

SEVENTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS: 16-27 APRIL 2007

The seventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF7) commences today at UN headquarters in New York. This session aims to formulate and adopt a multi-year programme of work (MYPOW) that would include a description and scheduling of the tasks for the period 2008-2015, and to conclude and adopt a non-legally binding instrument (NLBI) on all types of forests. A multi-stakeholder dialogue is also scheduled to present stakeholders' views on priority areas of action with respect to the MYPOW and salient themes and perspectives on the NLBI. Other agenda items include consideration of enhanced cooperation and policy and programme coordination, and provision of further guidance to the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNFF

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

To achieve its main objective, the UNFF's principal functions were identified 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 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.

UNFF1: 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 (MAR); finance and transfer of environmentally sound technologies (ESTs); and consideration with a view to recommending the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests.

UNFF2: 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.

UNFF3: UNFF3 met in Geneva, Switzerland, from 26 May-6 June 2003. UNFF3 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: MAR; 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.

UNFF4: UNFF4 convened in Geneva, Switzerland, from 3-14 May 2004. UNFF4 adopted five resolutions on: forest-related scientific knowledge; social and cultural aspects of forests; MAR and criteria and indicators; review of the effectiveness of the IAF; and finance and transfer of ESTs. UNFF4 attempted to, but could not, reach agreement on resolutions on traditional forest-related knowledge and enhanced cooperation and policy and programme coordination.

UNFF5: UNFF5 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 UNFF6.

UNFF6: UNFF6 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 UNFF7 adopt an NLBI on all types of forests. UNFF6 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

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.

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, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UNFF, the UN Economic Commission for Europe and Intercooperation. UNFF gave an update of the results of its sixth 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.

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 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.

CPF-18: The Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) held its eighteenth meeting on 10 December 2006, at UN headquarters in New York. Members discussed preparations for the UNFF *ad hoc* expert group meeting (11-15 December 2006), including finalization of Joint CPF Remarks to be presented, preparations for UNFF7, recent policy developments and progress in on-going joint initiatives.

NLBI AHEG: The UNFF *ad hoc* expert group on the consideration of the content of the NLBI on all types of forests took place from 11-15 December 2006, at UN headquarters in New York. Experts completed a first reading of a composite draft text of the NLBI, focusing on, *inter alia*, MAR, means of implementation, adoption/subscription, and national measures contributing to the Global Objectives on forests. The composite draft text has been forwarded to UNFF7 for consideration.

PROFOR ADVISORY BOARD MEETING: The World Bank's Programme on Forests (PROFOR) held an Advisory Board Meeting, from 1-2 February 2007, to discuss a range of issues including the state of the PROFOR portfolio and key outcomes from 2006, findings from the Mid-Term Review, and priority topics for upcoming activities. The Board also identified areas for further collaboration with the National Forest Programme Facility and bilateral donor agencies in implementing PROFOR activities.

COUNTRY-LED INITIATIVE IN SUPPORT OF THE MYPOW: The Country-Led Initiative in Support of the UNFF MYPOW: Charting the Way Forward to 2015, met from 13-16 February 2007, in Bali, Indonesia. Over 150 experts from governments, international and regional organizations, and Major Groups gathered to explore, elaborate and develop a broader understanding of the possible concepts and elements to be included in the new MYPOW of the UNFF. The meeting was also intended to provide UNFF7 with guidance regarding: the structure and substance of the MYPOW; inter-linkages between the MYPOW and the NLBI on forests; strengthening the regional dimension in the work of the IAF through the MYPOW; and possible approaches to accomplishing the global objectives on forests and the new principal functions of the UNFF. A Co-Chairs' Summary Report was produced, which aims to provide a starting point for UNFF7 deliberations on this topic.

COFO-18: The eighteenth session of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO-18) convened at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, from 12-16 March 2007. In their final report, COFO delegates requested and recommended that FAO undertake numerous activities related to the issues debated during the meeting, including: forests and energy; forest protection; putting forests to work at the local level; progressing towards SFM; and shaping an action programme for FAO in forestry. The CPF held its 19th meeting during COFO-18.

PREPARATORY MEETINGS FOR UNFF7: Preparatory meetings for UNFF7 were held in Libreville, Gabon (3-4 April 2007) for African countries, and in Bogota, Colombia (25-27 March 2007) for member countries of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization. Participants discussed the MYPOW, the NLBI, means of implementation and regional involvement.