

UNFF21 Highlights: Wednesday, 13 May 2026

The third day of the 21st session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF21) focused on informal negotiations regarding the draft omnibus resolution, which will dictate follow-up through 2028 on the matters discussed by UNFF21 in the first two days.

Informal Consultation on the UNFF21 Omnibus Resolution

Vice Chair Abderrahim Houmy (Morocco) introduced the draft resolution prepared by the Secretariat and invited comments to be considered in a second draft. The resolution includes sections on: country-led initiatives (CLIs); enhanced cooperation with partners; communication and outreach; monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR); interlinkages between the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and major global forest related developments; means of implementation; preparation for the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) final review; and impacts of the UN80 Initiative on the Forum and its Secretariat.

Vice Chair Houmy invited general comments on the draft. Delegates welcomed the “short and operational” text as a basis for negotiations. Some members suggested adding a preambular paragraph to underline the urgency of the situation.

CLIs: On a CLI on integrated fire management, several members suggested referring to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) Global Fire Management Hub.

One country suggested language encouraging clear identification of roles and provision of support on the organization of CLIs.

Several countries suggested deleting a reference to a “manageable” number of CLIs between UNFF sessions, preferring not to limit them, and pointing out that host countries shoulder most of the costs. UNFF Secretariat Director Juliette Biao clarified that “manageable” refers to the Secretariat’s capacity to support them substantively. One country suggested providing more resources to the Secretariat, instead of limiting the number of CLIs.

One delegation asked to change the draft resolution’s invitation to “implement” the Vienna Call for Action from the Global Summit on Advancing Sustainable Forest-based Bioeconomy Approaches to “consider implementing.”

A regional group suggested adding language highlighting the contributions of sustainable forest management (SFM)

and sustainable bioeconomy approaches to the three pillars of sustainable development, resource efficiency, and circularity.

One country insisted that references to “bioeconomy” be changed to “forest-based bioeconomy.”

Enhanced Cooperation with Partners: A regional group asked for more language on meaningful participation of Major Groups, and a stakeholder offered language welcoming Major Group contributions to UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) implementation and asking the Forum to take concrete steps to recognize forest certification entities among Major Groups.

Communication and Outreach: One country asked to spotlight the GFGs more in awareness-raising efforts.

Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting: One member suggested “requesting” instead of “encouraging” members to submit their voluntary national reports (VNRs), while another suggested setting clear timeframes. One country proposed listing the countries that sent their VNRs in a footnote.

Some delegations opted to replace references to the reduction of reporting burden with references to “streamlining” or “maximizing efficiency” of forest-related reporting, and to support increasing reporting capacity.

Interlinkages of GFGs and Major Global Forest-related Developments: On interlinkages between the GFGs and international processes, some countries suggested “taking note of” instead of “welcoming” global initiatives. Another proposed that integration of the UNSPF with national policies, its contribution to global initiatives, and the promotion of the UN Decade for Afforestation and Reforestation, be subject to national circumstances.

A stakeholder suggested that a forest pavilion be organized at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP 17, while a Member recommended removing reference to organizing a forest pavilion at UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conferences of Parties (COPs). One country suggested referring to forest events at COPs other than the UNFCCC COP. One delegate offered a compromise to either refrain from mentioning pavilions or to ask relevant partners to “engage actively and increase the visibility of forests, including through supporting, if appropriate, forest pavilions at the COPs.”

A member expressed support for references to the UNFCCC COP 30 Presidency Roadmap for Halting and Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation by 2030, while another supported welcoming efforts under the UNFCCC COP 30 Action

Agenda. One delegate stated that it is premature to welcome the COP 30 Presidency's Roadmap initiative, while several suggested inviting Forum members to contribute to initiatives "such as" the Roadmap.

One delegate asked to refer to land degradation rather than forest degradation, although another opposed this.

One delegation proposed a new paragraph to welcome "efforts under the UNFCCC COP 30 Action Agenda, such as the Global Initiative on Productive Forests (GIPF), to recognize the role of productive forests, agroforestry systems, family farming, and community-based forest management in supporting sustainable livelihoods, poverty eradication, food security, and the maintenance of standing forests, in support of the GFGs, in particular GFG 2, as appropriate."

