**IFF-4 HIGHLIGHTS**

**MONDAY, 31 JANUARY**

On the first day of IFF-4, delegates met in an opening Plenary session to address organizational matters and to hear opening remarks from key speakers and delegations. Following Plenary, the Working Groups convened to discuss their organization of work.

**OPENING PLENARY**

IFF Co-Chair Bagher Asadi (Iran) opened IFF-4, welcoming delegates and noting that the IFF’s intensive two weeks of work would be directed toward resolving outstanding issues. Asadi turned to the provisional agenda (E/CN.17/IFF/2000/1) and announced the election of officers: Co-Chairs Asadi (Iran) and Ilkka Ristimäki (Finland), and Vice-Chairs Yevgeny Kuzmichev (Russian Federation), a representative of Cote D’Ivoire to be announced, and Andrea Alban (Colombia), who will also serve as Rapporteur. The Plenary adopted the agenda and the proposed organization of work.

David Harcharik, Chair of the Interagency Task Force on Forests (ITFF), called attention to three key issues: objectives, implementation, and partnerships. He said policy dialogue must have clear objectives, and supported building on and strengthening existing institutions. He also urged maximizing use of existing financial resources. Regarding implementation, he emphasized the need for concrete actions for implementing recommendations, and said money is the best measure of commitment. He noted shared commitment and partnerships between various interest groups both at the global and local levels.

Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director, said that forests could no longer be considered as a factory for timber as they are important for conservation and the protection of the environment. He highlighted the importance of forests and wooded land for water management, biodiversity conservation, and breaking the vicious cycle of poverty associated with deforestation and drought. He said that UNEP has supported the ITFF and regarded this process as an innovative mechanism and highlighted UNEP’s role in a number of intersectoral processes. He underscored the key role that UNEP plays in building bridges between environment agencies and the forestry sector. He recalled that governments had made considerable progress in negotiating the Forest Principles. With regard to the options presented in the Secretary-General’s paper on international arrangements and mechanisms to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests, he noted that none of them are mutually exclusive. In closing, he said problems created yesterday cannot be solved with yesterday’s thinking.

Louise Fréchette, UN Deputy Secretary-General, noted governments are gradually recognizing the consequences of global warming but still refuse to link development and environmental sustainability. She noted the IFF process had created scientific and political momentum and given incentives to improve national policies. She called for more aggressive treatment of forest issues and said any future arrangement must ensure wide participation, and an open, transparent, parent and inclusive process to promote synergies among the many institutions involved in forest issues. She underscored the significance of IFF deliberations for other key areas of sustainable development and noted forests are a quintessential global issue.

Emi Watanabe, UNDP Assistant Administrator, stated that the IFF can help turn the tide against the “business as usual” approach by making decisions that have significant, positive impacts on environments and livelihoods of poor populations. She highlighted the importance attached to the sustainable management of forests, which relate directly to the alleviation of poverty. She noted that UNDP is primarily involved with financing resources, and called for concrete and determined action by the international community.

Juan Mayr, Colombian Minister of Environment and CSD-8 Chair, assured delegates that focusing on consensus areas could lead to good results and wished them the best.

PORTUGAL, on behalf of the EU, underscored the need to send a clear message to CSD-8 and noted broad support for institutionalizing an international forest policy dialogue. He emphasized the importance of implementing the IPF proposals for action and highlighted efforts underway within the EU. With regard to finance, he said sustainable forest management (SFM) should be self-sustaining in the long-run and encouraged public-private partnerships. He noted that while the EU has supported negotiating a legally binding instrument (LBI), it remains open to other proposals.

CUBA noted progress on technical aspects of forests thus far, but expressed concern over the lack of consensus on political elements. He highlighted, inter alia, the need for balance between SFM and economic development, special requirements of different ecosystems, the special needs of least developed countries and linkages of forests to other key areas of sustainable development.

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with rural communities and their development. CANADA said trade, finance, transfer of environmentally sound technologies (ESTs) and traditional knowledge would remain key issues in any future process. He expressed support for an intergovernmental committee to negotiate a forest convention and said the Costa Rica Canada Initiative process identified elements and functions critical to SFM. He said a forest instrument should balance environmental, economic and social concerns, as well as cultural and spiritual concerns.

IRAN said that since UNCED the concerns of low forest cover countries (LFCCs) have been inadequately addressed and noted that forests, woodlands and trees were important culturally, economically, socially and environmentally, as well as for their subsistence value. He called for international partnerships to assist LFCCs rehabilitate and restore degraded forests and woodlands.

