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IPF-2 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 11 MARCH 1996

The second session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests opened in Geneva at 10:30 am, Monday 11 March. Delegates adopted the agenda, gave general statements and considered category I, programme element 2 (I.2), on underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation in both morning and afternoon sessions. FAO Assistant Secretary General David Harcharik introduced the document on programme element I.4, fragile ecosystems affected by desertification and the impact of air-born pollution of forests.

OPENING PLENARY

Co-Chair N.R. Krishnan (India) recalled the work of the IPF at its first session (IPF-1). Since the first meeting, an interagency task force on forests, composed of various UN agencies, produced the documents for IPF-2. He said much interest is centered on these deliberations and urged delegates to live up to those expectations. IPF-2 should produce results that will provide a strong foundation for future work. Joke Waller-Hunter (DPCSD) highlighted activities since IPF-1 and noted that the financial situation of the UN has grown worse, which implies constraints on documentation and conference facilities. She highlighted the various country-led initiatives that will focus on key agenda issues and facilitate the output of the IPF. The Co-Chair noted that he and Sir Martin Holdgate (UK) will serve as co-Chairs. Juste Boussiuet (Gabon), Anatoliy Pisarenko (Russian Federation) and Manuel Rodriguez (Colombia) were elected Vice-Chairs.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Chair presented delegates with the provisional agenda (E/CN.17/IPF/1996/1) and an informal paper on the organization of work. The group adopted the agenda, but agreed to an initial general debate. The US gave general comments on all programme elements and noted that IPF should remember the differences between countries while seeking common ground. CANADA also gave a general statement, but BRAZIL suggested that general statements be reserved.

UNDERLYING CAUSES OF DEFORESTATION

Co-chair Krishnan invited discussion on work programme element I.2, the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation. Ralph Schmidt (UNDP) introduced the report on programme element I.2 (E/CN.17/IPF/1996/2). Given the degree of national specificity and interaction among causation issues, he said their analysis would be most effectively pursued at the national and sub-national levels.

AUSTRALIA recommended that national forest strategies be devised in an interdisciplinary manner, taking local and regional planning needs into account. He stated that agricultural clearing, fuelwood collection and land tenure reform were responsible for much of Australia's deforestation and required governmental review. He also suggested that plantations should not replace natural forests. REPUBLIC OF KOREA, supported by CHINA, highlighted the need to develop forest plans and strategies at the national level and said they be geared toward the political regime in place. He proposed that developed countries assist developing countries in devising their national plans, and should provide harmonized guidelines. He also stated that knowledge and technology should be transferred and encouraged the formation of forest partnership arrangements. NEW ZEALAND cautioned against generalizing about causes of deforestation. He disagreed with Australia regarding plantation forestry, stating that it has been successful in New Zealand. He supported the promotion of sustainable trade in forest products and urged countries to view trade holistically. Co-chair Krishnan said plantation forestry programmes had been successful in India as well.

COLOMBIA said landholding practices that lead to speculation are a major cause of deforestation. He said overemphasis on differences in causation may lose sight of overall causes. Poverty may be an underlying cause but the wealth of "consumer bosses" in developed countries also is a cause. CHILE supported the suggestion to include planting forests as a means to relieve pressure on natural forests. The benefits of planting forests in degraded soil to combat desertification should also be included. FINLAND said criteria and indicators (C&I) work underway will help to determine optimum forest cover. IPF should emphasize: management and protection of natural forests; biodiversity in natural and semi-natural forests; and economic, ecological and social perspectives on management practices.

The US said specific solutions are necessary because it is difficult to generalize about causes or solutions. She supported a review of policies for sustainable forest management (SFM) and national case studies as possible actions. Individual countries could set optimum forest cover targets but these are not generically valuable. ZIMBABWE said action proposals need to focus more on indirect causes. Communal land ownership can be a survival strategy, while breaking up communal resources can have negative repercussions. PERU said delegates should consider forests' social and economic roles and that land holding can mean use of land, not simply ownership.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA said community and social forestry for maintaining forest cover and promoting SFM should be addressed in national plans. POLAND underlined the interaction of causes such as air pollution, climate, forest ecosystem simplification and social elements. Poland combines

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afforestation with a national protection system to address fragmentation, soil and water protection and other non-timber values. CANADA said forest partnership agreements need further elaboration as a proposed action.

ECUADOR said international lending agencies can cause deforestation by forcing countries to adopt macroeconomic policies that result in intensive, harmful use of the environment. JAPAN underlined the cross-sectoral nature of analysis and the difficulty in generalizing. He supported national case studies and the need for field level application of C&I and SFM. ITALY, for the EU, emphasized optimizing financial resources, scientific research and monitoring, and assessment and valuation of multiple benefits. Market-based measures and certification procedures are of interest. IRAN said the IPF's work should include afforestation and reforestation, and noted population and technology transfer issues.

