Draft Chairman’s Summary of the plenary session of the high-level segment 25 May

**Role of forests in the follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit and integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields**

Forests and trees play a critical role in supporting the livelihoods of people, particularly the world’s poor. Forest resources directly contribute to the livelihoods of 90 per cent of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty and who depend on forests to enrich their soil, provide nutrition for their livestock and protect their water supply. For these people, forests are a source of food, energy, shelter, medicine, commerce, and spiritual well-being. Finding means of managing forests in a more sustainable way is thus crucial for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.

The plenary session was organized as a policy dialogue between Ministers, Heads of member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and high-level representatives of Major Groups. The session was moderated by H.E. Ms. Buyelwa Patience Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry of South Africa.

**Policy recommendations highlighted in the discussion**

Efforts to defeat poverty and pursue sustainable development will be in vain if degradation and natural resource depletion, including loss of forests and illegal activities in the forest sector, continue unabated. Where forests play a critical role in enabling people to cope with poverty, their rights should be safeguarded, by providing and securing of tenure and access to wood and non-timber forest products. Furthermore, efforts to tackle these challenges and make strides towards sustainable forests management needs be strengthened at all levels, including a strong International Arrangement on Forests.

The alarming rate of deforestation continues to warrant international attention and there is a need to renew the pledge to combat deforestation, restoring the forest functions in degraded landscapes and improve the livelihoods of poor people living in and around forests world-wide. Several participants stressed that setting global forest goals in this regard may serve as a catalyst for action at all levels and stimulate countries to set their own target to fulfill this commitment. Furthermore, such common goals could also be conveyed to the high level plenary meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, in which heads of state and government would participate to comprehensively review the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

Several delegations stress the need to increased resource mobilization, both domestically and externally, for sustainable forests management and the achievement of the
Millennium Development Goals. Capacity building, research and transfer of environmentally sound technologies were also highlighted as priorities in order to make significant progress on the ground.

Some delegations highlighted that forests are deeply entwined with other sectors of society and their management requires coordinated efforts and intersectoral approaches. National forest programmes provide an excellent framework within which countries can address the opportunities for trees and forests to contribute to broader development objectives.