ZAMBIA, on behalf of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, noted that African countries do not support a LBI without a viable financial mechanism and prefer improved coordination of existing arrangements and a new permanent intergovernmental forum for forest policy deliberations. With regard to trade and environment, he called for trade liberalization, particularly for value-added forest products.

BRAZIL noted that the Forest Principles constitute the most comprehensive instrument on forests and suggested that maintaining a permanent spotlight on forests is the main achievement of the IFF process. He underscored the lack of consensus on a LBI and called for pragmatic discussions that would avoid passing on bracketed text to the CSD.

WORKING GROUP 1

Co-Chair Asadi introduced the IFF-3 report (E/CN.17/IFF/1999/25), a working document for the meeting, and suggested matters finalized at IFF-2 and IFF-3 not be reopened. He proposed that attention be brought to underlying causes, traditional forest-related knowledge (TFRK), forest conservation and protected areas, and forest research. He proposed, and delegates supported, establishing a contact group on financial matters as a cross-cutting issue following deliberations on financial resources in Working Group 2. The EU welcomed the consensus already achieved and the efforts made by countries to improve their national forest programmes, as well as harmonize formats and definitions. He underscored the important role of indigenous and local communities in TFRK and suggested the creation of a contact group. On forest research, he called for policy programmes and strategies within national programmes.

The US called for heightened attention to bracketed text on cross-cutting issues and suggested that matters needing special consideration be identified and eventually considered in contact groups. She asked that the text on protected areas and forest research be reconsidered, as it does not accurately reflect the position of several delegations.

COLOMBIA said that it would be more appropriate to deal with the issues of TFRK and intellectual property rights in other fora. NORWAY emphasized the importance of the IFF deliberations remaining cognizant of current developments on TFRK. INDONESIA and JAPAN supported the creation of a contact group on TFRK. AUSTRALIA supported a consolidated discussion on financial issues and referred to previous IPF work on nomenclature to avoid difficulties with terminology. BRAZIL, supported by CANADA, requested that as few contact groups as possible be established. Co-Chair Asadi said the Working Group would work through less contentious elements first.

The WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT said that the issue of mining was a serious omission in discussions on underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation. He urged governments that host mining transnationals to take urgent action to regulate their activities.

WORKING GROUP 2

Co-Chair Ristimäki overviewed the work before Working Group 2 and on the following programme elements: need for financial resources; trade and environment; transfer of ESTs for SFM; valuation of forest goods and services; economic instruments, tax policies and land tenure; future supply of and demand for wood products and non-wood forest products; and rehabilitation of forest cover in environmentally critical areas. He noted clean text on economic instruments and future supply and demand, and remarked that the texts on valuation and rehabilitation require very little work. Ristimäki underscored the aim of removing brackets from text on financial resources, trade and environment, and transfer of ESTs. He drew attention to the report of the recent workshop on financing SFM held in Croydon, London. He said contact groups established at IFF-3 on these issues would resume deliberations: trade and environment, chaired by Don Wijewardana (New Zealand); transfer of ESTs, chaired by Ralph Roberts (Canada); and need for financial resources, chaired by Knut Oistad (Norway). He hoped that these contact groups would complete their work by the end of the week.

The US raised questions about the procedure to be used in discussing bracketed text. She expressed concern over concluding discussions in the contact groups before convening a contact group on Category III, as many linkages between the issues exist. She suggested that a contact group on Category III begin its work as soon as possible.

The EU urged against duplicative discussion on transfer of ESTs, stating considerable efforts had been expended in fora such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

Regarding the remaining bracketed text on valuation and rehabilitation, as well as the proposal to move a subparagraph from assessment, monitoring and rehabilitation to transfer of ESTs, GUYANA requested that the Group postpone its decision until the G-77/CHINA was able to discuss the issues.

IN THE CORRIDORS

What will constitute the new mechanism(s) to carry forward the work of the IFF is the main buzz throughout the corridors. Many delegations have come to the final meeting of the IFF determined to reach consensus prior to the CSD, but without a clear picture of what such a consensus will look like. It appears many are hoping that someone will come forward with a workable model. Many delegations called for political will, but as one delegate suggested, the fact that there are so many references to political will signals its absence. It appears that debate over finances will be a major sticking point, with some delegates lamenting the fact that the IPF and IFF processes have yet to bring forward any new sources of funding and wondering whether such funding is forthcoming.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Plenary will convene at 10:00 am in the Trusteeship Council to consider international arrangements and mechanisms to promote the management, conservation and sustainable developments of all types of forests (Category III).