

Concept Note:

Expert meeting on Strengthening Major Groups and Other Stakeholders' Engagement in the work of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) beyond 2015

5-6 October 2016, Ottawa, Canada

Introduction:

The United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat (UNFFS) and the Canadian Forest Service will jointly convene a two-day expert meeting titled “expert meeting on strengthening major groups and other stakeholders’ engagement in the work of the international arrangement on forests (IAF) beyond 2015”. This meeting is in response to section IX on the involvement of major groups and other stakeholders contained in resolution E/RES/2015/33¹, agreed at the Forum in its eleventh session in May 2015, and subsequently adopted by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) in July 2015. The expert meeting will take place from 5 to 6 October 2016 in Ottawa, Canada.

Approximately 30 invitees from forest-related civil society organizations and other stakeholders, UNFF Major Groups and UNFF Member States will participate in this expert meeting in their personal capacity.

Background and Rationale:

According to resolution E/RES/2000/35 that established the Forum, participation of a wide range of forest-related stakeholders, including major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, is considered a key component of sustainable forest management (SFM). In addition, accredited major group organizations with the ECOSOC and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) were encouraged to participate in Forum sessions.

At UNFF11, Member States decided to strengthen high-level political engagement with the participation of major groups and other stakeholders, in support of SFM. Through this resolution, the Forum recognized the importance of the continued and enhanced engagement of major groups and other stakeholders in its sessions and intersessional activities². It invited major groups

¹ ECOSOC Resolution E/RES/2015/33 on the International arrangement on forests beyond 2015

²E/RES/2015/33/ paragraph 29

and other stakeholders to enhance their contributions to the work of the IAF beyond 2015³, and requested the Forum secretariat to promote the involvement of major groups and other stakeholders in its work, in particular leaders from the private sector and non-governmental sector, including forest industries, local communities and philanthropic organizations⁴. The Forum also invited Member States to consider enhancing the participation and contribution of major groups and other stakeholder representatives in country-led initiatives⁵.

Additionally, the Council also decided to restructure the sessions of the Forum from biennial to annual sessions⁶. In this regard, the odd-year sessions would focus on implementation and technical advice, and give major groups and other relevant stakeholders an opportunity to provide technical advice and input to the Forum⁷.

Furthermore, as a follow-up to UNFF11, the Forum invited Member States and relevant stakeholders, including major groups and other stakeholders, to provide their views and proposals, including on the IAF strategic plan for the period 2017-2030 and the quadrennial programme of work for the period 2017-2030. Civil society organizations (CSO's) and Major Groups represent an important constituency in the forest policymaking process and improving their engagement in the work of the IAF can help vocalize their interests. They have the potential to act as a driving force in promoting international cooperation through mobilizing public support for Sustainable Forest Management. This is because they are closer to on-the-ground implementation, and for this reason can play a critical advocacy role in influencing the public, complementing, widening and legitimizing global forest related dialogue and decisions.

However, various challenges and obstacles have limited the participation and engagement of major groups and other stakeholders in the forest policy dialogue, particularly in the work of the Forum. These challenges have also limited Major Groups' convening power and capacity to facilitate implementation of decisions and recommendations from the Forum.

The main challenges, *inter-alia*, include:

- Lack of clear institutional or financial mechanisms for mobilizing and coordinating major groups' engagement;

³E/RES/2015/33/ paragraph 31

⁴E/RES/2015/33/paragraph 33

⁵E/RES/2015/33/ paragraph 32

⁶E/RES/2015/33/paragraph 6 (b))

⁷E/CN.18RES/2015/33/ paragraph 6 (g) (ii)

- Fragmented, inconsistent communications between Major Groups and a one-way communication to Major Groups from the Forum processes;
- Lack of Major Groups' collective consensus and views at the regional and international levels;
- The constraints of operating under the ECOSOC rules of procedure covering NGO access and participation in the Forum's sessions and intersessional meetings⁸.

For these reasons, it is imperative to explore and identify concrete ideas and means to widen and make more meaningful the engagement of Major Groups in the IAF activities and overall work in ways that strengthen and also transcend the framework laid down by ECOSOC.

Objectives:

The meeting will provide an opportunity for the active engagement of diverse forest-related stakeholders including civil society organisations, and UNFF major groups to identify approaches and actions for strengthening engagement and contributions of major groups and other stakeholders', particularly leaders from the private sector and non-governmental sectors, forest industries, local communities and philanthropic organizations in the work of the IAF beyond 2015, including the Forum.

The main objectives of this expert meeting are:

- To provide specific proposals to AHEG2 for consideration of experts and inclusion in the eventual proposal on the IAF strategic plan to enhance engagement of major groups and other stakeholders; and
- To explore options on modalities for enhancing major groups' and other stakeholders' participation in UNFF sessions, including UNFF12.

Expected Outputs

A summary of discussions containing key elements of discussions, ideas and proposals will be prepared, including:

- Options and scenarios for participation in Forum Sessions and intersessional activities;
- Contributing to reporting on major groups contribution to promoting implementation of sustainable forest management, including the UN Forest Instrument; and Forum decisions.

⁸ ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31

- Specific proposals for inclusion in the IAF strategic plan and quadrennial programme of work.

The results of this meeting will be submitted for consideration of the AHEG Co-Chairs as input to their revised proposal of options and building blocks on the IAF Strategic Plan and the quadrennial programme of work. The meeting report will also be made available to AHEG 2 participants.

Meeting format:

The meeting will be held from 10 am to 6 pm daily and will be co-chaired by Mr Peter Besseau, Chair, UNFF12 Bureau and Director, International Affairs, Canadian Forest Service Natural Resources and a member of the Major Groups (TBD). It will include 2 presentations, the first by Ms Jan McAlpine, UNFFS Consultant, on the background paper on the “Review of the provisions and arrangements of the 10 intergovernmental organizations for involving major groups and other stakeholders” followed by interactive discussions. The second presentation will be given by the UNFF Secretariat, on the proposed options and building blocks of the strategic plan and the quadrennial programme of work. These will be followed by plenary discussions on ways to facilitate more effective engagement and participation of major groups representatives in Forum sessions and technical advice sessions for example in the same way as major groups engagement in the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII); and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals.

Participation:

The experts from some Member States ,UNFF major groups, other forest-related stakeholders, particularly leaders from the private sector and non-governmental sectors, forest industries, local communities and philanthropic organizations will participate in their own personal capacities.

Background materials and working language:

Participants will be provided the draft programme of work and the background paper on the “Review of the provisions and arrangements of the 10 intergovernmental organizations for involving major groups and other stakeholders” in due course prior to the meeting.

The AHEG Co-Chairs’ initial proposals on (i) Building blocks/options for the Strategic Plan for 2017-2030 and (ii) the Quadrennial programme of work for 2017-2020 are available on the UNFF website at

<http://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/aheg/iaf-strategic-plan-ii-2016/index.html>.

The working language of the meeting is English with no interpretation.