

UNFF-6 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2006

On Monday, 13 February, the Sixth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-6) convened at UN Headquarters in New York to discuss the future of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF). In morning and afternoon plenary sessions, delegates heard opening statements and addressed organizational matters. In an afternoon side event hosted by the Major Groups, delegates discussed the contribution of civil society to sustainable forest management (SFM). In the late afternoon, delegates broke into regional consultation meetings.

OPENING PLENARY

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates elected to the Bureau Judith Mbula Bahemuka (Kenya) as Chair, Majdi Ramadan (Lebanon), and Jose Antonio Doig (Peru). Chair Bahemuka noted the previous election of Tono Kruzic (Croatia), and Franz Xaver Perrez (Switzerland) to the Bureau. She further highlighted the need for the Forum to live up to its potential for achieving globally agreed goal of reducing deforestation, making SFM a reality and increasing the contribution that forests make to human well-being. She said that this will require improving methods of work, developing a multi-year programme of work (MYPOW), and increasing official development assistance for SFM, and urged delegates to keep the issue of a legally binding instrument (LBI) in perspective.

Chair Bahemuka presented the appointment of officers: Majdi Ramadan (Lebanon) and Jose-Antonio Doig (Peru) as Vice-Chairs of UNFF-6; Franz Perrez (Switzerland) as rapporteur; Doig and Perrez as facilitators of Working Group I (WGI) and Ramadan and Kruzic of WGII.

On the organization of work, Chair Bahemuka said that WGI will address the general mandate of UNFF, including declaration of message, global goals and strategic objectives, and an instrument for all forest types. WGII will consider: means of implementation; working modalities; monitoring, assessment and reporting; enhanced cooperation; and cross-sectoral policy and programme coordination.

Jose-Antonio Ocampo, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, encouraged strengthening linkages between the work of the Forum and other forest-related processes, institutions and instruments, mainstreaming SFM into the broader development agenda, and enhancing regional initiatives and collaborative networks for more effective implementation on the ground.

Chair Bahemuka proposed, and delegates agreed, to grant accreditation to the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), pursuant to a note from the Secretariat (E/CN.18/2006/4).

IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISION 5/2 OF

UNFF-5: Pekka Patosarri, head of the UNFF Secretariat, presented the note of the Secretariat (E/CN.18/2006/2) that transmits the Chairmen's draft text from UNFF-5, according to decision 5/2, and stated that this gives the Forum a clear mandate to complete the review of its progress. He suggested that the Forum should consider making reference to the 2005 World Summit outcome document and global goals. He noted the need to clarify the objectives and functions of the IAF, and the institutional status of the UNFF, and to improve its ability to address emerging issues and make links to regional and national efforts. He noted the need to improve the global funding framework and to enhance UNFF's role with regards to the CPF and other institutions.

Chair Bahemuka, supported by all participants, recognized the significant efforts of Hosni el Lakany, as former CPF Chair. El Lakany extended his gratitude to Forum participants and CPF partners, and noted the importance of the future of the IAF. He called for an increase in the length of forest rotation intervals, a reversal in the conversion of forests to other land uses, and cautioned that the forest sector risks being subsumed by other sectors. Speaking on behalf of CPF members, Michael Martin, Food and Agriculture Organization, offered appreciation for support and guidance received from UNFF, and supported enhanced collaboration with civil society.

OPENING STATEMENTS: GABON, on behalf of COMIFAC, noted the global significance of tropical forests, recalled that the Yaoundé Declaration recognizes the right of peoples to use their forests in development efforts, and called for a flexible and voluntary approach and increased financial assistance.

AUSTRIA, for the EU and associated countries, expressed disappointment at UNFF-5's failure to reach consensus, and conceded that since achieving an LBI is not a realistic prospect, the EU wished to engage in a pragmatic dialogue that would contribute to SFM for all forest types. He called attention to developments in other related fora, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention on Combat Desertification (CCD), and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO). He also sought clarification of how the LBI issue would be handled at this session.

CAMBODIA, on behalf of the ASEAN member countries, highlighted regional efforts in enhancing multiple-use forest management, noted the option of establishing an ASEAN forest trust fund, and, with INDIA, PAKISTAN, and KENYA, supported a dedicated global forest fund and the transfer of environmentally sound technology.

PANAMA, on behalf of the Central American Integration System, said that the future IAF should emphasize the contribution of forest ecosystems to national, regional and international economies and strengthen forest governance with local participation in forest management. He also favored the adoption of an LBI, and called for the creation of innovative financial mechanisms and the reintroduction of a working document on payment for environmental services.

GHANA, on behalf of the African Group, welcomed the launch of the Africa Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) and other regional initiatives and called for: an international revenue fund; reversal of declining forest sector ODA; establishment of a Global Environment Facility (GEF) operational programme on forests; and the improvement of market access for African forest products.

