

UNFF7 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 16 APRIL 2007

On Monday, 16 April, the Seventh Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF7) convened at UN Headquarters in New York to discuss the non-legally binding instrument (NLBI) on all types of forests, and the Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) for the period 2008-2015. In a morning plenary session, delegates heard opening statements and addressed organizational matters. In the afternoon, the UNFF Secretariat introduced the agenda items on the NLBI, the MYPOW and enhanced cooperation and policy and programme coordination.

OPENING PLENARY

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates elected to the Bureau Hans Hoogeveen (the Netherlands) as Chair, and Hamidon Ali (Malaysia), André-Jules Madingou (Gabon) and Arvids Ozols (Latvia) as Co-Chairs. Chair Hoogeveen said an effective instrument must reconcile divergent views, particularly regarding means of implementation for sustainable forest management (SFM), and that the NLBI must include a financial mechanism. He said national and global interests are complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Pekka Patosaari, Director, UNFF Secretariat, said the Forum has increasingly become an integral part of the broader development agenda. He stressed the importance of: coherent and predictable forest policies that recognize all forest benefits; creating enabling environments for private sector investment; efficient and effective land tenure systems and access to forest resources, particularly for local communities and indigenous peoples; good governance and law enforcement; and regional initiatives and partnerships. He said the NLBI will signal a new era in international forest policy by stimulating and invigorating dialogue to address emerging issues, and enhancing international cooperation for a new people-centered forest policy agenda.

On the organization of work, Chair Hoogeveen urged delegates to conclude a first reading of the NLBI and MYPOW draft texts during the first week. AUSTRALIA recommended that the working groups begin their deliberations earlier

to maximize time for negotiations, and proposed that the background paper on means of implementation, provided by the World Bank, be presented in plenary.

OPENING STATEMENTS: Germany, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION (EU), called for shortening the NLBI text, and enhancing its political appeal and authority. He proposed that future UNFF sessions should: focus on a limited number of pressing issues; reduce time dedicated to negotiations; and focus on assessing progress in implementation.

Stressing the financial needs of low forest cover countries, PAKISTAN emphasized the NLBI's role in supporting local initiatives, integrating SFM and poverty reduction strategies, and promoting financial incentives and the use of non-timber forest products.

Gabon, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, reported on a successful regional preparatory meeting, which identified regional priorities and a common African position. Noting the need for adequate financial means and capacity building, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO supported establishing a global forest fund.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said the MYPOW should include intergovernmental meetings organized by regional UN commissions to improve UNFF's effectiveness and strengthen interaction with regional and subregional components. AUSTRALIA said the NLBI should further commitment towards achieving the Global Objectives on forests, provide clarity on key elements of implementation, and account for the role of forest certification schemes in combating illegal logging and promoting SFM.

Colombia, on behalf of the AMAZON COOPERATION TREATY ORGANIZATION (ACTO), opposed establishing quantifiable goals, and recalled the Rio Declaration Principles 2 and 7 (Sovereignty of States over their natural resources, and Common but differentiated responsibilities). With INDIA, ACTO stressed that reporting on implementation must be voluntary and subject to financial resources for its development, and called for creating a forest fund or financial mechanism. INDIA suggested convening regional meetings every two years. JAPAN prioritized periodic monitoring and reporting in each country and region, and said the international arrangement on forests should

address illegal logging. GUATEMALA underlined the need for transparent and fair markets, and said the NLBI should consider new trends in forestry such as bioenergy.

CUBA stressed the importance of means of implementation for developing countries, and new and additional financing. CHINA said negotiations at UNFF7 should, *inter alia*, adhere to the Forest Principles, Rio Declaration and Johannesburg Declaration, and develop an effective and operational MYPOW. NORWAY, the US and others said the MYPOW should have a thematic focus for each UNFF session. NORWAY proposed that UNFF8 address climate change and SFM, and that flexibility be retained to address emerging issues. He added that UNFF sessions should focus on in-session workshops and seminars, rather than negotiations, and questioned the need for intergovernmental preparatory meetings (IPMs). SWITZERLAND said more active participation from members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and Major Groups should be secured, the MYPOW should tackle difficult and emerging issues, and the NLBI should be short and concise, with a focus on new elements. MEXICO said the NLBI should include benchmarks or indicators to measure implementation, while respecting national sovereignty.

