

TWELFTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS: 1-5 MAY 2017

The twelfth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF12) opens today at UN Headquarters in New York. The meeting will address a number of issues, including the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 (the Strategic Plan), monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR), means of implementation (MOI) and enhanced cooperation, coordination and engagement on forest-related issues. Other topics for discussion include, *inter alia*, the Forum Trust Fund, and emerging issues and challenges.

As part of the deliberations on the Strategic Plan's implementation, panel discussions on forests in relation to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 (Poverty alleviation), SDG2 (Food security) and SDG5 (Gender equality) will also take place.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNFF

The UN Forum on Forests was established in 2000, following a five-year period of forest policy dialogue within the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). In October 2000, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in resolution 2000/35, established the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF), including the UNFF as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, with the main objective of promoting the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

The UNFF's principal functions are to: facilitate the implementation of forest-related agreements and foster a common understanding on sustainable forest management (SFM); provide for continued policy development and dialogue among governments, international organizations and Major Groups, as well as address forest issues and emerging areas of concern in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner; enhance cooperation, and policy and programme coordination on forest-related issues; foster international cooperation and monitor, assess and report on progress; and strengthen political commitment to the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION: The UNFF's organizational session took place from 12-16 February 2001, at UN Headquarters in New York. Delegates agreed that the UNFF Secretariat would be located in New York, and made progress towards the establishment of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), a partnership of 14 major forest-related international organizations, institutions and convention secretariats.

UNFF1: The first session of UNFF (11-23 June 2001, New York) discussed and adopted decisions on the UNFF Multi-Year Programme of Work, a Plan of Action for the implementation of the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action, and the UNFF's work with the CPF. Delegates also recommended establishing three *Ad Hoc* Expert Groups (AHEGs) to provide technical advice to UNFF on: approaches and mechanisms for MAR; finance and transfer of environmentally sound technologies (ESTs); and parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests.

UNFF2: The second session of UNFF (4-15 March 2002, New York) adopted decisions on, *inter alia*, specific criteria for: the review of the effectiveness of the IAF; and continued policy development. UNFF2 agreed that specific criteria related to the implementation of the Proposals for Action are the extent to which: countries, the CPF and other actors progressed in implementing the Proposals for Action; countries developed and started to implement national forest programmes or equivalent processes; the IAF facilitated and promoted countries' implementation, focusing on MOI; and countries progressed in assessing the Proposals for Action in order to determine their relevance in their national contexts.

UNFF3: UNFF3 (26 May – 6 June 2003, Geneva) adopted six resolutions on: enhanced cooperation and policy and programme coordination; forest health and productivity; economic aspects of forests; maintaining forest cover to meet present and future needs; the UNFF Trust Fund; and strengthening the Secretariat.

UNFF4: UNFF4 (3-14 May 2004, Geneva) adopted five resolutions on: review of the effectiveness of the IAF; forest-related scientific knowledge; social and cultural aspects of forests; MAR, and criteria and indicators; and finance and transfer of ESTs. On the review of the IAF, delegates agreed to request that Member States submit a voluntary questionnaire based on the specific criteria agreed to at UNFF2. UNFF4 attempted, without success, to reach agreement on resolutions on forest-related traditional knowledge, enhanced cooperation, and policy and programme coordination.

UNFF5: UNFF5 (16-27 May 2005, New York) was unable to reach agreement on strengthening the IAF and did not produce a Ministerial Statement or a negotiated outcome. Delegates did agree, *ad referendum*, to four global goals on: significantly increasing the area of protected forests and sustainably managed forests worldwide; reversing the decline in official development assistance (ODA) for SFM; reversing the loss of forest cover; and enhancing forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits. They also agreed in principle to negotiate, at some future date, the terms of reference for a voluntary code or international understanding on forests, as well as MOI.

UNFF6: UNFF6 (13-24 February 2006, New York) generated a negotiating text containing new language on the function of the IAF, a commitment to convene UNFF biennially after 2007, and

a request that UNFF7 adopt a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (NLBI). UNFF6 also set four global objectives on forests (GOFs) for the IAF to: reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through SFM, including through protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation; enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, and the contribution of forests to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals; increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests; and reverse the decline in ODA for SFM, and mobilize significantly increased new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of SFM.

UNFF7: UNFF7 (16-27 April 2007, New York) adopted the NLBI and a Multi-Year Programme of Work for the period 2007-2015. Delegates agreed that a “voluntary global financial mechanism/portfolio approach/forest financing framework for all types of forests” would be developed and considered, with a view to its adoption at UNFF8.

UNFF8: UNFF8 (20 April - 1 May 2009, New York) discussed: forests in a changing environment, including forests and climate change; reversing the loss of forest cover and degradation, and forests and biodiversity conservation; and MOI for SFM. Delegates adopted a resolution on forests in a changing environment, enhanced cooperation and cross-sectoral policy and programme coordination, and regional and sub-regional inputs. Delegates did not agree on a decision on financing for SFM, and decided to forward bracketed negotiating text to the Forum’s next session.

