

## UNFF12 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 1 MAY 2017

The twelfth session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF12) opened on Monday, 1 May 2017, at UN Headquarters in New York. In the morning, delegates addressed a number of organizational matters, heard opening statements and held a general discussion on the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 (UNSPF).

In the afternoon, delegates resumed their general discussion on the implementation of the UNSPF and began a more in-depth consideration of UN system-wide contributions to implementation. Delegates heard an outline of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests' (CPF) policy document. They also held a panel discussion on the contributions of CPF members, UN partners and stakeholders to implementing the UNSPF.

### ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

On Monday morning, 1 May, UNFF12 Chair Peter Besseau opened the meeting. He explained Vice-Chair Clarissa Souza Della Nina (Brazil) was not able to attend UNFF12, and members agreed that Tomas Krejzák (Czech Republic) will act as Rapporteur.

Delegates adopted the provisional agenda (E/CN.18/2017/1) and Chair Besseau emphasized that implementation of the six Global Forest Goals and 26 associated targets of the UNSPF calls for ambitious, deliberate, UN-wide action. He invited constructive guidance and feedback from participants on the new format and design of the Forum.

### OPENING STATEMENTS

Peter Thomson, UNGA President, emphasized the health of the world's forests is fundamental to humanity's place on this planet. He said without recognition of the importance of sustainably managed forests, the efforts of the international community working towards the 2030 Agenda will ultimately fail.

Marie Chatardova, ECOSOC Vice-President, praised the UNFF for remaining at the forefront of the dialogue on forests, including through its mutually supportive relationship with ECOSOC.

Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, in acknowledging the importance of forests in climate change reduction and livelihood opportunities, noted that the UNSPF provides a roadmap to the implementation of the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, and other international agreements.

UNFF Director Manoel Sobral Filho reiterated that forests are a vital resource for human life, including in their use and exploitation for economies worldwide. The UNSPF, he noted, will provide the right enabling environment to equitably and sustainably share forests, and provide a pathway out of poverty.

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

UNFF Director Sobral introduced this agenda item (E/CN.18/2017/2), highlighting that the thematic and operational priorities of the UNSPF for 2017-2018 have taken into account the SDGs currently being reviewed by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). He added that panel sessions would be held to facilitate technical discussions on forests in relation to these SDGs, and announced that the UNFF Secretariat will be developing a communication and outreach strategy for the UNSPF.

UNFF12 Chair Besseau opened the floor for general discussion.

Many Member States welcomed the adoption of the UNSPF and the 4POW by the UNGA, and provided an overview of national actions contributing to implementation of the UNSPF and the SDGs. Ecuador, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA urged greater commitment to achieving the goals and targets of the UNSPF. He called for additional funding and stated that MOI should encompass technology transfer.

THAILAND urged prioritizing conservation of forest ecosystems, including encouraging local communities' involvement. PERU said there is a need to ensure improved livelihoods of forest-dependent communities through the practice of SFM. ISRAEL urged cooperation to achieve the Global Forest Goals, including through sharing of expertise.

IRAN said the UNSPF is a global framework for action at all levels and urged for more integrated, synergistic implementation of the SDGs. INDONESIA highlighted the importance of: capacity building and technology transfer; reducing reporting burdens; and improving coherence and coordination between forest-related institutions.

CANADA noted the need to "get out of our comfort zones," by talking to other land-use sectors and engaging with the private sector. MALAYSIA underscored the importance of the UNFF's ability to assist in national SFM implementation. ROMANIA highlighted the opportunity the UNSPF provides to improve coordination among countries.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA urged the UNFF to continue enabling financial resources necessary to achieve the goals and targets of the UNSPF and the SDGs. NEW ZEALAND said the UNSPF provides opportunity to galvanize ambitions for achieving SFM. MOROCCO urged the UNFF to take national plans of action into account in the implementation of the UNSPF to ensure that countries are able to meet SDGs and the Global Forest Goals. COLOMBIA highlighted the need for cooperation and access to funding that takes into account the realities of each country.

AUSTRALIA encouraged meaningful reporting, and the inclusion of value-added programmes while avoiding duplication. CHILE noted that the six goals of the UNSPF provide each country with the opportunity to address SFM within their national context,

and requested political and financial commitment at all levels. CHINA encouraged mobilizing funds, recognizing the role of forests in achieving the SDGs, and improving MAR.

VIET NAM called upon the GFFFN to mobilize new funding opportunities and enhance support to developing countries to access forest-related climate financing. The ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) urged commitment to support developing countries in SFM and reported on their actions to combat illegal logging through technology transfer and strengthening law enforcement.

The EU said MAR is crucial to demonstrate progress in implementation of the UNSPF, noting the need to avoid additional reporting burden and duplication.

Nigeria, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, noted their appreciation of: the role and function of GFFFN; and the UNSPF as a useful road map for bringing forests into national accounting, planning and priority-setting. SWITZERLAND observed that the “truly impressive” opening panel is indicative of UNFF’s authoritative voice on forests, while emphasizing the need to increase the visibility of forests UN-wide, saying “one voice is not a choir.”

