

UNFF19 Highlights:

Monday, 6 May 2024

After reports on initiatives on combating forest fires and developing a Model Forest Act, and a panel discussing valuation of forest ecosystems, delegates at the 19th session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF19) started negotiations on a draft declaration for the High-level Segment (HLS) scheduled for Thursday 9 May 2024 and a draft UNFF19 omnibus resolution, focusing on text on the 2024 Midterm Review (MTR) of the effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF).

Opening

UNFF19 Chair Zéphyrin Maniratanga (Burundi) opened the meeting. Members approved the provisional agenda (E/CN.18/2024/1) without amendment and the Chair's proposed organization of work.

Maniratanga reviewed the extensive preparations for the MTR of the effectiveness of the IAF and "constructive" informal intersessional consultations on a draft UNFF19 omnibus resolution and draft HLS declaration, characterizing them as major achievements of UNFF and "true manifestations of stakeholders' commitment" to forests. He expressed hope that informal negotiations on these two UNFF19 outcome documents during the week would successfully conclude by the end of Wednesday, 8 May.

UNFF Secretariat Director Juliette Biao Koudoukpo noted that "the world remains off track" for achieving the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) by 2030. She said forests are linked to most SDGs and called for broadening audiences and building partnerships. Koudoukpo stressed the need to strengthen the Secretariat for developing a strategic approach and increasing its effectiveness and influence.

Policy Discussions on the Implementation of the UNSPF 2017-2030: Activities in Support of the Thematic Priorities for the Biennium 2023-2024

Director Koudoukpo summarized the Secretariat's Notes for UNFF19 on:

- activities supporting UNFF19's thematic priorities for the UNSPF implementation (E/CN.18/2024/2);
- UNSPF means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) (E/CN.18/2024/3); and
- monitoring, assessment, and reporting in the context of the UNSPF (E/CN.18/2024/4).

INDIA presented on its country-led initiative in October 2023 on the themes of "forest fires/wildfires" and "forest certification and sustainable forest management" (E/CN.18/2024/8). Citing recommendations, he highlighted, among others, to:

- adopt an integrated approach to prevent and manage forest fires/wildfires and manage post-fire landscape restoration through policy interventions;
- incorporate technology and digital solutions to enhance forest governance and monitoring; and
- create universally accepted benchmarking standards for forest certification at a global scale; and

- evaluation of current certification programmes and how they relate to universal standards.

He called on the UNFF Secretariat to facilitate the operationalization of the Global Fire Management Hub by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), which will provide a platform to share knowledge and experience about strategies for, and management of, forest fires and wildfires.

UNEP and ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK presented on their partnership with UNFF and other organizations in the Model Forest Act Initiative (MoFAI), seeking to create a legal tool kit to support the conservation and sustainable management of vital forest ecosystems. Patricia Kameri-Mbote, UNEP, noted many forests laws predate the 1972 Stockholm multilateral environment meeting that created UNEP and do not reflect knowledge gained and principles adopted since Stockholm.

On a panel on "Valuing Forest Ecosystems in National Policy and Strategies," Stefan Schweinfest, Director, UN Statistics Division, reviewed the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) adopted in 2012 and its recent update on ecosystem accounting, noting how SEEA may be applied to valuing forest ecosystems. Pushpam Kumar, UNEP, discussed points to bear in mind in valuation of forest ecosystems, and provided examples from India and Ethiopia on its use in policy and strategy.

Trust Fund for the UNFF

Director Koudoukpo reviewed the Secretariat's Note on the Forum's Trust Fund (E/CN.18/2024/7), noting contributions totaling USD 943,031 from the China, Germany, the Republic of Korea, and the US. She summarized expected expenditures for 2024, priorities and challenges, and urged more countries to contribute to the Trust Fund.

CANADA announced that it will soon contribute CAD 250,000 to the Trust Fund towards improving communication with country offices and forest monitoring and reporting.

Midterm Review in 2024 of the Effectiveness of the International Arrangement on Forests in Achieving its Objectives

Director Koudoukpo summarized the Secretariat's Note on the preparations for the MTR of the effectiveness of the IAF in achieving its objectives and the draft UNFF Quadrennial Programme of Work for 2025-2028 (E/CN.18/2024/5).

General Debate

UNFF19 heard interventions on the UNSPF, Trust Fund, MTR preparations, and the draft Quadrennial Programme of Work. UKRAINE mentioned the extension of its Forest Code and the forest damages caused by the invasion of its territory by the Russian Federation.

The EUROPEAN UNION (EU) stressed the need to take an integrated approach to forests. She called for the years left to the UNSPF to show that the IAF has an added value in the multilateral context, said the EU is "willing to think out of the box" to do what is necessary to give the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) a stronger mandate, and emphasized the indispensable role the GFFFN has to play.

INDIA shared its revision of the National Forest Policy. COSTA RICA noted its ban on deforestation, protection of forest cover and payment for ecosystem efforts. CANADA encouraged the development of the MoFAI.

AUSTRALIA called for streamlined UNFF omnibus resolution text. ECUADOR emphasized forest certification and crafting the regulations in a participative fashion. INDONESIA reported corrective measures to their Forest and Other Land Use (FOLU) Net Sink 2030 strategy, including its monitoring and verification systems. BRAZIL highlighted the exchange of good practices and technical cooperation during the August 2023 Amazon Cooperation Treaty Summit and referenced his country's contribution towards the Tropical Forests Forever instrument.

ARMENIA reported forest cover expansion to 20% by 2050 and protecting forests through a continuous surveillance system. JAPAN noted its efforts to develop a forest environment tax to encourage support for forest benefits and announced a revised voluntary national contribution (VNC) that would incorporate the GFGs. NEW ZEALAND mentioned efforts to encourage wood processing investments and offered to share its experiences incorporating Māori Indigenous practices for data collection.

