

**Concept Note**  
**High Level Round Table**  
**Sixteenth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests**  
**9:00am- 11:00am, 26 April 2021**

**I. Background**

1. Pursuant to ECOSOC resolution 2020/14, the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) was requested to organize a High-Level Round Table (HLRT) during the sixteenth session of the Forum (UNFF16) to discuss major forest-related developments. The UNFF Secretariat was also requested to compile an initial assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable forest management, the forest sector, forest-dependent people, indigenous peoples and local communities, forest financing and international cooperation, and to present the assessment to the Forum at its sixteenth session<sup>1</sup>. This issue will be discussed under agenda item 5 of UNFF16 on emerging issues, under which the UNFF16 HLRT is also organized.

**II. Major forest-related developments**

2. During the SDG Moment<sup>2</sup>, High-Level Roundtable on Climate Action<sup>3</sup>, and UN Summit on Biodiversity<sup>4</sup>, which were held as part of the UNGA High-Level period in September 2020, world leaders emphasized the need to promote ecosystem-based solutions to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity, combat climate change, and restore a more balanced relationship with nature in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. They also stressed the need for redoubled efforts to counter negative trends and protect ecosystems, including through restoration of degraded forests, and substantially increasing afforestation, reforestation and conservation globally. In response to these calls, the Secretary-General took several initiatives, including the Decade of Action<sup>5</sup>. There is also ongoing work to develop a common approach on biodiversity, as well as common messages to turn the tide on deforestation. There have been also numerous initiatives and activities related to forests undertaken by countries around the world.
3. The launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) is scheduled to be held on 5 June 2021 during the World Environment Day celebrations. The Decade's primary objective is to support and scale up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide and raise awareness of the importance of successful ecosystem restoration. The strategy for the Decade<sup>6</sup> identifies forests as part of key ecosystems to be restored. The strategy also considers target 1.1 of GFG1<sup>7</sup> of the UNSPF relevant to the Decade and its objectives.
4. The theme of the International Day of Forests in 2021 is "Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being". The annual celebration will provide an opportunity to communicate the importance of

---

<sup>1</sup> Background documents and Secretariat Note on the impacts of COVID-19 on sustainable forest management are available at: <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sdg-moment/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/high-level-climate-change-roundtable>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.un.org/pga/75/united-nations-summit-on-biodiversity/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action/>

<sup>6</sup> The strategy for the decade is available at: <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/strategy>.

<sup>7</sup> Target 1.1 of GFG1 is set to increase forest area by 3 per cent globally by 2030.

forest restoration, taking into account the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 and the role of forests in supporting human well-being and post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

5. The thematic focus of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2021 is “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”. Sustainable Development Goals 1 (poverty), 2 (hunger), 3 (health), 8 (economic growth and employment), 10 (inequalities), 12 (sustainable consumption and production), 13 (climate change), 16 (inclusive societies) and 17 (means of implementation) will be discussed in depth. Currently, the GA is reviewing the targets of the SDGs with a 2020 timeline as part of the review pursuant to its resolution 74/298. These include forest-related targets such as 6.6, 15.1 and 15.2<sup>8</sup>. The intergovernmental negotiations related to this review are underway and expected to be finalized by the end of March 2021.
6. The post-2020 global biodiversity framework is expected to be adopted at COP15 of the CBD in 2021 in Kunming, China. The latest draft framework<sup>9</sup> contains no specific reference to forests. However, it includes forest-related aspects, including “intact and wilderness areas”, “nature”, “areas particularly important for biodiversity”, “terrestrial natural ecosystems”, “natural systems”, “managed ecosystems”, “wild species of flora”, “nature- based solutions” and “green spaces”. The UNSPF and its Global Forest Goals, can contribute to the post 2020 global biodiversity framework.
7. Twenty sixth Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC is scheduled to take place in November 2021 in Glasgow, UK. Forests and other land use activities are relevant for fluxes of greenhouse gases. Forests are also prominent in the Paris Agreement, especially in the context of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and promoting the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD-plus). It is important to further promote inclusion of forest-based climate actions in the future nationally determined contributions (NDCs,) and also promote coherence between the Paris Agreement and the UNSPF, in particular, its GFG1.
8. Fifteenth World Forestry Congress is scheduled to be held in 2022 in Seoul, Republic of Korea. It provides an opportunity for the global forestry community to consider the state and future of world forestry, particularly in the context of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The congress will identify key measures that must be put in place as the forest sector adjusts to the new reality and aims to help ‘build back better’.

