TENTH SESSION OF UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS TAKES UP REPORTS
ON EMERGING ISSUES, POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Delegates at Istanbul Meeting Stress Importance of Integrating Forests
Into Sustainable Development Framework, Also Weigh Options on Global Fund

With preparations under way to elaborate a post-2015 global framework and a set of
ambitious sustainable development goals, participants at the tenth session of the United Nations
Forum on Forests today stressed that woodlands must have a rightful place in those policy-
designing processes, while they also tackled the matter of new financing options for managing
those vital natural resources.

During two separate discussions, on the reports of the Secretary-General dealing
respectively with emerging issues and implementing sustainable forest management, most delegates
agreed on the need to integrate forests into the parallel processes that came out of the United
Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Yet, divisions became apparent when
the talks turned to creating a voluntary global fund dedicated to forests, a proposal supported by
many developing countries.

“The majority of countries are not in a position to provide public funding for the forest
industry” and there was “no panacea” in merely financing sustainable forest management, China’s
representative said in support for a proposal put forward by the delegate of Fiji, on behalf of the
“Group of 77” developing countries and China, for the creation of a voluntary global forest fund.
He also called for establishing a funding window specifically for sustainable forest management
within the Global Environment Facility (GEF) scheme.

The speaker for the Delegation of the European Union said there had already been several
financing instruments pertinent to forests, such as the funding mechanisms set up for climate
change mitigation and for conservation of biodiversity. Further, the overall amount of official
development assistance (ODA) available for sustainable forest management had significantly
increased, according to a 2012 study.

He indicated that developing countries could scale up financing for sustainable forest
management at the national level by mobilizing new and additional financing in the private sector
through an enabling regulatory and investment-friendly environment. The Union felt that there was
not sufficient conclusive evidence that the establishment of new forest-specific financing
mechanisms, such as a global forest fund, would help address the multiple challenges facing forest
financing.

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The representative of the United States said that his delegation supported neither the establishment of a global forest fund nor the creation of a stand-alone focus area on forests within the GEF. Rather, his Government supported the ongoing process of reviewing the current pilot phase of the multifocal Sustainable Forest Management/Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (SFM/REDD+) incentive mechanism, as a basis for ensuring adequate attentions for sustainable forest management.

South Africa’s speaker said the current financial climate might not allow for the immediate creation of a global forest fund but preparatory work on the mechanism could nevertheless begin, including discussion on modalities. She also said the window for sustainable forest management within the GEF should be distinguished from the current one for biodiversity.

As for the connection between the future international mechanism for forests, and the broader sustainable development processes, the Philippines’ representative said the period 2013-2015 would be strategically important because the Forum on Forests would review the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests and decide on its future. It was also the target year for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Forum should take advantage of such an opportune time to adopt a legally binding instrument dedicated to forests, he said. That instrument should take into account the three major pillars of sustainable development — environmental protection, economic growth and social development. It should be able to have collaboration with and links to existing multilateral environment conventions, as well as separate annexes and protocols for the different regions and subregions.

In the afternoon, the Forum began preliminary discussions on the road map to its eleventh session and the future of the international arrangement on forests, including the future of the Forum process.

The representative of the Delegation of the European Union said it was vital that the current session take concrete, transparent and inclusive steps so that the Forum’s next session in 2015 could make an informed decision on the international arrangements and the future of the Forum process. He lauded the ongoing work on natural capital accounting as a tool for promoting the renewal of natural forests and wood, saying the Forum Secretariat should be asked to look into that in the next two years.

Switzerland’s backed the “natural capital accounting” concept as a way to attract other sectors to sustainable forestry management, thus ensuring forestry management remained a top political priority.

Many African countries said the Forum’s eleventh session in 2015 should be held at a United Nations facility in Africa, with Kenya offering to host the Forum in Nairobi.

Jan McAlpine, Director of the Forest Forum Secretariat, said the road map or work programme between the tenth and eleventh sessions would need to be carefully defined. She said it would be useful to separate the question of the intersessional work on the future international (more)
arrangement on forests and the status of the Forum itself from that of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

She noted that the creation of an open-ended ad hoc expert group, such as the one proposed by several representatives, would be costly. The cost would be even greater if a large number of countries participated. The ad hoc expert group was an advisory body, which did not have a mandate to make decisions regarding the Forum’s road map, the Forum itself, the international arrangement on forests, or the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

The Forum will meet again in plenary at 5 p.m., Friday, 12 April to wrap up its work in the first half of its two-week session.

Background

As the United Nations Forum on Forests continued its tenth session today, participants were expected to consider several issues central to the body’s current and future work. Before delegates were several reports from the Secretary-General, including one on Emerging Issues: International Arrangement on Forests, post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda and the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20); the interconnections and implications (document E/CN.18/2013/6). Other reports dealt with Means of Implementation for Sustainable Forest Management (document E/CN.18/2013/11) and the second meeting of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Expert Group on Forest Financing — 14-18 January 2013, Vienna, Austria (document E/CN.18/2013/12).

