designing an overarching and comprehensive framework, with a common understanding of sustainable forest management concepts and an effective structure for monitoring and compliance.

I know that the international forest community is ready to reach higher. To secure the long-term political commitment and accountability on forests, a clear agenda for the future, to which all countries wholeheartedly commit themselves to, is needed. At the 6th session of the UN Forum on Forests, countries will have the opportunity to strengthen the Arrangement on Forest, with leadership, vision and determination, which would ensure that forests remain on the international agenda in the future, too.

It is likely that the Bureau of the Sixth Session would wish to consider holding preparatory informal meetings before the end of this year. This would allow Member States' representatives to speak in a relatively official manner, and to reach some clarity on pending key issues. With intensive and effective work done by the Bureau, countries and the Secretariat, between now and February 2006, and mindful of the need to foster a common understanding among negotiating parties, the next Session of the UN Forum on Forests will set forests on a new phase.

With these few words I wish you all a productive session.

I thank you for your attention.