MALAYSIA noted its commitment to keep at least 50% of its territory under tree cover, efforts to strengthen forest law and regulation, and planting of 7.9 million trees. SAUDI ARABIA stressed the priority given forest cover and forest development under its Vision 2030. ARGENTINA emphasized the need for new, additional, accessible funding for forests, and, with URUGUAY, urged avoiding barriers to commerce.

NEPAL reviewed its statistics on forests under community management, restored forests, protected areas, and trees planted, and the policies supporting these changes. SOUTH AFRICA called for the MTR to strengthen the UNSPF, catalyze participation in its implementation and promote greater implementation of sustainable forest management (SFM). GUATEMALA noted it has reduced its annual deforestation rate to 0.36% and highlighted its implementation of REDD+ supported by the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility.

IRAQ discussed its efforts to support SFM, combat illegal logging, rehabilitate forests, and plant trees. The HOLY SEE stressed that all actions to protect forests need to be integrated with protecting the wellbeing of forest-dependent people. COLOMBIA discussed its efforts to roll back deforestation and protect Amazonian forests and called on the international community to provide more resources.

CHINA highlighted its updated VNC, including expanding forest areas, decreasing forest fires, restoring wetlands and other landscapes, and strengthening forest monitoring and management. CAMEROON noted its strategic vision to rehabilitate degraded forests and ecosystems, calling for compensation for ecosystem services and a mandatory global carbon tax.

MEXICO stressed boosting forest financing through the GFFFN to generate results for owners, local communities, Indigenous Peoples, and women, regardless of deed possession, and access to loans and subsidies for women workers.

GABON called for sustainable funding for the Congo Basin. He stressed promoting certification, forest communities, climate-resilient national policy, and research in scientific and technological innovation.

The PHILIPPINES called for policy frameworks for market and non-market mechanisms to encourage the private sector, identify potential investment areas, cover multilevel risks, and develop revenue-sharing mechanisms.

GERMANY urged delegates to contact Major Groups for information on their visions and proposals for UNFF19. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA noted the revision of its National Forest Plan and doubling forests' contribution to its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement.

The US asked the CPF to include temperate forests in its new joint initiative on tropical forest fires. He expressed concern regarding the concept of universal standards for certification. He called for assessing UNFF's mandate, current resources, and gap analysis before devoting new resources for UNFF Secretariat staffing.

URUGUAY highlighted its logging ban, tax exemptions for ecosystem services, sovereign bonds linking native forest to climate change indicators, and support for harmonization of criteria for assessing forest ecosystems.

The UK urged the UNFF to spotlight forests' value, particularly for climate, and embed the UNSPF in the wider UN agenda. MOLDOVA urged international cooperation and sharing of best practices on ecosystem services.

GHANA noted its forest plantation and landscape restoration strategy, incorporating native species and trees on farms.

Negotiations on the Draft High-Level Declaration

Director Koudenoukpo summarized the Secretariat's Note on UNFF19's HLS, including a forest partnership forum with the CPF, non-governmental organizations and private sector chief executive officers ([E/CN.18/2024/6](#)).

In the afternoon, a working group co-facilitated by the UNFF19 Vice Chairs Leticia Zamora Zumbado (Costa Rica) and Jaroslav Kubišta (Czechia), examined the "zero draft" of the HLS declaration and considered Members' proposed revisions. Apart from minor editorial suggestions, work on the first section centered on inclusion or deletion of, or reference to:

- local and/or forest communities;
- demand for forest and agricultural products;
- [the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use](#);
- language on halting degradation; and
- "fiber security."

Most delegates agreed to revise a paragraph on the benefits provided by forests.

Comments on the second section included addition of paragraphs or text on sustainable financial resources and capacity building; and referencing the global stock take under the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Negotiations on the Draft Omnibus Resolution

The working group on the draft resolution was co-facilitated by the Co-Chairs of the Open-ended Intergovernmental *Ad Hoc* Expert Group (AHEG) on preparations for the MTR, Maureen Whelan (US) and Avhashoni Renny Madula (South Africa). Delegates made comments on paragraphs on actions to be taken in the MTR by UNFF members, the UNFF Secretariat, and the CPF and its member organizations.

Some delegates objected to proposals for additional text given the number of intersessional consultations already held. One delegate noted that those consultations were not technically considered "negotiations."

Some delegates debated whether to note the Paris Agreement, the Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Land Degradation Neutrality principles as individual instruments, or as subsidiary to the UNFCCC, the CBD, and the UNCCD, respectively, with some cautioning that references should be consistent with references in already agreed documents.

The question of referring to "traditional" or "local" knowledge, and where this should appear, also received some attention.

In the Corridors

The packed plenary filled with a happy buzz in the morning indicated a good start to the UN's Forum on Forestry. The spirit of optimism and productivity was also reflected in several positive initiatives highlighted by delegations during the morning, and lunch provided by a side event was a crackling affair in the Vienna Cafe outside the conference room. The mood altered somewhat in the afternoon as the real work started on negotiating the two draft UNFF19 outcomes, and the informal working groups were reminded of budgetary constraints and austerity measures that will prevent any informal sessions outside the official session times or interpretation in the omnibus negotiations. It remains to be seen whether the drafts can be finalized and agreed by the rigid deadlines set and what will happen if they cannot, given that negotiations of important documents frequently "run over," sometimes even going overnight. A seasoned observer cautioned "tricky conversations" often require longer hours than currently scheduled by the Bureau.