



UNFF-3 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 26 MAY 2003

On Monday, 26 May 2003, the Third Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-3) opened in Geneva, Switzerland. Delegates gathered all day in Plenary to hear opening statements from the UNFF Secretariat, the UNFF Chair and country delegations. Delegates also heard a presentation on national forest trends.

OPENING SESSION

Pekka Patosaari, Coordinator and Head of the Secretariat of the UNFF, opened UNFF-3. The delegates then elected Hossein Moeini Meybodi (Islamic Republic of Iran) as Chair of UNFF-3, and elected the UNFF-3 Bureau members: Gustavo Eduardo Ainchil (Argentina), Peter Csoka (Hungary), Conceição Ferreira (Portugal), and Matia Mulumba Semakula Kiwanuka (Uganda).

Chair Meybodi underlined the UNFF's objective to provide a framework for international cooperation aimed at achieving sustainable forest management (SFM). Identifying the main tasks of UNFF-3, he noted the importance of establishing the *ad hoc* expert groups on: approaches and mechanisms for monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR); financing and transfer of environmentally sound technologies (ESTs); and consideration with a view to recommending the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests. He then invited all delegations to actively partake in the multi-stakeholder dialogue.

Pekka Patosaari, UNFF Coordinator, addressed the meeting on behalf of UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Nitin Desai. Stressing the need to translate global forest commitments into action, he said the ultimate success of the UNFF will depend on its ability to mobilize political, financial, scientific and technical support for SFM. He noted the critical role of governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society in achieving SFM, and stressed the need for cross-sectoral policy harmonization at the national, regional and global levels.

UNFF Coordinator Patosaari then highlighted progress made through the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and country-led initiatives. Identifying progress assessment as one of UNFF's main challenges, he encouraged countries to submit voluntary reports and provide feedback on the reporting process.

Hosny El-Lakany, Chair of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) reaffirmed the CPF's commitment to the UNFF and outlined joint CPF/UNFF initiatives, including on funding of SFM and forest-related reporting. Welcoming the UNFF's guidance and support, he noted that CPF might not be able to carry out all tasks that it might be invited to address.

Amb. Beat Nobs, Swiss Agency of the Environment, Forest and Landscapes, underscored the multifunctionality of forest ecosystems and the cross-sectoral character of SFM. He stressed the role of UNFF in bringing together the different perspectives on

forests; providing overarching guidance on SFM; and coordinating the numerous institutions and processes dealing with forests.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates adopted the organization of work and, with a minor modification, the provisional agenda (E/CN.118/2003/1), and approved all observers. UNFF-3 then appointed Peter Csoka (Hungary) as a Vice-Chair and rapporteur for UNFF-3

PRESENTATION ON NATIONAL TRENDS: In the afternoon, Pekka Patosaari presented national trends reflected in country reports to the UNFF. He reported progress on, *inter alia*: country assessments of the IPF/IFF proposals for action in national contexts; the development of NFPs; interagency consultation in policy formulation and planning; stakeholder participation; forest valuation; and the application of economic instruments for SFM. He highlighted a decline in the relative economic importance of the forest sector, and noted increased demand for social and environmental services from forests.

COUNTRY STATEMENTS: A number of delegations thanked the Government of Switzerland for hosting the meeting and the UNFF Secretariat, and congratulated UNFF Coordinator Patosaari with his appointment.

MOROCCO, on behalf of the G-77/China, recommended that UNFF focus on means of implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action and ways to ensure progress in delivering financial assistance, technology transfer and capacity building for SFM in developing countries. He underscored that promoting SFM through private sector activities should not diminish the role of intergovernmental partnerships between developing and developed countries. He also stressed that the G-77/China attaches importance to the issue of composition of the *ad hoc* expert groups and reiterated the G-77/China's commitment to constructive discussion at UNFF-3.

GREECE, on behalf of the EU and the EU accession countries, recommended that the UNFF promote and coordinate action on forest issues, and welcomed the criteria for reviewing the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests agreed upon at UNFF-2. He stressed the need for further cooperation between the UNFF and CPF and expressed hope for a positive outcome on the issue of the *ad hoc* expert groups. He also called for clear recommendations on key issues that require political commitment, and for exploring further MAR issues.

FIJI, on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Group, expressed support for UNFF and overviewed a regional workshop on assessing the implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action. He called for the development of an international partnership to assist the region in achieving SFM.

AUSTRALIA, supported by NEW ZEALAND and CANADA, called for further efforts to assess the IPF/IFF proposals for action in national contexts, and proposed creating regional implementation facilitation teams to foster SFM policy



formulation and implementation. He recommended that UNFF sessions become more interactive, and that the Secretariat provide clear guidance on country report format. AUSTRALIA also strongly urged UNFF-3 to reach a decision on the terms of reference for the *ad hoc* expert groups. NEW ZEALAND called for innovative approaches and cooperation on the issue of the *ad hoc* expert groups. SWITZERLAND said the UNFF has reached a critical phase after a decline in momentum following UNFF-2's failure to adopt the mandate for the *ad hoc* expert groups. He suggested that UNFF-3 focus on implementation, exchange of experience, and forest policy guidance, and stressed the potential role of international trade in promoting SFM.

