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FAO Forestry: Enhancing Policy and Programme Coordination

Statement

by

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Mr Chair,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues,

The forest sector continues to be affected by the rapid pace of global changes, including globalization, climate change, and the dynamism of global communications. Many private companies and countries are adjusting their forestry strategies in an effort to remain competitive. The UN and its programmes and agencies, including FAO, are in reform. These changes will affect forestry at the national level and the international forest dialogue.

FAO will respond to these changes by carrying a strategic review of its forestry priorities and work activities by March 2009. The review will be done in consultation with Members, regional forestry commissions, and partner organizations.

Many of you participated in the FAO Committee on Forestry last month in Rome so you were already part of the process of determining priorities to FAO's work on forestry. COFO was very successful both in terms of high level of participation of 600 delegates, including 100 heads of national forestry administrations, and also in providing a rich dialogue on key and timely forest issues. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr Chair, for presenting a key note address in the opening day of COFO.

As has been confirmed by the FAO Council, the current overall priority of the FAO forestry programme is the implementation of SFM - the same objective as the proposed non-legally binding instrument. According to the FAO Council, FAO should play a central role in the International Arrangement on Forests. The Council has also requested FAO to strengthen the Regional Forestry Commissions in order to boost national implementation of SFM through action-oriented dialogue and regional cooperation.

In recommending forestry priorities, COFO 2007 requested FAO to:

1. strengthen its role as a knowledge and communication centre for forestry;
2. support national forest programmes and integrate forestry in poverty reduction strategies;
3. assist Members in their efforts to improve forest law;
4. carry out studies on forest tenure and assist communities to develop small-scale forest-based enterprises; and
5. strengthen support to countries to address increasing threats to forest ecosystems from wildfires, pests and invasive species

Regarding cooperation, FAO needs to boost collaboration with GEF on forest funding. Our fruitful joint work with UNFCCC in climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, including to reduce emissions from deforestation, has to be further strengthened. COFO also invited CPF to strengthen cooperation on bioenergy issues.

Monitoring, assessment and reporting on forests continues also as FAO priority, notably through the series of the State of the World's Forests, the global Forest Resources Assessment, forest product statistics, and the regional Outlook Studies. The latter provides a range of options for action to shape the future of the world's forests based on policies implemented and investments made today. We just finalized the outlooks for 2020 in Latin America and the Caribbean and in West and Central Asia and we have embarked on the outlook study for Asia-Pacific. Studies for Africa and Europe were completed two years ago.

Another FAO's core work area is voluntary guidelines and best practices. FAO has recently facilitated two multistakeholder processes on guidelines for planted forests and for fire management and, together with ITTO, best practices on forest law enforcement, followed by regional workshops to exchange country experiences in this field.

All these examples can be looked upon as pillars of implementation of sustainable forest management.

It would be fair to say that FAO's work has contributed significantly to and reflected largely the outcomes of the IPF/IFF and UNFF. As another concrete example, IPF highlighted national forest programmes, and subsequently this led to the establishment of the National Forest Programme Facility as a growing multi-donor trust fund and partnership hosted by FAO to support development and implementation of NFPs.

Mr Chair, FAO is fully engaged in the UN system wide efforts to enhance coherence and cooperation. In forestry, FAO works with all CPF members, at different levels and intensity, maximizing synergies and best possible support to member countries. Indeed, CPF is the main mechanism to enhance cooperation and coordinated approaches on forest activities. The spirit of cooperation is very high, while it is obvious that not everything can and should be done together. Often FAO's work complements the work by other partners and vice versa. Also, not all competition is bad as it can provoke innovation and thus better services to member countries.

The CPF spirit has also triggered more systematic planning among its members. For example, FAO and ITTO have undertaken more systematic planning for funding and implementing many of their joint activities. In 2005 the CBD secretariat and FAO initiated a joint planning effort for more coordinated support to the implementation of the CBD programme of work on forest biological diversity. FAO works more systematically than ever before with the UNFCCC secretariat. IUFRO is the oldest FAO forestry partner, and with CIFOR and IUCN we cooperate almost daily in workshops, reviews and publications. Also, the discussion on funding and financing for SFM has broadened our collaboration with GEF and the World Bank. I could go on and list all other CPF members but I'm afraid the time will not permit.

Yet, the CPF members are only one group of FAO partners, in addition to many other global, regional and national organizations, including non-governmental organizations. Without such tremendous cooperation, we would not be able to perform. The magnitude of partners is an asset.

In concluding, Mr Chair, I firmly believe that cooperation among many forest-related organizations has never been higher than it is today. Yet fragmentation of forest issues is a reality, reflecting national challenges in coordination and delegation of responsibility. I am confident, however, that working in partnerships in real activities can turn the fragmentation into mutual benefits and advance the profile of forests and sustainable forest management worldwide. That is also why existing, well working and externally evaluated instruments, trust funds and organizations need to be strengthened, instead of creating new structures and new layers of governance. This is perhaps the greatest challenge of governments in pursuing coherence.

Thank you.