

**Opening Remarks by Ambassador Kamau, Chair of the UNFF11
Bureau
First Meeting of the Ad Hoc Expert Group on the International
Arrangement on Forests
Monday, 24 February 2014 - UNON – Nairobi, Kenya**

Good morning.

I call the First Meeting of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Ad Hoc Expert Group on the International Arrangement on Forests to order.

*Professor Judi Wangalwa Wakhungu, the Cabinet Secretary for Water,
Environment and Natural Resources of Kenya
Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General,
Distinguished Experts,*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address you as the Chair of the Bureau of the 11th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests and even more so because we are in my home country. Welcome to this meeting, and welcome to Kenya!

We are at a critical juncture, as the time has come to evaluate and review the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) which among other elements includes a review the work of the UNFF. UNFF is a unique body created by Member States fourteen years ago. UNFF is unique because it is the only global intergovernmental policy body within the UN system that comprehensively deals with all socio-economic and environmental issues related to all types of forests and trees outside forests, and their interlinkages with other critical issues such as agriculture, biodiversity, climate change, desertification, energy, and water. The Forum is also the only ECOSOC subsidiary body that has universal membership and includes 197 Member States of the UN and States Members of the Specialized Agencies. These

are unique characters of UNFF and no other global body can be compared to this Forum.

There are many reasons to believe that UNFF has been successful in performing its mandates. Adoption of the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (Forest Instrument) and the four Global Objectives on Forests by the UNFF and subsequently by the General Assembly brought the international policy development on forests to a new stage, after almost twenty years. This instrument is the first-ever globally agreed instrument on all types of forests. UNFF has successfully raised the profile of forests on the global development agenda and influenced international policy agreements on forests in other fora. These successes range from the forest chapter of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation adopted in 2002 which pulled almost entirely from the UNFF2 Ministerial Declaration, to the forest chapter of the Rio+20 Conference which also mainly drew from the UNFF9 Ministerial Declaration.

The Forum has consistently highlighted the multiple and cross-sectoral benefits of forests in addressing global challenges, and has undertaken major analytical work in areas such as forest financing, forests and economic development.

In performing the review of the IAF, it is important to remind that UNFF is neither a convention nor an organization and does not have the same level of resources that a convention or an organization has at their discretion. So, the expectation from this body should correspond to the status and resources of the Forum. In spite of all the limitations, however, UNFF has contributed significantly to the policy development and implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests

worldwide, and has made outstanding achievements, even in comparison to the forest-related conventions and organizations.

Nevertheless, the work is far from over and we must all work together to further strengthen all components of the IAF so they may perform more efficiently and effectively in their respective functions.

The UNFF11 decision on the future of the IAF should substantively increase political commitment for sustainable management of all types of forests and trees outside of forests. “Implementation” should be one of the main components of the final agreement on the future of the IAF. The UNFF11 decision on the future of the IAF should entail clear and solid provisions to support countries in implementing SFM policies including the forest instrument, and a concrete mechanism to monitor implementation of the Forum’s decisions, strengthen the Forum and its secretariat, and integrate forests in the sustainable development goals and the development agenda beyond 2015. This decision should ensure that necessary means to implement the decisions of the Forum are available at various levels. Further avenues should be identified and agreed to systematically strengthen the connections between the Forum with the regional organizations and processes, UNFF national focal points, major groups and other stakeholders.

Our work, however, is not standing alone in the international arena. I would like to seize this opportunity to update you on the Eighth Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, which just gathered in New York from 3 to 7 February. I have the honor to co-chair the Open Working Group, or OWG. Its last session addressed natural resources

such as forests, together with oceans and seas, as well as biodiversity. Panelists and participants made clear that forests are key sources of wood and other forest products, water supplies, medicines, livelihoods, ecosystem stability, carbon storage and other vital services. The need to recognize and respect the rights of indigenous peoples and other forest dwellers, and their vital role in sustainable forest management, was noted. The importance of capacity building, technology transfer and financing in relation to the sustainable use and management of forests and other natural resources, as well as of science-based policy making, partnerships and multi-stakeholder participation, were also emphasized.

The first meeting of the ad hoc expert group is a very good opportunity to review the inputs that have been provided on the IAF and share views on the best course of actions to build on the strengths of the existing IAF, aiming at agreeing on an improved future IAF. It is also a unique opportunity to find ways and means to integrate forests in the sustainable development goals and the development programme beyond 2015.

The outcome of this meeting, as well as the conclusion of the second meeting of the AHEG will provide a strong basis for UNFF11, when it makes its decision on the future of the IAF. To this end, I would like to encourage you to actively and constructively participate in the debate of the coming five days.

As we embark on our journey to UNFF11, in May 2015 in New York, let us remember that what we are starting today will hopefully guarantee that

future generations will enjoy the many benefits that trees and forests bring to our lives. We need to continue to raise awareness on the benefits of all types of forests and trees outside forests, and we need to continue to build capacity all over the world to ensure that forests will continue to flourish in the years to come.

Last but not least, I wish to thank the Government of the UK, as well as other donor countries for their generous contribution in organizing this meeting and for supporting participation of experts from eligible countries in AHEG1.

Thank you.