

Statement by Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General, DESA
Opening Session of the Second Meeting
of the
Open-Ended Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Expert Group
on the International Arrangement on Forests
12 January 2015

Ambassador Bibalou,
Distinguished Members of the Bureau of the UN Forum on Forests,
Distinguished Co-Chairs of AHEG,
Director, United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat,
Distinguished Experts,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you at this second meeting of the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group (AHEG) on the international arrangement on forests (IAF).

The first meeting of this group – in Nairobi last year – gave rise to innovative thinking on the direction that the future International Arrangement should take. Now these ideas must be translated into strategic and focused action for the future IAF.

As you know, the Member States have taken significant steps toward defining the post-2015 development agenda, to be adopted in September this year. The Sustainable Development Goals will constitute the core of this agenda, and will address economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated manner. The post-2015 development agenda will be unified and universal, taking into account the current global context characterized by the shifting geography of poverty, rising inequality, rapid globalization and slowing global growth.

Above all, the emphasis on “leaving no one behind” will force us to be much more aware of vulnerable groups and communities such as forests communities, as well as risks and opportunities for risk mitigation .

The Secretary-General’s Synthesis Report on the post-2015 development agenda, entitled, “The Road to Dignity by 2030” – which was released last month – presents a vision for ending poverty and transforming lives, while protecting the planet.

The report identifies six essential elements to frame and reinforce the sustainable development agenda, focused on:

- ending poverty and tackling inequalities,
- improving people’s lives and wellbeing,
- ensuring inclusive economic transformation,
- promoting just, safe and peaceful societies,
- protecting the planet for current and future generations, and
- building bold and lasting partnerships for a sustainable future.

These developments are directly relevant to your deliberations on shaping the post-2015 IAF. Forests are an integral component of the proposed SDGs. Proposed goal 6 on water and sanitation, and goal 15 on terrestrial ecosystems, specifically note the importance of forests. And there are four

specific forest-related targets under these SDGs, which have emanated – directly or indirectly – from the work of the current IAF. However, the contributions of forests are by no means limited to these two SDGs. Undoubtedly, sustainable forest management directly contributes to many of the other SDGs and targets.

The integration of forests in the SDGs is important, not just for the recognition this provides to the sector, and the natural resource – but perhaps more importantly, for the role this defines for the forest sector and community in implementing sustainable development around the world.

The new Agenda, as it is emerging, is huge. Energy to implement, science to inform policies and expertise to review it will require strong and effective intergovernmental thematic platforms.

This Forum, as the only universal, intergovernmental policy forum on forests, is in a unique position to monitor progress in implementation of the post-2015 development agenda related to forests, and to ensure the achievement of forest-related goals and targets in the SDGs. In this way, the future IAF will be the conduit from the forest community to the broader sustainable development discussions, and to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

The current review process of the IAF is a timely opportunity for the forest community to influence the ongoing post-2015 development agenda, and ensure coherence with its outcome. To this end, I strongly encourage you to pro-actively engage in designing a post-2015 IAF and integrate it into the broader global development agenda toward 2030.

Rest assured that we in DESA will spare no effort in assisting you to build a strong and effective post-2015 International Arrangement on Forests.

Thank you.