UNFF9: UNFF9 (24 January - 4 February 2011, New York) launched the International Year of Forests 2011. The Forum adopted by acclamation a resolution on forests for people, livelihoods and poverty eradication, which addressed, *inter alia*: procedures for assessment of progress; increased regional and sub-regional cooperation; enhanced cooperation, including with Major Groups; and MOI for SFM, particularly the AHEG process on forest financing.

UNFF10: UNFF10 (8-19 April 2013, Istanbul, Turkey) adopted, among other items, the “Resolution on Emerging Issues, MOI and the UNFF Trust Fund,” which decided that the effectiveness of the IAF would be reviewed in 2015, and established an open-ended intergovernmental AHEG to review the IAF’s performance and effectiveness. The resolution set out the elements to be included in the review: submissions by countries, the CPF, its members and other relevant organizations and stakeholders; an independent assessment of the IAF; and an AHEG on the IAF review.

UNFF11: UNFF11 (4-15 May 2015, New York) forwarded a resolution to ECOSOC recommending, *inter alia*: renaming the NLBI the “UN Forest Instrument”; strengthening and extending the IAF to 2030; deciding that the IAF is composed of the UNFF and its Member States, the Secretariat of the Forum, the CPF, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) and the UNFF Trust Fund; deciding to set clear priorities for the GFFFN in the Strategic Plan; and convening an open-ended intergovernmental AHEG to develop proposals on a replacement for the reference to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the UN Forest Instrument with an appropriate reference to the SDGs and targets, the Strategic Plan, and the Quadrennial Programme of Work (4POW) for the period 2017-2020.

ECOSOC approved the UNFF11 recommendations on 22 July 2015 in resolution 2015/33, and the UN General Assembly gave effect to the changes recommended by the Council on 22 December 2015 in resolution 70/199.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

AHEG1: AHEG1 (25-27 April 2016, New York) explored the required strategic approaches and actions to achieve the IAF objectives, including: the mission, vision, communication strategy, possible goals, targets and priority actions, the roles of IAF components, and the organizational structure of the Strategic Plan; suggestions for the 4POW; possible elements for the “framework for reviewing implementation” of the Strategic Plan; and planned follow-up activities leading to AHEG2.

Just prior to the AHEG1 meeting, UNFF12 met briefly to elect its Bureau.

EXPERT MEETING ON ENHANCING REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL ARRANGEMENT ON FORESTS:

The expert meeting (26-28 September 2016, Tehran, Iran) agreed on a number of actions to enhance regional and sub-regional involvement, including that mechanisms be developed to foster cooperation between UNFF and regional and sub-regional organizations and processes that work towards implementing the Strategic Plan.

AHEG2: AHEG2 (24-28 October 2016, Bangkok, Thailand) continued discussion of the Strategic Plan and 4POW, and considered several non-papers on: guiding principles for the inclusion of goals and targets; existing intergovernmentally-agreed provisions on forests; forests’ contribution to the SDGs; and forest-related data and baseline information. Broad consensus was reached on many elements of the draft Strategic Plan and 4POW, to be submitted to the UNFF Working Group and Special Session.

OLI ON DEVELOPING GLOBAL FOREST INDICATORS, IN SUPPORT OF UNFF: This organization-led initiative (OLI) (28-30 November 2016, Rome, Italy) was organized by the CPF and considered a proposed global core set of forest-related indicators, covering indicators for: SFM; progress towards the forest-related SDGs, targets and other internationally agreed goals on forests; and other indicators relevant for the IAF Strategic Plan. Participants agreed that, following an extensive consultation process, the proposed global core set should be brought to the attention of UNFF and other governing bodies for consideration in various processes.

UNFF WORKING GROUP ON THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FORESTS AND PROGRAMME OF WORK 2017-2020:

The UNFF Working Group (16-20 January 2017, New York) reviewed and agreed on the Strategic Plan and the 4POW. Strategic Plan discussions centered on the global forest goals and targets, implementation framework, review framework, and the communication and outreach strategy. The Working Group discussions on the 4POW included the thematic and operational activities and resources required to implement the Strategic Plan and priority actions for even and odd-year sessions. Despite protracted evening discussions, the Working Group was able to reach consensus, and succeeded in drafting the UN’s first comprehensive Strategic Plan for Forests.

On 20 January 2017, immediately following the adjournment of the Working Group meeting, a Special Session of UNFF12 was convened to adopt the report of the UNFF Working Group.

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON REPORTING TO UNFF:

This expert group meeting (7-10 February 2017, Brasilia, Brazil) convened to contribute to developing a format for voluntary national reporting on implementation of the Strategic Plan and the UN Forest Instrument. It also considered development of a global set of forest indicators, data sharing arrangements, the reporting cycle for the UNFF, and the potential uses of information collected through reporting.