

26 March 2020

Excellency,

The international community is currently confronting an unprecedented challenge caused by the global pandemic of COVID-19. This pandemic is now impacting all aspects of our daily work, including the work of the United Nations. As you are aware, the fifteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF15) is planned to be held from 4 to 8 May 2020 in New York. As a policy session, UNFF15 is expected to adopt a resolution on several important issues, in particular, the Quadrennial Programme of Work of the Forum for 2021-2024. It is also expected to include a high-level segment to adopt a ministerial declaration.

To minimize the health risks associated with the spread of COVID-19 and considering local authority decisions on limiting physical meetings in UNHQ, the Bureau of UNFF15 hold extraordinary virtual meetings on 16 and 23 March 2020. The Bureau thoroughly discussed and elaborated the feasibility and practicality of different scenarios for UNFF15 from substantive and procedural aspects. In its discussion, the UNFF15 Bureau took into full account i) Decision of the ECOSOC Bureau on revised schedule of meetings, ii) Explanation by the Secretariat that UNFF15 as a policy session must take place in 2020 to provide guidance to Members of the Forum and its Secretariat on the ongoing substantive and operational issues, and iii) Advice by the Secretary of the Forum on the need for UNFF15 to conclude its work within the ECOSOC 2020 cycle which ends in July 2020. As the result of its extensive discussion, the Bureau made the following decisions regarding UNFF15:

1. UNFF15 will be scaled down to adopt the resolution during one half-day session. This session is recommended to be held, either in person or virtually, within the first or second week of June 2020. The draft resolution will be considered agreed, following the silence procedure as outlined below. The Bureau will keep you posted on any new development on this matter, considering the evolving situation.
2. There will be no high-level segment during UNFF15. To maintain the momentum, however, the Bureau of UNFF15 recommended to organize the high-level segment during the 16th session of the Forum in 2021 to adopt a ministerial declaration. In this regard, the ongoing consultation on the draft ministerial declaration is, hereby, suspended¹.
3. All Members of the Forum are urged to actively participate in, and contribute to the CBD and UNFCCC Conferences of Parties, whose forest-related outcomes would be important elements for consideration in the context of UNFF16 Ministerial Declaration and the Forum's programme of work for 2021-2024.
4. The UNFF15 draft resolution should be concise and focus on key substantive and operational issues in the agenda of UNFF15 which are critical for the work of the Forum and its Secretariat. Regarding the Quadrennial Programme of Work of the Forum for 2021-2024, UNFF15 will

¹ UNFF informal consultation on draft ministerial declaration (held on 3-4 March 2020, New York) and its follow-up

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decide only on the programme of work for UNFF16 in 2021. Decision on the programme of work of the Forum for 2022-2024 will be made at UNFF16.

5. The Bureau will lead an inclusive, transparent and consultative process for finalization of the draft resolution in advance of UNFF15, through virtual means, as follows:
 - a. Members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders are invited to submit their concrete input on the attached zero draft resolution to the Secretariat by 15 April 2020.
 - b. Considering the submitted inputs, the Bureau will share the revised zero draft with Members and stakeholders on 20 April 2020. Members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders are invited to submit their concrete input on the revised draft to the Secretariat by 8 May 2020.
 - c. Based on additional submitted inputs, the Bureau will further revise the draft resolution and share it with Members and stakeholders on 12 May 2020. Members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders are invited to submit their final input on the revised draft to the Secretariat by 26 May 2020.
 - d. Chair will circulate final draft resolution of UNFF15 on 1 June 2020, and will put it on silence procedure, for agreement, until 4 June 2020 at 12:00 noon (NY time).
6. All inputs should be submitted to the UNFF Secretariat at unff@un.org, by copying Mr. Ryo Nakamura at: nakamura@un.org. The submitted inputs will be also posted on the UNFF15 webpage at: <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html>

The Bureau recognizes the tightness of the above-mentioned schedule, and would like to emphasize the importance of provision of concrete suggestions by Members from the early stage of consultation. Overcoming the existing challenge caused by the global pandemic of COVID-19 requires us to take a proactive and flexible approach, as well as respecting the stated timelines. I am quite confident that by working together constructively and collaboratively, we would be able to successfully conclude the work of the UNFF15 at this difficult time. To this end, I count on your full support, understanding and collaboration in the weeks ahead.

The Bureau will continue to consult with the Bureau of ECOSOC regarding the exact date of the half-day session of UNFF15, and update the membership on developments.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Boris Greguška



Chair of UNFF15 & Chief State Counselor
Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development
of the Slovak Republic

To: All Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations-New York