UGANDA said fuelwood should be mentioned as a non-timber forest use. Forest quality can be a bridge to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

GERMANY supported the proposal calling for deliberate and controlled forest replacement plans and said every country must define its own optimum cover. He recalled that Germany once experienced heavy deforestation, and solutions arose through the development of substitutes for forest products. SWITZERLAND said that as long as forests are valued only in terms of timber produced, countries will not be able to solve forest degradation. He said including optimum forest cover in national plans was important because it calls for political will. Any review of policies must also address the indirect causes of deforestation, and new case studies should make it possible to develop national policies. CANADA said any proposed options should be considered in conjunction with sustainable consumption and production. He said land tenure should be examined, supported comprehensive monitoring actions and proposals on review of policies and case studies and agreed with Japan's call for a workshop on case studies.

INDONESIA said planned deforestation followed by reforestation is a sound management system when done correctly. The relationship between harvesting damage and lack of clear property rights is not appropriate. The EU stated that a tool to enhance the understanding of underlying causes would help, but it is not the solution. It will be crucial to correct inappropriate policies and the incentives for their use. Assistance to developing countries should focus on promoting adequate legislation and improving planning. The EU considers the proposals for action as a good basis for discussion. INDIA experienced degradation because of the alienation of people who rely on the forest. He supported the proposal to include optimum forest cover in national plans and called for methodologies to assess forest quality changes. He said the proposal for increasing human capacity must be supported with funds.

GREEN EARTH ORGANIZATION questioned the use of plantations as a means of abating forest degradation. He suggested that reinstatement of farmlands through sound agricultural practices may be preferable and the issue should be high on the IPF agenda. NORWAY acknowledged the need to establish legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms for national forest plans as well as a data bank on the replacement and modification of forests. He suggested that the links between forests and biodiversity should be examined with an eye towards projecting future policies. FRIENDS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL called for expanded discussion of the ineffectiveness of national enforcement measures as an underlying cause of deforestation. He urged that the customary rights of native and indigenous peoples be protected.

MALAYSIA noted that the establishment of forest plans should be a country-driven process. He stated that efforts at the international level should focus on sharing knowledge and technology. He also advocated the need to improve donor coordination and to increase global forest cover. The UK noted the need to clearly distinguish between fact and assumption when discussing underlying and direct causes of deforestation. He urged the delegates not to operate on the assumption that any

change in forest use is bad and that they make forest-related decisions based on national and sub-national factors. He urged that governments not only devise policies but implement them. BRAZIL emphasized the need to define causation factors and optimal forest cover for each country individually. He also acknowledged the impact economic factors can play and highlighted the need to address land-tenure issues.

FRANCE agreed that all deforestation is not necessarily harmful. He said that forest quality was more important than forest quantity and that establishing indicators would be important in this regard. He cautioned against oversimplification of the issues and urged the panel to focus on eliminating the processes that are most detrimental to the forests and increase the use of those that are beneficial. BIODIVERSITY ACTION NETWORK encouraged the IPF to address all related issues, including those that are politically charged such as macro-economic adjustments, international trade and exchange rates and consumption and production patterns. He proposed the establishment of an intersessional working group to address international dimensions of underlying causes of deforestation.

The US said studies of change in deforestation could show causes of reforestation. It is important to expand consideration of land tenure from the Secretariat document's definition. SWEDEN said it is necessary to put man, not trees and forests, in the center, considering agriculture and land-use as causes. Optimum forest cover could be clarified by consumption and production studies. IUCN and ASIA FOREST NETWORK suggested that IPF encourage nations to develop such policies to facilitate community efforts to manage and stabilize forests, and that national agencies should learn about participatory management systems.

AFRICAN NETWORK FOR FOREST CONSERVATION called for a monitoring system to facilitate participatory management, alternatives to aggressive biodiversity exploitation, legally binding commitments and rigorous land-use planning. The IUCN COMMITTEE FOR THE NETHERLANDS suggested addressing: industry subsidies; extraction resulting in destruction of virgin forests; and impacts of dam constructions. Case studies of indigenous and local users managing large forests could assist in developing diagnostic tools. CANADA supported NGO interventions recommending community empowerment.

The Chair summarized, noting comments on: avoiding over-generalization; causes outside the forest sector; national measures and action plans, including uncertainty over optimum forest cover; forest quality; agriculture and development strategies; international trade and economic influences; and support for proposed actions, with some adjustments.

ECOSYSTEMS AFFECTED BY DESERTIFICATION, AND AIR-BORNE POLLUTION IMPACTS

Co-Chair Holdgate introduced programme element I.4, fragile ecosystems affected by desertification and the impact of air-borne pollution on forests. David Harcharik, FAO Assistant Director General, Forestry Department, summarized the document on this item (E/CN.17/IPF/1996/3). Part one of the document summarizes challenges in fragile ecosystems, successes and failures in reforestation, especially in Africa. It suggests that IPF consider integrating plantations and reforestation with natural systems, and strengthening governments capacities. Part 2 considers forest decline, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. It says IPF should consider the need for: additional international commitments on long-range pollution; monitoring and research; and an approach that defines a threshold for negative impacts.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

ECOSYSTEMS AFFECTED BY DESERTIFICATION, AND AIR-BORNE POLLUTION IMPACTS: Delegates are expected to resume consideration of programme element I.4, fragile ecosystems affected by desertification and the impact of air-borne pollution on forests.