Summary of Roundtable 1: Forests for People
Wednesday, 2 February 2011

The High-Level Roundtable on Forests for People (Roundtable 1), of the Ninth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF9) was held on 2 February 2011 during its high level ministerial segment. The Roundtable was chaired by Mr. Ingwald Gschwandtl, Vice-Chair of UNFF9 and moderated by Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, Senior Fellow of the United Nations Foundation and former Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). During this Roundtable ministers and high officials of the following countries made statements: Croatia, Norway, Turkey, Cameroon, Austria, Thailand, Zambia, the Philippines, Peru, Ghana, China, Senegal, Mongolia, Angola, Romania, USA, Morocco, Hungary, Lesotho, Central African Republic, India, Poland, Russian Federation, Czech Republic, Israel, Mauritania, Ukraine, Gabon, Indonesia, Botswana, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Italy, Nepal, and Jamaica. What follows is an overview of the discussion among the Ministers and other high level representatives.

The discussions at this Roundtable were focused on the intertwined relationship between people and forests. Participants highlighted the multiple functions and contributions of forests to human well-being, environmental stability and economic development, noting that forests provide not only goods and services, but are also sources of folklore and spirituality, and have deep roots in different cultures and religions. Countries stressed that, in addition to indigenous and forest-dependent peoples, urban populations also benefit from forests through raw materials, clean water and air and recreational activities. Member States emphasized that targeted policies are needed at local, national, regional and international levels to sustainably manage forests. In this respect, good forest governance, tenure security, local participation, cross-sectoral and landscape-level policy frameworks, as well as increased funding and political commitment were also considered of high importance.

Forests play a vital role in preserving ecosystems and biological diversity, as well as in combating climate change, and reducing risks from natural disasters. Concerns were expressed over deforestation, illegal logging and trans-boundary movement of illegal forest products, desertification, recurring droughts, and changing forestland to agricultural lands especially in recent years. Meanwhile some countries indicated that recent policies enacted to protect and promote forest restoration efforts have resulted in improved environmental conditions – such as erosion control – and have also led to increased employment. Forests are also crucial for improving livelihoods, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable development, which was underscored by many countries. Forests offer multiple services, including timber and non timber forest products, and are the main sources of food, medicine and raw materials for building and weaving, and for employment generation.

The International Year of Forests was considered widely as a major opportunity to increase awareness among the general public on the role of people as a key vehicle to protect the world’s forests. To further promote a people-centered approach on forests,
many countries supported the work of the Forum in exploring inter-sectoral linkages between forests, water, agriculture, land management and energy. Countries also emphasized that a comprehensive approach on forests is needed to reconcile short-term needs with long-term policy and economic interests. The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the development of national forest programmes and model forests was also noted as an important factor to promote forests for people. Several countries explained how their work with communities has embraced the long-term benefits of forests for people.

Limited financial and technical capacity, lack of data on forest resources, and difficulties in disseminating information to rural communities on sustainable forest management practices were highlighted as major impediments for realizing the full potential of forests. Countries recognized the significance of the existing collaboration among countries on these matters. However, many countries called for increased funding cooperation including through establishing a global forest fund, to provide predictable and reliable funding for forests.

Participants underscored the need for advancing implementation of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on all Types of Forests (forest instrument), and the achievement of the Global Objectives on Forests. Many countries stressed that the Four Global Objectives on Forests are set to address people’s needs.