With regard to the Decade on Afforestation and Reforestation (2027-2036), a delegate requested specifying that the Forum "takes note with appreciation of the initiative by the Congo and Uzbekistan and other interested countries in this regard" and adding that it invites Forum members to promote the decade "including by providing a roadmap for its effective implementation."

Means of Implementation: One delegation noted discomfort with the term "forest degradation" and suggested replacing "halting and reverting deforestation and forest degradation by 2030" with "fighting against deforestation." They also requested deletion of a reference to the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) in a paragraph on the launch of innovative global forest financing initiatives.

On the need to strengthen the provision and mobilization of, and access to, new and additional resources from all sources, one developing country, supported by many, proposed adding that resources should be "predictable," and replacing "from all sources" with "additional public resources." A delegate preferred combining all mentions of contributing to the Trust Fund into one paragraph, expressing a similar view in reference to the GFFFN.

One delegation proposed, and many agreed to, adding a new paragraph recognizing the role of Indigenous Peoples and the promotion of measures to strengthen their governance capacities with options for financing. Several countries proposed referring to Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in line with UNSPF language, one adding "where applicable," while another suggested referring to "groups in vulnerable situations, including IPLCs and Peoples of African descent." A member suggested referring to "Indigenous Peoples, Peoples of African descent, as well as local communities."

One delegation requested that a reference to technological support be "on voluntary and mutually agreed terms." Another member, supported by many, proposed a new paragraph referring to the TFFF, noting its uniqueness in scale and that 20% of its funding would go to IPLCs.

Initial Discussion on the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) Final Review: A developed country, supported by a couple of others, encouraged including language on starting the IAF final review discussions at UNFF22, with adoption at UNFF23. They also requested an itemized and prioritized

list of activities for delegates to take back to their capitals to stir voluntary contributions and proposed deleting a paragraph recommending the UN General Assembly (UNGA) maintain the current ability and resources of the Forum Secretariat.

Another developed country also proposed language on exploring thematic priorities and cooperation modalities for the IAF final review between UNFF21 and UNFF23.

Impacts of the UN80 Initiative Pertaining to the Forum and its Secretariat: One developed country expressed concern over the tone of a paragraph on the UN80 initiative, suggesting it was attempting to mitigate the initiative. They called for incentivizing efficiency and effectiveness and improving voluntary contributions. Some developed countries proposed deleting the paragraph.

Another developed country requested removal of binding language and deletion of the qualifiers "sustained and adequate" in reference to voluntary funding.

A developing country, supported by several other developing country delegates, proposed a new paragraph on stronger language in support of the UNFF Secretariat, reaffirming it as the only universal intergovernmental body within the UN system solely dedicated to all types of forests. They stressed the need to preserve and strengthen the capacity of the secretariat to support the Forum and implement its mandate as agreed by member states.

Acknowledging the currently limited regular budget, one delegation suggested recommending that the UNGA strengthen the budget.

In the Corridors

The UNFF Secretariat is feeling the squeeze of budgetary deficits and reforms, being constrained to bare bones staffing despite ambitious and ever-increasing mandates. In the face of the UN80 reforms, questions swirl about how to prevent it from being further hampered in attempting to achieve the goals set for it.

This was top of mind today among delegates as they negotiated the language of the omnibus resolution. Delegates also fretted about reduced contributions to the Trust Fund. "Depending on the largesse of voluntary contributions of one or two countries is not sustainable," acknowledged one developed country delegate, "and there's only so far the CPF can or will pick up the slack." But another asked how, realistically, can the resource problem be fixed when both foreign aid and contributions to international processes are contracting?

A developing country delegate suggested this situation may ultimately mean that the UNFF can only undertake what interests a country enough to host a CLI, or to underwrite a specific project, rather than what interests the entire UNFF membership. Another developing country delegate voiced concern that it also means less support for participation by developing country experts at annual UNFF sessions, which leads to reliance on mission personnel with less expertise on forests.