The US highlighted six "C's" for the NLBI: clarity, conciseness, consensus, continuity over time, internal consistency, and coherence. She said the NLBI should provide added value and reflect both national and international commitments. She highlighted good governance as a cross-cutting issue, and urged the development of working modalities of UNFF meetings. She said the MYPOW should reflect a discussion and range of views on commitments in the NLBI, and noted that the US hoped to commit US\$500,000 to the UNFF Trust Fund.

Jan Heino, CPF Chair, highlighted the joint commitment and implementation power of CPF member organizations, but stressed the group's need for adequate resources to realize this potential. MAJOR GROUPS stated that three key areas for the NLBI are governance, benefit sharing, and policy and programme implementation, emphasizing that weakness in implementation has unintentionally marginalized vulnerable groups.

FIJI emphasized international support for SFM implementation in small island developing States, particularly official development assistance and capacity building. The MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE PROTECTION OF FORESTS IN EUROPE called for collaboration between policy bodies at all levels and integration with other sectors such as energy, agriculture and biodiversity.

The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION (FAO) described its activities to support SFM, including: publishing the State of the World's Forests reports; supporting national policy development; and working jointly with the CPF.

NLBI: The Secretariat introduced the revised composite draft text for developing an NLBI (E.CN/18/2007/3), stating that it had been compiled based on country proposals submitted after UNFF6 and revised after the first reading of the draft during the *ad hoc* expert group meeting in December 2006. He noted that 50 percent of the text was taken from previously agreed language, and that country attributions were not included in the composite draft. Patosaari recalled a consensus reached at UNFF6 that the NLBI should strengthen links with regional mechanisms and focus on implementation.

MYPOW: M.S. Kaban, Minister of Forestry, Indonesia, reported on the Country-Led Initiative on the MYPOW, held in Bali, Indonesia in February 2007, noting recommendations on, among others, the MYPOW's flexibility to integrate NLBI implementation and address regional and subregional participation.

The Secretariat introduced the Secretary-General's Report on the MYPOW (E/CN.18/2007/2) and the suggested draft text for the MYPOW, highlighting the following issues for consideration: the close relationship of several issues to the NLBI; logistical and institutional issues with regard to regional aspects; provision of input to ECOSOC during intersessional years; and the necessity of adequate resources for the expanded work programme. Patosaari noted that the MYPOW should reflect urgent issues, including reinforcing the conceptual framework of SFM, and means of implementation.

ENHANCED COOPERATION: The Secretariat introduced its note on enhanced cooperation and policy and programme coordination (E/CN.18/2007/5), noting the Forum may wish to provide further guidance on linkages, and address the relationship between forests and internationally agreed development goals. The Secretariat presented the CPF Framework 2007 (E/CN.18/2007/6), highlighting new joint initiatives of the CPF on, *inter alia*, science and technology and a forest sourcebook on SFM. She highlighted expert meetings on harmonizing definitions, and ongoing activities including funding sources for SFM and the Global Forest Information Services. She also reviewed collaborative activities, including the World Bank background paper on means of implementation, forest landscape restoration and rehabilitation of degraded lands, and improving law enforcement and governance. AUSTRALIA asked the Chair of the CPF to provide ideas on how the CPF can be improved. MEXICO urged the CPF and the UNFF to share technical expertise.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The record rainfall outside the windows of UN Headquarters did little to discourage the overwhelming optimism felt around Conference Room 1 on the first day of what is expected to be two weeks of sticky negotiations. Nevertheless, delegates were evidently aware that they will either have to adopt the non-legally binding instrument (NLBI) at the end of this meeting, or risk closing the window of opportunity for strengthening the international arrangement on forests for a long time to come. "Ça passe ou ça casse," it passes or it falls apart, as one delegate eloquently captured the challenge, may well become the slogan for UNFF7. In response, delegates rushed through the day's agenda at lightning speed in anticipation of Tuesday's working group deliberations. Others noted that if the Forum is successful in adopting an instrument at the end of the two weeks, there will no longer be a principal *raison d'être* for the incipient parallel process of like-minded countries pursuing a legally-binding instrument, thus enhancing support for the NLBI across the board.

Many were also keen to start discussions on the much-awaited World Bank paper on financing sustainable forest management, noting that the only way forward in agreeing on an instrument will be to solidify means of implementation.