



**STATEMENT BY JOSÉ ANTONIO OCAMPO
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TO THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS
New York, 13 February 2006**

Madam Chair,
Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The United Nations Forum on Forests stands at a critical juncture. Since the fifth session could not complete its consideration of the review and future actions, the sixth session of the Forum confronts the same challenges it faced last year: to chart the way ahead for the Forum after its first five years and adopt an effective method of work. Let us consider what is at stake.

All of us here know that forests cover a third of the Earth's land surface. Their benefits extend from economic development and distribution of wealth to environmental safeguarding functions. Annual international trade in primary and secondary forest products amounts to 200 billion dollars, a monumental sum. At the same time, hundreds of millions of people depend, at least partly, on forests for their livelihood. This renders the alarming rate of deforestation a major threat to sustainable development, and one to which some of the world's poorest people are particularly vulnerable.

Forests issues do not really belong to any one sector. Forest-related challenges are complex and critical for protecting the environment and improving human life. If sustainably managed, forests can provide opportunities for sustainable livelihood, particularly for people in rural areas. Given the impact on forests of population expansion, economic growth and environmental instability, it is not surprising they have been at the center of several international negotiations. Sustainable Forest Management has become a major policy objective for many countries.

The United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, held in Rio in 1992, firmly put forest issues on the international agenda, as reflected in the Rio Declaration, the Forest Principles and Chapter 11 of Agenda 21.

Since Rio, the concept of Sustainable Forest Management has received unprecedented global attention. Much of the international effort has focused on establishing the framework and mechanisms to facilitate implementation of Sustainable Forest Management, particularly through the two *ad hoc* arrangements under the Commission on Sustainable Development: the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), followed by the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). Together, the two produced proposals for action providing a good account of collective international understanding on Sustainable Forest Management, based on the Forest Principles.

Created by the Economic and Social Council in 2000, the current International Arrangement on Forests continues this line of work. It institutionalizes an intergovernmental

process that provides support to Member States and practitioners, as well as to the many people who subsist on forests.

The Arrangement incorporates a mandate and work programme for the UN Forum on Forests as its central structure: a permanent intergovernmental body with universal membership, operating as a functional commission under ECOSOC and with the support of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF). The Arrangement clearly sets out the mutually reinforcing roles of the Forum as the policy organ and of the CPF members as facilitators of implementation.

Just as the UN Forum on Forests belongs within the wider institutional framework of the UN development system, so is its work is part of the UN's wider development policy framework.

The Forum has been working to provide the necessary policy development, guidance and support to the national implementation of Sustainable Forest Management. Over the past five years, this objective has increasingly become an integral part of the broader development agenda, emanating from the major UN conferences and summits. This includes the policy decisions and targets set out in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and in the Millennium Declaration, plus the agreements reached last year at the 2005 World Summit. The links of Sustainable Forest Management to the global effort to eradicate extreme poverty have become especially clear.

Adopted by Heads of State and Government, the World Summit Outcome recognizes the cross-sectoral character of forest issues and the crucial need to manage forests sustainably. The Outcome Document calls for trees and forests to contribute fully to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. Towards this end, it commits Governments to strengthen the conservation, sustainable management and development of all types of forests for the benefit of current and future generations, including through enhanced international cooperation.

This is the context for your deliberations over the next two weeks. As part of your efforts, you will consider how to advance implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action. While a good starting point, these have not yet served to slow deforestation in a marked way. In fact, illegal logging and associated trade have further exacerbated deforestation and forest degradation. Clearly, further articulation of and concrete action on emerging issues is needed. Good governance, Sustainable Forest Management for peacebuilding, and capacity building at the local and landscape levels should be at the centre of the forest policy agenda. Equally, the issues of land tenure and access should be addressed, together with the proper valuation of timber and environmental services that forests provide.

Like all of ECOSOC's functional commissions, the Forum will need to reflect—in light of the Summit—on how to maximize its contribution to unified implementation of the conference and summit outcomes. The Forum should articulate further the concept of Sustainable Forest Management as one of the tools for integrated implementation of the development goals. It should explore how to build stronger linkages between Sustainable Forest Management policy and other forest-related institutional and programmatic processes, including those focused on desertification, biological diversity, climate change, water and energy.

The Forum must also consider how it will contribute to the major thrust of the Summit on achieving greater coherence and synergies in the United Nations' normative, analytical and operational work, at both headquarters and country levels. This means, in the first instance,

thinking about how to strengthen productive linkages between the efforts of the Forum and those of the major forest-related international organizations, institutions and convention secretariats that compose the Collaborative Partnership. More generally, it means the Forum's pulling together a wide range of forest-related processes, institutions and instruments, as well as major stakeholders, in order to address jointly the priority economic, social and environmental issues linked to forests in a much more integrated manner. All these actors—at the national, regional and international levels—have critical roles to play in advancing the concept of Sustainable Forest Management.

The UN regional commissions have a particular potential to help raise the profile of forest issues and to mainstream them into the broader development agenda. This was the focus of the first Inter-Regional Workshop on UN Cooperation and Future Forest-related Actions, held here in New York last December. A number of regional initiatives, including criteria and indicators processes, regional partnerships and collaborative networks, have been helping to advance the forest policy process. I hope that we see intensified regional collaboration on this front, aimed especially at more effective implementation on the ground.

Distinguished Delegates,

This sixth session has an opportunity to strengthen and broaden the effectiveness of the UN Forum on Forests—and the International Arrangement on Forests—with vision and determination. Deciding on a clear and compelling agenda for the future would help to secure strong international commitment and accountability on forest issues. In reviewing its working methods, the Forum should discuss ways to provide better guidance to its many partners on the meaning of policies, as well as ideas to facilitate implementation. It should seek to stimulate invigorated interaction and dialogue at global, regional, national and local levels to address emerging issues affecting forests. It should explore practical steps to integrate forests more closely with other cross-sectoral issues. And it should aim to spur enhanced international cooperation and strong support from partners worldwide, in the form of increased pro-poor, pro-nature and pro-growth actions that link trees and forests to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals and the people-centred development agenda.

My message to you today is that you confront these challenges, these possibilities, within a broad context of United Nations reform. The whole UN system is gearing up in a new drive to implement the development goals in an integrated and enduringly effective way. Sustainable Forest Management holds great promise for advancing the array of development goals. But there is a risk that, without a firm agreement on its future action, the Forum will call into question its capacity to deliver on that promise—its very *raison d'être*. Let us not let that happen.

Madam Chair,

We know that we can count on your skilful leadership to help drive forward this Forum in this critical session. I offer our support and my best wishes for a most productive meeting.