Discussion on Emerging Issues, Post-2015 Forest Arrangement, Financing

The Forum’s morning session explored emerging issues in forest management, such as how to integrate forests into the post-2015 United Nations development agenda and the follow-up to the outcome of Rio+20, as well as options for forest financing.

Among the first speakers taking the floor, a representative of the Delegation of the European Union said that Rio+20 had put in place several parallel processes that would contribute to the formulation by 2015 of a new overarching institutional and policy framework for sustainable development. Forest-related matters were being discussed in other frameworks, such as climate change, biodiversity and desertification conventions. “That new, emerging institutional and policy landscape will have significant implications on institutional forest policy and to the future of the United Nations Forum on Forests,” he said.

Against that background, he said that the Union supported a proposal to establish an ad hoc expert group, and other activities during the intersessional period to review the various aspects, components and options for any future international arrangement on forests and its mandate, ahead of the Forum’s next session in 2015. The two-year review process could include analysis of the international forest arrangement facilitated by the members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. The ad hoc expert group at the global level could analyse such an arrangement by country and by Major Group representatives.

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While supporting the call to establish an ad hoc expert group, the representative of Fiji, speaking on behalf of the “Group of 77” developing countries and China, said that several factors must nevertheless be taken into account. Those included that the composition of the working group must be open-ended and intergovernmental and made up of Member States of the Forum. In addition, it should meet at least twice before the Forum’s next session. It should look into the regional and subregional mechanisms and explore potential synergies with international conventions and bodies addressing forest issues, such as those on climate change, desertification and biodiversity. He said it was essential for the group to align its work with other relevant processes, such as those established by Rio+20.

He also welcomed a proposal to make forests one of the priorities among the Sustainable Development Goals. Such inclusion was necessary to strengthen the important role of forests for achieving broader development, poverty eradication, improving livelihoods, and achieving inclusive economic growth. At the same time, establishing a cross-cutting Goal on natural resources would underscore the significance of including forests in the post-2015 development agenda and among the sustainable development targets.

Brazil’s speaker said the ad hoc expert group should meet in New York to draw on the universal membership of the United Nations and wider representation of other stakeholders. He also said it was not the Forum’s job to elaborate the sustainable development goals. The Forum could discuss how to integrate forests into such goals. The delegate of the United States said the Forum “cannot prejudge the structure or substance of the sustainable development goals, or treatment of forests in the post-2015 development agenda”.

Philippines’ speaker said “the period from 2013-2015 will strategically shape the future for sustainable development and sustainable forest management”. The Forum should take advantage of that opportune time to adopt a legally binding instrument dedicated to forests. That instrument should take into account the three pillars of sustainable development, namely environmental protection, economic development and social development. It should have collaboration with and links to existing multilateral environment conventions. Finally, the instrument should have distinct annexes and protocols for different regions and subregions.

Speaking next, the representative of Turkey said her country would like to see a finalized convention on forests at the Forum’s next session in 2015 because traditionally, sustainable forest management had been promoted by legally binding pacts that dealt with other environmental issues.

Switzerland’s delegate requested that the Forum consider allowing the participation of civil society, chiefly the Major Groups, in all its meeting, not just in an isolated portion, or one day, during a given session. They should be included in the ad hoc expert group meetings as well. Offering another suggestion, Iran’s speaker underscored the importance of using existing regional and subregional mechanisms to indentify challenges unique to different regions and countries, including those with low forest cover like his own.

Also speaking on that topic today were the representatives of China, Mexico, Colombia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Argentina, India, Ghana, Gabon, Cameroon and Cuba.

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When the discussion turned to means of implementation, specifically forest financing, the representative of the Delegation of the European Union said there were already several financing instruments that included forests, such as funds for climate change mitigation and conservation of biodiversity. In addition, the overall amount of official development assistance (ODA) available for sustainable forest management had significantly increased, according to a 2012 study.

He said it was, however, essential to establish adequate enabling conditions at the national level to scale up financing for sustainable forest management. There was also great potential for mobilizing new and additional financing from within the private sector through the creation of an enabling regulatory and investment-friendly environment. The Union felt that the ad hoc expert group on forest financing had not provided sufficiently conclusive evidence that creating new forest-specific financing mechanisms, such as a global forest fund, could help address the multiple challenges in financing sustainable forest management.

Yet the representative of Fiji, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, called for the establishment of a voluntary global fund and the creation of a new focus area for forests under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) scheme on its next funding cycle.