SENEGAL proposed developing a special programme for fragile forest ecosystems such as mangroves, and expressed hope that, in the future, funds currently used to address trafficking will instead be used to promote forest biodiversity conservation.

NIGER stressed the importance of global financing and capacity building to undertake SFM. SOUTH AFRICA urged the UNFF to consider national contexts and allow countries to determine their own involvement. NEPAL called upon the UNFF to pool resources and enhance capacities for local populations. FIJI noted the important role of forest ecosystems in sustaining small island developing states’ (SIDS), and called for increased financing, in particular to scale-up mangrove conservation.

China, for the MONTREAL PROCESS ON CRITERIA AND INDICATORS FOR THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF TEMPERATE AND BOREAL FORESTS, reported on the 26th meeting of the working group held in Yangji, China in August 2016. He noted that the Yanji Declaration reiterated the Montreal Process’s commitment to, *inter alia*: enhance MAR capacity for forests; actively engage in global initiatives related to forests; and collaborate with other organizations for SFM.

GHANA outlined progress at the national level, including: a new forest and wildlife policy that promotes SFM; a forest sustainable development action plan; a REDD+ strategy; and the launch of a national tree plantation strategy.

UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) highlighted Forest Europe’s contribution to enhancing forest leadership. She stated that ECE and FAO are working closely to provide a better understanding of the state of Europe’s forests, including through the production of the State of Europe’s Forests Report. FARMERS AND SMALL FOREST LANDOWNERS said attention to and inclusion of small forest owners is indispensable for successfully implementing the UNSPF. He noted the importance of fair trade in safeguarding the rights of small-forest holders.

**UN SYSTEM-WIDE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL FOREST GOALS AND TARGETS:** Eva Müller, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), on behalf of Maria Helena Semedo, FAO Deputy Director-General and CPF Chair, presented the CPF policy document, saying that it contains elements for strengthening the CPF, including the need for clear rules of operation, understanding of members’ own capacities and collaboration with other partners. The CPF work plan, she noted, is aligned with the UNSPF and the 4POW. She further stated it consists of: activities contributing to UNFF sessions; and joint initiatives relevant to achieving the Global Forest Goals and targets, SDGs and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

UNFF12 Chair Besseau invited comments on the CPF policy document and work plan. SWITZERLAND congratulated the CPF for being so active, requested access to the policy document and work plan, and suggested updating the CPF website to aid transparency. Müller clarified the documents should both be accessible on the UNFF website. The INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR BAMBOO AND RATTAN (INBAR) noted its aspiration to become a CPF member.

**PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CPF MEMBERS, UN PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNSPF:** This panel was moderated by Hosny El-Lakany, University of British Columbia, Canada. Eva Müller, FAO, said CPF members’ work aims to contribute to the goals of UNSPF as well as the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. She said traditional sectoral approaches are insufficient to achieve the SDGs, and outlined, *inter alia*, the CPF’s joint initiatives that streamline learning and reporting.

Carole Saint-Laurent, IUCN, outlined IUCN’s role in providing technical support, capacity building and optimizing synergies between the Global Forest Goals, and the numerous national efforts globally.

Milena Sosa-Schmidt, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), stated that CITES’ contribution to SDGs has a direct impact on the Global Forest Goals, for example, by reducing biodiversity loss. She urged CPF to consider inviting CITES to join the CPF.

Xia Jun, Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet), highlighted the role of regional organizations in building synergies, avoiding overlapping actions, and focusing on sub-regional needs.

In the ensuing discussion, COLOMBIA urged for increased partnership with the Ramsar Convention, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and other regional bodies. CHINA said a strengthened and open CPF is needed for implementation of the UNSPF. MALAYSIA urged the CPF to review funding guidelines and support developing countries in accessing finance for SFM. PAPUA NEW GUINEA said CPF should provide guidance for simplification of implementation of the UNSPF. The EU noted the need to invite other agencies, not currently members of CPF, to use the goals and targets in their programmes for achieving SFM. IUFRO said the extensive network and pool of scientific expertise of its members can be mobilized for effective implementation of the UNSPF.

### **IN THE CORRIDORS**

UNFF12 convened for its first day, with a “new, improved” format, with a sense of pride pervading among Forum members. This was largely due to the UNSPF being hailed by many as a major milestone that has “lifted the Forum’s profile,” and increased its visibility. Indeed, delegates seemed pleased with the high-level opening panel, an apparent affirmation that the Strategic Plan may well succeed in being the authoritative voice on forests throughout the UN system. This, one seasoned delegate was heard saying, is an achievement that the Forum and its Member States have long been working towards.

Reminiscing on the journey, some delegates expressed relief that the Strategic Plan was adopted by the General Assembly last week, saying they do not expect late night deliberations at UNFF12. One delegate was even heard remarking that he expects the week’s deliberations to be cordial and “easy.” The consensus among many was that the week’s agenda would allow for in-depth, focused discussions on the more technical aspects of SFM, and encourage an exchange of experiences and discussion on forests’ contribution to the SDGs.