

UNFF EXPERT GROUP ON THE NON-LEGALLY BINDING INSTRUMENT: 11-15 DECEMBER 2006

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) *ad hoc* expert group on the consideration of the content of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests commences on 11 December 2006 at UN headquarters in New York. Participants, including government-designated experts from member States and representatives of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), intergovernmental organizations and major groups, will take into account the compilation of the draft indicative elements of the non-legally binding instrument and other proposals submitted by member states during UNFF-6, proposals presented afterwards and comments provided by member states regarding all the proposals. The expert group will provide its outputs for consideration by the Forum at its seventh session.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNFF

The UNFF followed a five-year period (1995-2000) of forest policy dialogue facilitated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF). In October 2000, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), in Resolution E/2000/35, established the UNFF as a subsidiary body, with the main objective to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

To achieve its main objective, principal functions were identified for UNFF, namely to: facilitate 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 identified in Agenda 21, as well as to address forest issues and emerging areas of concern in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner; enhance cooperation as well as 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.

The IPF/IFF processes produced more than 270 proposals for action towards SFM, and form the basis for the UNFF Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) and Plan of Action,

which have been discussed at annual sessions. Country- and organization-led initiatives have also contributed to UNFF's work.

ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION: The UNFF organizational session and informal consultations on the MYPOW 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 addressed progress towards the establishment of the CPF, a partnership of 14 major forest-related international organizations, institutions and convention secretariats.

UNFF-1: The first session of UNFF took place from 11-23 June 2001, at UN headquarters in New York. Delegates discussed and adopted decisions on UNFF's MYPOW, a Plan of Action for the implementation of the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action, and UNFF's work with the CPF. Delegates also recommended establishing three *ad hoc* expert groups to provide technical advice to UNFF on: approaches and mechanisms for monitoring, assessment and reporting; finance and transfer of environmentally sound technologies; and consideration with a view to recommending the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests.

UNFF-2: The second session of UNFF took place from 4-15 March 2002, at UN headquarters in New York. Delegates adopted a Ministerial Declaration and Message to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and eight decisions on: combating deforestation and forest degradation; forest conservation and protection of unique types of forests and fragile ecosystems; rehabilitation and conservation strategies for countries with low forest cover; the promotion of natural and planted forests; specific criteria for the review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests (IAF); and proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for 2002-2005.

UNFF-3: UNFF-3 met in Geneva, Switzerland, from 26 May-6 June 2003. UNFF-3 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. Terms of reference were adopted for the voluntary reporting format, and three *ad hoc* expert groups designed to consider: monitoring and reporting;

finance and transfer of technologies; and “consideration with a view to recommending the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests.”

UNFF-4: UNFF-4 convened in Geneva, Switzerland, from 3-14 May 2004. UNFF-4 adopted five resolutions on: forest-related scientific knowledge; social and cultural aspects of forests; monitoring, assessment and reporting and criteria and indicators; review of the effectiveness of the IAF; and finance and transfer of environmentally sound technologies. UNFF-4 attempted to but could not reach agreement on resolutions on traditional forest-related knowledge and enhanced cooperation and policy and programme coordination.

UNFF-5: UNFF-5 took place from 16-27 May 2005, at UN headquarters in New York, with the goal of reviewing the effectiveness of the IAF. However, participants were unable to reach agreement on strengthening the IAF and did not produce either a ministerial statement or a negotiated outcome. They 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 means of implementation. Delegates decided to forward the draft negotiating text to UNFF-6.

UNFF-6: UNFF-6 took place from 13-24 February 2006, at UN headquarters in New York. Negotiators reached agreement on how to proceed with reconstituting the IAF. Delegates 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 UNFF-7 (16-27 April 2007) adopt a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests. UNFF-6 also set four global objectives for the IAF: reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through SFM, including 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.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

AFWC-15: The 15th session of the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission convened in Maputo, Mozambique, from 29 March to 1 April 2006. Topics included: the AFWC implementation of SFM in Africa; achievement of the Millennium Development Goals through regional cooperation; forest law compliance; and links between climate change and deforestation.

APFC-21: The 21st session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission met in Dehradun, India from 17-21 April 2006, and focused on SFM and financing issues. The Commission considered the use of innovative financing such as the payment of environmental services and the role of regional mechanisms in promoting SFM. Delegates further discussed codes of practice

for planted forests, forest harvesting and wildland fires, and the FAO/International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) guidelines for best practices on law compliance in the forest sector.

EFC-33: The 33rd session of the European Forestry Commission was held in Zvolen, Slovakia, from 23-26 May 2006, with delegates considering lessons learned and challenges ahead for the forestry sector in countries with economies in transition. The Commission also focused on progress towards SFM in Europe, forest law compliance, and forest-related voluntary codes of practice.

ITTC-40: The 40th session of the International Tropical Timber Council took place in Mérida, Mexico, from 29 May to 2 June 2006. The Council allocated a total of US\$3.9 million to a number of new projects, addressed tropical timber procurement policies in consumer countries, and convened a number of side-events on challenges facing community forestry enterprises.

LACFC-24: The 24th session of the Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission took place from 26-30 June 2006, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Participants discussed planted forests, conservation of biological diversity, climate change and forest fires. During the meeting, an initiative was launched to collect case studies of successful forest management from around the region for replication elsewhere.

INTERNATIONAL FOREST REGIME ROUNDTABLE: A roundtable discussion entitled “Towards a new international regime on forests” was held on 5 July 2006, in Geneva, Switzerland. Organized by the Geneva Environment Network, the meeting was attended by representatives from, *inter alia*, the ITTO, FAO, UNFF, the UN Economic Commission for Europe and Intercooperation. UNFF gave an update of the results of its 6th session and reaching a “soft forest convention.” Participants discussed illegal logging, the feasibility of a non-legally binding “soft” convention to ensure compliance, taxing illegal forest activities and capacity building.

AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARIAN CONFERENCE: The First International Conference of Parliamentarians on the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystems convened in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 24-27 October 2006. The conference focused on good forest governance and poverty alleviation. Participants adopted the Yaoundé Message, which encourages the Network of Parliamentarians for the Sustainable Management of Central African Forest Ecosystems (REPAR) and the Parliament of Cameroon to organize subregional meetings on good governance of forest resources, as well as an action plan that highlights three priority actions: institutional development of REPAR; enhancement of REPAR’s involvement in forest sector monitoring; and combating transboundary forest crime.

ITTC-41: ITTC-41 took place from 6-11 November 2006, in Yokohama, Japan. Delegates discussed: the ITTO Biennial Work Programme for 2006-2007; measures to improve and strengthen the ITTO project cycle; and ITTO Objective 2000. Delegates to ITTC-41 approved 13 new projects and seven pre-projects, and pledged US\$5.4 million in project financing. The Council adopted a decision on the terms of reference for selecting a new Executive Director, allocating up to US\$100,000 from the Working Capital Account for the search process, and a decision to extend ITTA, 1994 until the provisional or definitive entry into force of the ITTA, 2006.