### III. Current global crises

9. The world is in the midst of multiple and unprecedented socio-economic and ecological crises. Climate change, biodiversity loss, degradation of ecosystems, water scarcity, deforestation, disasters, pollution and environmental hazards, compounded by the current COVID-19 pandemic, have put the ecological integrity of the planet and the future of mankind under serious threat. Global temperatures are

---

<sup>8</sup> For list of SDGs and their targets, please see: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

<sup>9</sup> CBD/POST2020/PREP/2/1 <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/3064/749a/0f65ac7f9def86707f4eaeafa/post2020-prep-02-01-en.pdf>

projected to rise by up to 3.2°C by 2100. Over one million species are threatened with extinction<sup>10</sup>. Water scarcity could displace 700 million by 2030, and 2.2 billion lack safely managed drinking water. Each year, 10 million hectares of forest are destroyed. Global forest fire activity burns approximately 450 million hectares of land every year; nearly two thirds of this area is in the savanna ecosystem of the earth in various regions<sup>11</sup>.

10. The global macroeconomic outlook has also worsened during the pandemic, accelerating inequalities and poverty around the world, and increasing pressure on natural resources and global commons. In 2020, over 131 million people were pushed into extreme poverty<sup>12</sup>, erasing almost all progress made in the last several years. COVID-19 has reinforced the need for global cooperation and collaboration, both for immediate response and for longer-term recovery. These crises have significantly weakened the capacity of countries to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and targets, including those contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### **IV. Objective of the High-Level Round Table**

11. Forest provides multiple socio-economic and environmental services and have huge potential to address global crises. An estimated 23% of total anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (2007-2016) derive from agriculture, forestry and other land use. Around 2.4 billion people – one-third of the world’s population – still rely on wood fuel to meet their basic energy needs. Forests are home to 80% of global biodiversity in terrestrial ecosystems. Forests and mountains provide 75% of freshwater resources.
12. The main objective of the HLRT is to provide an opportunity for senior officials from governments, United Nations entities and other international organizations, as well as representatives from the private sector, industries, and civil society to discuss the most effective policies and actions for curbing current global crises. More specifically, the speakers and participants are encouraged to share their views on:
  - a. How can forests be part of the solution to current global crises, in particular, climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation and land degradation, inequalities and poverty in the post COVID-19 era?
  - b. How can we attract the private sector to engage and contribute more effectively to address global crises?

#### **V. Modalities of the High-Level Round Table**

13. The Chair of UNFF16 will preside over the High-Level Round Table, make opening remarks and moderate the interactive discussion. As part of the opening segment of the HLRT, the following senior officials will make opening remarks:

- Mr. Munir Akram, ECOSOC President (five minutes)

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://ipbes.net/news/how-did-ipbes-estimate-1-million-species-risk-extinction-globalassessment-report>

<sup>11</sup> Please see a background study on “the impacts of disasters on forests, in particular forest fires” at UNFF16 webpage at: <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> UN, DESA (2021), World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021. Available online at [https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2021\\_FullReport.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2021_FullReport.pdf)

- Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the UN General Assembly (five minutes)
- Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, speaking on behalf of the UN Secretary General (five minutes)
- Mr. QU Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (five minutes)
- Ms. Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (five minutes)

14. After the opening segment, the Chair will open the floor for interactive discussion on the above-mentioned questions. The following lead discussants will be asked to start the discussions by sharing their views.

- Ms. Tina Birmpili, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Convention to Combat Desertification (four minutes)
- Mr. Donald Cooper, Director of Transparency Division, UNFCCC Secretariat (four minutes)
- Ms. Jane Molony, Executive Director of the Pulp Manufacturers Association, South Africa, and member of the FAO Advisory Committee on Sustainable Forest-based Industries (four minutes)

15. The HLRT is open to participation of Members of the Forum, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, UNFF regional and sub-regional partners, and major groups. There will be no pre-determined list of speakers for the interactive discussions. Delegations who wish to speak should request the floor using a dedicated speaker request form. The link to the form will be circulated in advance of the HLRT and will be made available in the chat board of the virtual platform. The form will only be activated during the HLRT when the Chair opens the floor for questions or comments. The maximum duration of each intervention is three minutes, which will be strictly enforced. Due to the interactive nature of the discussions, prepared statements are strongly discouraged. Interested delegations, if they so wish, could submit their prepared statements to the Secretariat, in advance of the session, for posting on the UNFF website.

16. Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations will make closing remarks after the interactive discussion segment is concluded. The key points of the High-Level Round Table will be reflected in the Chair's summary of UNFF16.

## **VI. Contact person**

17. For all inquiries related to the HLRT, please contact Mr. Ryo Nakamura at: [nakamura@un.org](mailto:nakamura@un.org).