JAPAN noted momentum in other fora regarding action against illegal logging and related activities, called for biotic monitoring and assessments, and encouraged flexible and efficient regional mechanisms. JAPAN, with the AMAZONIAN COOPERATION TREATY ORGANIZATION (ACTO), INDIA and the SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY (SPC), supported a non-LBI. ACTO also opposed specific quantifiable global measurements, and suggested focusing on social aspects of SFM.

CROATIA wished to be associated with the EU statement, and recalled Croatia's call for 2010 to be proclaimed the international year of forests. CHINA noted the importance of national forest plans, and the need to avoid further fragmentation of international forest policy. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, noting the importance of the St. Petersburg Europe and North Asia FLEG conference, said that Russia supports the implementation of SFM at all levels and has developed a national action plan.

CANADA and AUSTRALIA recalled their longstanding efforts towards an LBI, expressed skepticism regarding the ability of a voluntary instrument to meet these goals, and stated that they will pursue alternative avenues if UNFF fails to deliver beyond the *status quo*. AUSTRALIA announced the release of a non-paper describing the development of a regional mechanism.

ALGERIA noted the need to strengthen the framework for international cooperation, taking into consideration the needs of low forest cover countries (LFCCs) and poverty reduction strategies, and noted the need for a global forest fund under the GEF. CHILE highlighted the World Summit Declaration's call for a more coherent international approach to forest issues, and said that Chile wished to work with others to advance this process incrementally. FIJI reviewed the results of their recent evaluation and planning efforts, clarified the need for a voluntary code and regional cooperation and said they hoped to have their comprehensive sustainable development legislation and programmes in place by 2015.

NIGERIA noted the importance of UNFF objectives, but disagreed with the need for either an LBI or quantitative global goals and targets. He called attention to African Group's call for increased support for capacity building.

ARGENTINA said they wanted to work with others to develop an LBI on reducing forest degradation while respecting national sovereignty and national priorities, and recognizing the principle of shared but differentiated responsibilities. He then noted that if UNFF-6 failed to achieve consensus, Argentina would pursue other alternatives, both within and outside the UN.

INDIA noted the limited financial resources for competing development agendas. The SPC highlighted initiatives to support member states to better understand the IPF/IFF proposals for action, and supported strengthening the CPF.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH, on behalf of Major Groups, lamented that opportunities for Major Group participation in UNFF have been reduced, and called for the development of SFM indicators that incorporate their many and varied interests.

SIDE EVENT: THE CONTRIBUTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY TO SFM

Chair Bahemuka chaired a side event, hosted by the Major Groups, on the contribution of civil society to SFM. ACTO noted the importance of civil society in regional collaboration and increasing transparency in all aspects of decision making.

COMIFAC described opportunities for SFM participation in the region, and emphasized the importance of working with the governmental framework, noting the need for financial assistance and capacity building. ASEAN noted the possibility of an ASEAN coalition of NGOs for disaster relief, and explained that ASEAN works on the basis of trust and modest, incremental change.

NEPAL noted their promotion of civil society involvement in SFM and highlighted the contributions they have made in such areas as non-timber forest products (NTFPs), poverty alleviation, biodiversity conservation, equity, and the role of poor rural women.

AUSTRIA, for the EU, noted their support for involving stakeholders, as it provides for improved ownership and implementation of policy and programmes. The US reported on the "debt for nature" programme that facilitates international cooperation and promotes civil society capacity building. CANADA noted the success of the Model Forests programme which translates the policies of SFM into practice, and includes a voluntary stakeholder partnership that aims to find common solutions to SFM.

Chair Bahemuka noted the common elements of the presentations, including: the importance of partnerships; capacity building and building of social capital; and financial commitments. She commented that this Major Group "side event" was important enough to be considered a "core event."

AFTERNOON PLENARY

COLOMBIA, supported by BRAZIL, supported the creation of a global forest fund, concrete action, and international cooperation, including South-South cooperation, but disagreed with quantifiable and time-bound goals. BRAZIL further encouraged: a focus on strategic objectives and adequate means of implementation; an international understanding on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all kinds of forests; a network of centers of excellence in all regions; and a clearinghouse mechanism.

PAKISTAN called for an enhanced and predictable flow of financial and technical resources, as well as priority attention to LFCCs. KENYA suggested raising the profile of the current arrangement and preferred setting global goals and targets.

The Secretariat of the Montreal Process said that the draft indicators for SFM were available and invited comments from delegates. The MCPFE noted the achievements of pan-European regional partnerships and a framework for cooperation in implementation as well as the development of pan-European Criteria and Indicators for SFM, and highlighted the value of regional inputs.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Delegates battled through two feet of snow in order to attend UNFF-6 and complete unfinished business from UNFF-5. But as they brushed the snow from their boots, the pessimistic mood proved more difficult to shake. The opening day saw some delegates softening their previous calls for an LBI, admitting that at this point it would be most pragmatic to set this issue aside. Others stated frankly that "pursuing other avenues" for the development of an LBI is a very real option, though they fell short of detailing what these might be. Noting their support for taking an incremental approach towards obtaining UNFF's objectives, some delegates commented that the modest expectations of what UNFF-6 is capable of delivering may, paradoxically, allow for progress.