



ECOSOC

United Nations Economic and Social Council

TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram, President of the Economic and Social Council at the Webinar “Forest at the heart of a green recovery from COVID-19”

September 28, 2020

**Excellencies,
Mr. Under-Secretary General,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am very grateful for the invitation to address this important webinar on forests.

It has been 20 years since the UN forum and forests was established.

You have pursued the goal through the United Nations strategic plan for forests.

Today, the objectives outlined in the plan are even more vital than they have been in the past.

We are facing triple challenges: the challenge of the COVID pandemic and its economic and social impact; the challenge of climate change; and the challenge of trying to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Our forests are literally burning.

At the same time with the COVID crisis and the decline in incomes, the dependence of millions of people, especially in the rural communities, on forests and on the products of forests, such as wood, has increased for energy supply.

The goals that were set out in the strategic plan remain relevant.

What we need to do is to see how we can focus on the main actions that should be taken under the current circumstance.

First of all, it is self-evident that we must stop the process of deforestation.

We must not only fight the fires that are burning but also provide alternatives for rural populations for their dependence on wood burning through renewable energy projects and by creation of job opportunities in the rural areas.

Obviously, major reforestation plans are required.

Some countries have started this in our region.

It is reported that Pakistan has embarked on reforestation plans through its national agencies.

Pakistan has an objective of planting 10 billion trees over the next three years, which also creates employment and job opportunities for unskilled labor.

Therefore in order to counter the challenges posed by the COVID crisis, we should utilize the mechanisms available at the ECOSOC.

First, I think we need to incorporate reforestation and adaption into the poverty alleviation programs of national governments.

We can utilize the resident coordinator and resident representative systems which are available in developing countries to bring plans before the ECOSOC during various forums and meetings during my presidency of the Council.

Another important area is science and technology.

I have identified this as a priority area for the presidency.

It could be extremely relevant, with regard to forests.

There are technologies that we need to promote, such as remote sensing, the more efficient use of water, and the GIS technology for data collection.

We can also use drone technology for observation, and application of solutions to forest and agricultural problems.

We need to pick from the plan of action the objectives that we need to promote in the context of science and technology and promote these in a targeted way in our deliberations and at the national level.

Finally, finance, is the key.

The key to the implementation of all plans and programs that we have including the strategic plan for 2030, resources obviously needed to be mobilized, both at the domestic and external level.

Governments can be encouraged to provide larger outlays in cash for programs such as I mentioned on reforestation and other nature based solutions.

Local communities needed to be mobilized in this process.

It is a cheap and efficient option for local communities to engage in reforestation and forest preservation activities.

Externally, obviously, we need a whole spectrum of solutions: we need solutions to the debt crisis, which hampers countries from outlaying money on such nature based solutions and reforestation.

There is an active plan for such nature's solutions: debt swaps for nature based solutions.

We need to activate this in an organized way in developing countries.

Green bonds have been mentioned and I think that this is a major innovative approach we can adopt to provide financing for forest action.

And last, but not least, I think we must hold on, though, our advanced country partners to their commitment to mobilize the hundred billion dollars in climate finance.

I hope to utilize the forum for Economic and Social Council to promote these activities and these objectives in the coming months.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in this.

I thank you.
