IFF-3 HIGHLIGHTS
3 MAY 1999

On the first day of IFF-3, delegates met in a morning Plenary session, heard opening remarks by Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Nitin Desai, via video conference from New York, adopted the session’s agenda, and presented general statements. In the afternoon, Working Group 1 discussed monitoring progress in implementation and Working Group 2 discussed future supply of and demand for wood and non-wood forest products and services.

OPENING PLENARY
IFF Co-Chair Ilkka Ristamäki (Finland) opened IFF-3 and noted its heavy agenda, particularly in light of the Thursday, 13 May, public holiday. He recalled recent initiatives taken by govern-ments, IGOs and NGOs and work undertaken by the Intergener Task Force on Forests (ITTF) and other experts. He urged govern-ments to inject political will into the IFF process and to be forward-looking to IFF-4, CSD-8 and beyond.

Under-Secretary-General Nitin Desai identified the period since Rio as one of confidence and consensus building. He said the IFF must define the forest issue and articulate its core components. He said the IFF needed to establish a mechanism to facilitate international commitments and mechanisms.

Professionals in the room echoed the need to foster political commitment, build consensus on priority areas and determine what form continuing deliberations should take. Following his remarks, NEW ZEALAND asked how momentum would be maintained after the IFF and GERMANY, on behalf of the EU, asked what role the CSD could play. Desai responded that UN standing bodies such as the CSD would continue the process, but that this would depend on IFF outcomes, and said the IFF must first build consensus on the meaning of sustainable forest management (SFM). He said an inter-agency collaborative mechanism should be developed. The INTERNATIONAL INDIAN TREATY COUNCIL expressed concern that indigenous peoples and cultures would be overlooked in the process. Desai responded that the relationship between people and resources is critical for sustainable development and emphasized participatory forest management.

JoAnne DiSano, Director for the Division of Sustainable Develop-ment, noted that implementation of the IFF proposals for action was very uneven and encouraged IFF-3 participants to produce a precise document. IFF Co-Chair Bagher Asadi (Iran) introduced the Bureau members: Co-Chairs Bagher Asadi (Iran) and Ilkka Ristamäki (Finland), Vice-Chairs Yevgeny Kuzmichev (Russian Federation) and Amalia Torres (Peru). Vice-Chair Torres was also elected as Rapporteur. The Plenary adopted the provisional agenda (E/CN.17/IFF/199/1) and approved the programme of work, and the floor was opened for general statements.

GERMANY, on behalf of the EU and Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, encouraged a substantive discussion on Category III, future arrangements and mechanisms, at IFF-3, and encouraged a first exchange on functions, scope and format of future arrange-ments or mechanisms. GUYANA, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, lamented the attempts by the North to put conditions on forest trade and questioned what compensatory economic mechanisms were available to implement and maintain national protected forest areas. SWITZERLAND offered to host IFF-4 in Geneva and urged governments to avoid duplicating proposals for action. The US suggested a fresh approach to deal with unresolved issues and supported elaboration and clarification of the IFF proposals. She expressed concern with duplication of the IFF’s work and the lack of progress made in technology transfers. JAPAN stressed the importance of and urged consensus on some form of international arrangements and mechanisms. CUBA stressed that indigenous peoples and cultures would be overlooked in the process. Desai responded that the relationship between people and resources is critical for sustainable development and emphasized participatory forest management.

The WORLD COMMISSION ON FOREST AND SUSTAIN-ABLE DEVELOPMENT presented the Commission’s final report. It identified three areas of failure: economic (i.e. forest products are under priced); governance failure (i.e. lack of local and indigenous rights, benefit sharing and gender equity); and ethical failures (corruption and lack of transparency). The report concluded that a binding agreement might be useful and proposed new fora for international discussion on forests through the establishment of a forest security council and forest trust. The CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY noted its commitment to the IFF proposals and highlighted the programme on forest biodiversity adopted at COP-4.
SOBREVIVENCIA highlighted the Global Meeting on Underlying Causes and said the success of IFF-3 would be judged by: agreement to protect frontier forests; a fund for forest protection; and a declaration acknowledging a forest crisis. Another representative of SOBREVIVENCIA noted concern over indigenous peoples’ involvement and called for unfettered access to the process. ASSOCIACION KUNAS UNIDAS said national legal systems must take biodiversity conservation and indigenous land rights into consideration and emphasized the need for discussion on protected areas.

WORKING GROUP 1

Working Group 1 (WG1), chaired by IFF Co-Chair Asadi, conducted a preliminary round of substantive discussion on monitoring progress in the implementation of the IPF’s proposals for action. Jag Maini, IFF Secretariat, opened the discussion by introducing the Secretary-General’s report on this item (E/CN.17/IFF/1999/3). He referred to the FAO survey of national forest programmes (NFPs), underscored the importance of criteria and indicator (C&I) processes, and highlighted the options to be considered by governments which include: harmonizing forest-related information; seeking funding from existing bodies; and building upon existing monitoring, reporting and assessment arrangements. The EU, supported by G-77/CHINA, NORWAY, NEW ZEALAND and CANADA, underscored the need to harmonize data collection. He urged that increased attention be given to non-wood products and non-economic aspects of forests. The FAO noted that NFPs have stagnated in a number of countries due to a lack of finances and capacity. BRAZIL highlighted the importance of national information and, with NIGERIA, highlighted the need for financial resources to support national efforts. NEW ZEALAND noted the importance of C&I as a key instrument for monitoring progress. JAPAN urged that the ITTO C&I processes be recognized and said that the GEF is not the appropriate funding agency for forest data collection. PORTUGAL emphasized the importance of C&I and noted pan-European C&I efforts. The US, with CANADA, underscored that the benefit derived from reviewing, monitoring and reporting must accrue at the national level.

AUSTRALIA recalled a VALDIVIA GROUP proposal for a reporting system, calling for description of: national processes to assess the IPF proposals; major agencies, organizations and groups involved in implementation of the proposals; and new activities that facilitate the implementation of the IPF proposals. MALAYSIA drew attention to the shortage of scientific, technological and professional personnel for assessing and reporting on progress and noted the need for capacity building. CHINA identified capacity and resources as critical problems to be resolved at IFF-3. CANADA said reporting should include the state of both forests and policy, and said the FAO and CSD reporting systems could be models. CANADA said monitoring and reporting is linked to Category III, international arrangements.

INDONESIA emphasized the importance of maximizing the utility value of reporting and dissemination of the reports. COLOMBIA said that evaluation is premature in countries where national plans are beginning. VENEZUELA said mechanisms for periodic reports on the IPF proposals should be institutionalized and said that a monitoring system could not be supported without additional funding. SOBREVIVENCIA emphasized participation of a wide range of stakeholders to avoid skewed reports from forest departments. The GLOBAL FOREST POLICY PROJECT called for broader reporting on conservation and sustainable management of all types of forests.

Responding to questions from a number of delegations, Maini suggested that guidelines for reporting on forests could include such topics as decision making, status and capacity building as highlighted in the Secretary-General’s paper.