

Major Groups Joint Statement
Monday 16 April 2007
UNFF-7

Thank-you Mr. Chair for extending to Major Groups the opportunity for this intervention.

As with others who have already intervened, Major Groups share a sense of optimism about the potential for the Non-Legally Binding Instrument to be a new beginning. At the end of next week will we all know whether we have simply re-worded past commitments, made incremental progress, or achieved something truly historic?

As major groups we asked ourselves what a Non Legally Binding Instrument would have to address to be historic. Our answer is that to be historically significant the Non Legally Binding Instrument must be a force to achieve its global objectives in particular to :

- reduce deforestation while enhancing healthy forest ecosystems,
- promote sustainable livelihoods,
- improve forest governance by specifically addressing corruption in all its forms, and
- reduce poverty for all forest dependent people.

To achieve these goals, Major Groups have identified three areas of concern. These areas are: governance, benefit sharing, and policy and program implementation.

Good governance is a pre-requisite for Sustainable Forest Management. Good governance requires effective forest institutions, supported by national legislation, proper budgets, and appropriate policies. This will occur more effectively if accomplished with the active participation of Agenda 21 major groups at all levels.

The Non legally Binding Instrument can promote better governance by addressing the issue of land tenure and by promoting land tenure mechanisms that, at least:

- (1) recognize the rights of women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and small holders to use forests in a sustainable manner; and,
- (2) when tenure conflicts arise provides for a timely dispute resolution process that protects the most vulnerable social groups.

Without such safeguards, the legacy of abuse and mismanagement will continue to be a burden on future efforts to achieve sustainable forest management.

Major groups are concerned about the ability of corruption and illegal forest activities, to undermine genuine attempts to achieve SFM. Corruption defers much needed resources from local communities causing programs to falter. In addition, corruption undermines the legitimacy of government at all levels denying them the moral authority required to enforce the difficult decisions required to promote SFM.

Governance also must insure fairness and equitable sharing of the wealth of forests. Equitable sharing of benefits, currently part of the proposed MYPOW, is the second area singled out by Major groups as a requirement for success.

Private sector investment offers the potential for the creation of great wealth and great destruction. Forest land must have either a cultural, social, or economic value to prevent conversion to other land uses. The creation of economic wealth is an important driver for keeping land in forest use. Unfortunately, there is today a chronic and consistent imbalance in the sharing of benefits created by the market exploitation of forests. The imbalance in power between private investors and other groups needs to be carefully monitored and regulated.

Markets tend not to recognize the socio-cultural values of communities or forests. This creates conflict and contributes to the displacement of women, indigenous peoples, local communities, and the forest workforce. Weakness in the implementation of policies has had the unintended consequences of marginalizing vulnerable groups. It has also promoted a type of commercial forestry and other non timber forest products which tend to benefit a relatively small group of investors to the detriment of other groups and occasionally to the detriment of entire countries. This type of activity does little to reduce rural poverty, leads to dangerous and unstable jobs for the forestry workforce, disrupts existing social and cultural structures, creates a hostile economic environment for small forestry land owners, and endangers indigenous peoples. Major Groups request that member states recognize the strengths and weaknesses of larger scale corporate investment projects and act to insure equitable sharing of benefits. In addition, Major Groups urge member states to develop guidelines to maximize the benefits accruing to local forest dependent groups from other types of market based approaches such as privatizing forests or existing efforts to monetize the ecological services of forests.

Likewise the power of donors and large intergovernmental agencies must also address the issue of benefit sharing. Private sector investments, ODA, and intergovernmental organizations need to insure that all projects promote:

- (1) Environmental conservation within the culture of the receiving country;
- (2) International conventions on human and worker rights;
- (3) Equitable distribution of forest resources and wealth for all stakeholders, and
- (4) Prior and informed consent of local and Indigenous Peoples.

The final area of Major Groups concern is the result of the slow pace of implementation of the prior IPF/IFF proposals for actions and other agreed international commitments. Rather than continue to focus on text, Major Groups would like to see the Forum help to shape the consensus required to strengthen the global political will needed to:

- accelerate the transfer of environmentally sound technology,
- build capacity for education, information, and research to empower all stakeholders; and
- expand collaboration opportunities among CPF members by offering more specific direction and tasks. The Non-Legally Binding Instrument could assist the various governing bodies of CPF members to identify more areas for mutual learning and cooperation.

The current situation that the Non Legally Binding Instrument is attempting to alter did not come about by accident. The present situation serves the needs of some at the expense of many. Just as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was controversial when it was developed Major Groups think the Non Legally Binding Instrument must be equally bold if it is to represent a historic advancement for forest dependent countries and forest dependent peoples everywhere.

Thank-you