Highlighting the successful forest-related outcomes of the WSSD, including forest partnerships, SOUTH AFRICA noted its commitment to uniting stakeholders and expressed hope that UNFF-3 yield concrete resolutions and foster effective debate. NORWAY noted that SFM is an effective means for eradicating poverty. Highlighting the importance of law enforcement and combating illegal trade, he said that actions should focus on reliable information, impact assessments, and national efforts to enhance human and institutional capacity. He stressed that an economically viable forest sector is necessary for SFM, and that the UNFF should give attention to regional perspectives on SFM.

Stressing the importance of coordinated implementation of international forest policy, CROATIA said that incorporation of this policy into national legislation is a main priority for his country, and identified voluntary certification as an important market-based tool to promote SFM. He also said forums such as the UNFF represent an opportunity for small countries to become involved in global policy processes.

IRAN outlined the main causes of deforestation in Iran and stressed the need for greater attention to: the economic and social aspects of forests; forest health and productivity; and the strengthening of participatory institutions.

SENEGAL, supported by the US, recommended that there be African representation in the UNFF Secretariat and called for supporting participation of African countries in international forest policy processes.

INDIA outlined the positive domestic forestry trends and the success of joint forest management programmes. He stressed the need for universal membership in the expert group on the issue of the legal framework.

JAPAN pledged its support to promote global SFM, highlighting the Asian Forest Partnership. He also expressed hope that the UNFF's work will benefit from the Third World Water Forum's outcomes, which emphasized the role of forest issues in water management.

The US recommended that UNFF-3 focus on the substantive exchange of experiences in the implementation of IPP/IFF proposals for action. She stressed the importance of country-led initiatives, the informal exchange of ideas during UNFF intersessional meetings, and other innovative means for advancing UNFF work. She underscored, *inter alia*, the relationships between economic issues and forest health and cover; the need to increase fairness and openness the timber trade; and commended the work of CPF and the International Tropical Timber Organization.

TURKEY outlined on the country's progress in interagency collaboration, stakeholder participation, and the development of a NFP, and offered to host future regional meetings.

ITALY drew attention to the recent MAR meeting in Viterbo, and emphasized the need to translate forest-related international documents into all languages. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA announced its development of a methodology to assess the social benefits of forest preservation. He stressed the importance of devel-

oping a standardized market information system and the need for collaboration in resource assessment, and urged UNFF-3 to launch the *ad hoc* expert groups.

INDONESIA recounted its recent shift in forest policy from timber-based to resource-based and identified combating illegal logging, fire prevention, resource conservation and rehabilitation, and policy decentralization as current priorities.

POLAND said there is an urgent need to align the ecosystem approach with SFM while maintaining forest productivity, forest services and employment opportunities. He stressed that SFM is a valuable investment that improves quality of life, and advocated legally-binding regulations.

Underscoring the need to move the UNFF into an implementation phase, CANADA urged UNFF-3 to focus on understanding key impediments to the implementation of IPP/IFF proposals for action and suggested developing measurable indicators of success.

ECUADOR pledged its commitment to forest conservation and SFM, and stressed the need for community involvement, international responsibility and cooperation, and C&I for sustainable forest management. Noting the potential contribution of SFM to improving equity and the quality of life, he advocated modernizing legal frameworks and alternative land use, such as ecotourism and agroforestry.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION noted its consistent support for SFM principles and regional programmes, noting that many international stakeholders lack information on forest health and policy in the Russian Federation. He suggested that national reports be obligatory, and encouraged all delegates to participate more actively in the UNFF process.

BRAZIL outlined its efforts to implement IPP/IFF proposals for action and indicated its readiness for a constructive dialogue on the issue of the *ad hoc* expert groups, noting that the expert group on the legal instrument should benefit from the work of the other two expert groups.

Melchiade Bukur, UN Convention to Combat Desertification, underlined the importance of afforestation and reforestation programmes and recommended that the UNFF focus on low forest cover countries and degraded forests; offered support to actions to protect forest productivity and health; and called for international cooperation to address poverty as the biggest challenge in maintaining forest cover.

Hamdallah Zedan, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), outlined the linkages between the CBD and the UNFF, highlighting the CBD's expanded programme of work on forest biodiversity. He called for continued collaboration with UNFF and CPF and the UNFF's input in achieving the CBD's target of significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

IN THE CORRIDORS

One year after a somewhat disappointing UNFF-2, some delegates appear to have adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude to UNFF-3, saying that UNFF is having trouble defining itself. In contrast, a small group of delegations, concerned that a loosely defined mandate could spell the demise of UNFF, are quietly "talking up" a proposal that, if accepted, would dramatically alter the character of UNFF, pushing it to become more action-oriented.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE: A multi-stakeholder dialogue will convene from 10:00 am-1:00 pm and again from 3:00-6:00 pm in Plenary to discuss the economic aspects of forests, forest health and productivity and maintaining forest cover.

INFORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE AD HOC EXPERT GROUPS: An informal consultation will convene from 7:00-9:00 pm to resume discussion on the terms of reference for the *ad hoc* expert groups that were carried forward from UNFF-2.