The delegate of China added that most countries were not in a position to provide public funding for the forest industry and there was no panacea for the challenge of financing sustainable forest management. China supported the creation of a voluntary global forest fund, which could take into account each donor’s financial condition, as well as a resolution by the Forum to request the GEF to make sustainable forest management one of the focus areas.

The representative of the United States said that his delegation supported neither the establishment of a global forest fund nor creation of a stand-alone focal area on forests within the GEF. Rather, the United States supported the ongoing process of reviewing the current pilot phase of the multifocal Sustainable Forest Management/Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (SFM/REDD+) incentive mechanism, as a basis for ensuring adequate attention was devoted to the issue.

However, South Africa’s speaker noted that the current financial climate might not allow for the immediate creation of a global forest fund but “this does not mean that we should not start working on the modalities and the creation of the fund.” She also supported the creation of a dedicated window for sustainable forest management within the GEF, separate from the current window for biodiversity.

The representative of India said that some $70 billion to $160 billion from both the public and the private sector would be needed annually to sustainably manage the world’s forests. There was an urgent need to create and strengthen partnerships with cross-sectoral institutions and multiple stakeholders. He supported creation of a global forest fund, as did the representatives of Ghana and Mauritania.

Also participating in the discussion on the second topic were the representatives of Indonesia, Niger, Mexico, Bolivia, Togo, Switzerland, Turkey, Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, Iran, Malaysia, Lesotho, Argentina, Papua New Guinea, Kenya and Congo.

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In the afternoon, the Forum began preliminary discussions on the road map to its eleventh session in 2015, the substance of the session itself and the future of the international arrangement on forests, including the future of the Forum process. The discussions were moderated by Mario Ruales Carranza (Ecuador), Forum Chair.

Taking the floor first, the representative of the Delegation of the European Union said it was vital that the current session take concrete, transparent and inclusive steps so that the eleventh session could make an informed decision on the international arrangements and the future of the Forum process. He supported the proposal to create an ad hoc expert group and other informal arrangements. The two-year review should include a country-by-country analysis by Forum members and the open-ended ad hoc expert group on the international arrangements. He called for preparation of background papers, as well as organizational initiatives to complement that process. He lauded the ongoing work on natural capital accounting as a tool for promoting the renewal of natural forests and wood, saying the Forum Secretariat should be asked to look into that in the next two years.

The representative of Switzerland backed the “natural capital accounting” concept as a way to attract other sectors to sustainable forestry management, thus ensuring forestry management remained a top political priority. The delegate of Burundi added that natural capital accounting would be beneficial in convincing Government officials of the need for financing for sustainable forestry management.

But Bolivia’s representative objected to the concept, saying it exploited nature as a “mere commercial object” rather than respecting its function as a “holy entity” that had rights. The natural capital accounting concept had been rejected at the Rio+20 Conference and should not be reintroduced.

The representative of Fiji, speaking on behalf of Group of 77 and China, called for a clear road map to 2015 and an intersessional meeting between now and that year, as did the representatives of China and Angola.

The representatives of Brazil, Cuba and Argentina echoed the call of earlier speakers for formation of an intergovernmental ad hoc expert working group, saying that such a group must have a very clear mandate post-2015 and during the intersessional period to aid Governments in achieving sustainable forest management. Argentina’s speaker added that the group must meet at least once in the coming period.

Representatives of several African countries, including those of Sudan, Ghana, Niger, South Africa, Gabon, Kenya, Senegal, Morocco, Namibia and Swaziland said the Forum’s eleventh session in 2015 should be held at a United Nations facility in Africa. Kenya’s representative offered to host the Forum at the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

The representative New Zealand backed the statement by the representative of the United States, saying the Forum must discuss the functions, scope and output of the ad hoc expert group and based on that analysis decide how many meetings it would require.

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Also taking the floor, the representative of Indonesia stressed the need for a transparent, inclusive process on a clear road map and a better understanding of issues in 2015. He asked for adequate information in advance on the country-led initiatives in order to have a better understanding of their status.

The representatives of Turkey and Uganda said a new forest instrument must be drafted. Similarly, they supported creation of a legally binding instrument, which must include analysis of provisions of the existing instrument and whether regional differences would be taken into account.

The observer for the State of Palestine supported the idea of creating a global forest fund to support his and other States that lacked sufficient financing for sustainable forestry management.

Following those statements, JAN MCALPINE, Director, Forest Forum Secretariat, said the road map, or work programme, between the tenth and eleventh sessions of the Forum would need to be carefully defined. She said it would be useful to separate the question of the intersessional work on the future international arrangement on forests, and the status of the Forum itself from that of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

She noted that the cost of each open-ended ad hoc expert group, such as the one proposed by several representatives today, was $270,000. That figure would increase if a large number of countries participated. The ad hoc expert group was an advisory body; it did not have a mandate to make decisions regarding the Forum’s road map, the Forum itself, the international arrangement on forests, or the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

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