

## Thirteenth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests: 7-11 May 2018

The thirteenth session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF13) opens today at UN Headquarters in New York.

### Expectations for this Meeting

Under the Forum's Quadrennial Programme of Work for the period 2017-2020 approved at a UNFF12 Special Session in January 2017, odd-numbered year sessions focus on discussions on implementation, technical advice and exchange of experiences, while even-numbered year sessions such as this one focus on policy dialogue, development and decision-making.

UNFF13's policy dialogue will focus on the thematic and operational priorities, priority actions and resource needs for the period 2017-2018, taking into account the review cycle of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) during the biennium and the theme of the 2018 International Day of Forests, "Forests and Sustainable Cities." The Forum also will provide its contribution to the follow-up, review, and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets under consideration by the 2018 HLPF.

The Forum also will discuss:

- emerging issues and challenges of global significance that are related to and/or have an impact on forests and sustainable forest management;
- UN system organizations' and partners' activities contributing to the achievement of the Global Forest Goals and targets of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 (UNSPF), such as the recent Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) conference, "Working Across Sectors to Halt Deforestation and Increase Forest Area - From Aspiration to Action."
- a CPF proposal on proposed set of global forest indicators;
- the cycle and format for national voluntary reporting at the Forum;
- guidelines for the operation of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) and measures to increase GFFFN effectiveness and efficiency; and
- the Communication and Outreach Strategy for the UNSPF.

### Origins of the Process

The UNFF was established in 2000, following a five-year period of forest policy dialogue within 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 2000/35, established the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF), including the UNFF as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, with the main objective of promoting the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

The UNFF's principal functions are to: facilitate the 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 well as address forest issues and emerging areas of concern in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner; enhance 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.

**Organizational Session:** The organizational session held in February 2001 at UN Headquarters in New York agreed that the UNFF Secretariat would be located in New York and made 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 held in June 2001 in New York adopted decisions on the UNFF Multi-Year Programme of Work, a Plan of Action for the implementation of the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action, and the 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 parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests.

### Key Turning Points

**UNFF5:** UNFF5 (May 2005, New York) agreed, *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.

**UNFF6:** UNFF6 (February 2006, New York) 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 a non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests. UNFF6 also set four global objectives on forests for the IAF to:

- reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through SFM, including through 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.

**UNFF7:** UNFF7 (April 2007, New York) adopted the non-legally binding instrument and a Multi-Year Programme of Work for the period 2007-2015. Delegates agreed that a “voluntary global financial mechanism/portfolio approach/forest financing framework for all types of forests” would be developed and considered, with a view to its adoption at UNFF8.

**UNFF8:** UNFF8 (20 April - 1 May 2009, New York) adopted a resolution on forests in a changing environment, enhanced cooperation and cross-sectoral policy and programme coordination, and regional and sub-regional inputs. Delegates did not agree on a decision on financing for SFM, and decided to forward bracketed negotiating text to the Forum’s next session.

**UNFF9:** UNFF9 (24 January - 4 February 2011, New York) launched the International Year of Forests 2011. The Forum adopted by acclamation a resolution on forests for people, livelihoods and poverty eradication, which addressed, *inter alia*: procedures for assessment of progress; increased regional and sub-regional cooperation; enhanced cooperation, including with Major Groups; and means of implementation for SFM, including an *Ad Hoc* Expert Group process on forest financing.

**UNFF10:** UNFF10 (8-19 April 2013, Istanbul, Turkey) decided that the effectiveness of the IAF would be reviewed in 2015 and established an *Ad Hoc* Expert Group to review the IAF’s performance and effectiveness.

**UNFF11:** UNFF11 (4-15 May 2015, New York) forwarded a resolution to ECOSOC recommending, *inter alia*:

- renaming the non-legally binding instrument the “UN Forest Instrument”;
- strengthening and extending the IAF to 2030;
- deciding that the IAF is composed of the UNFF and its Member States, the Secretariat of the Forum, the CPF, the GFFFN and the UNFF Trust Fund;
- deciding to set clear priorities for the GFFFN in the UNSPF; and
- convening an *Ad Hoc* Expert Group to develop proposals on a replacement for the reference to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the UN Forest Instrument with an appropriate reference to the SDGs and targets, the UNSPF, and the Quadrennial Programme of Work for the period 2017-2020.

UNFF11 also agreed on a new format for the Forum: sessions would take place annually, but based on two-year thematic cycles, with the first year comprising discussions on implementation and technical advice, and the second focusing on policy dialogue, development and decision-making.

ECOSOC approved the UNFF11 recommendations on 22 July 2015 in resolution 2015/33, and the UN General Assembly gave effect to the changes recommended by the Council on 22 December 2015 in resolution 70/199.

**UNFF12:** UNFF12 (1-5 May 2017, New York) was the first session to be held under the new format. UNFF12 adopted an omnibus resolution covering monitoring, assessment and reporting, means of implementation, enhancing cooperation, coordination and engagement on forest-related issues, and contribution to the HLPF. The resolution, *inter alia*:

- requested the Secretariat to revise the format for voluntary national reporting on UNSPF implementation;
- decided to consider the cycle and format for the first voluntary national reporting at UNFF13;
- invited the CPF to present to UNFF13 its proposal on a global set of forest indicators;

- invited the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to make further funds available for SFM and other forest-related initiatives under the GEF-7 replenishment;
- invited CPF to present its work plan to UNFF13 and consider expanding its membership to intergovernmental partners;
- adopted guidelines for country-led initiatives in support of the Forum;
- requested the Secretariat, with the CPF, to prepare for UNFF13 a report on actions to accelerate progress in achieving SDG15 and forest-related targets, and a background study on the contribution of forests to other SDGs; and
- decided that UNFF13 will finalize substantive input to HLPF 2018.

### Intersessional Highlights

**Expert Meeting on Communications:** In September 2017, the UNFF Secretariat held an expert meeting at UN Headquarters in collaboration with the UNECE/FAO Forest Communicators Network and the FAO Global Coordination Group on Forest Communication to gather lessons learned from successful communication and outreach strategies related to forests. The information gathered was used to inform the preparation of the draft communications and outreach strategy for consideration by UNFF13.

**Expert Meeting on Regional and Sub-regional Contribution to the Implementation of the UNSPF:** Held on 20-21 November 2017 in Nairobi, Kenya, the meeting discussed format and periodicity of the regional/sub-regional reports to UNFF, and agreed that it should use as a reference the UNFF national reporting but with more general content. It also agreed on recommendations on the inputs for the HLPF 2018.

**Expert Meeting on Major Groups and Other Relevant Stakeholders’ Contribution to the Implementation of the UNSPF:** Held on 20-21 November 2017 in Nairobi, Kenya, the meeting identified core principles for the Major Groups work plan, and priority areas of work by Major Groups for implementation of the UNSPF and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, and made proposals on the UNFF contribution to the HLPF 2018.

**Expert Meeting on Reporting to the UNFF:** Held on 21-23 November 2017 in Nairobi, Kenya, the meeting agreed on a revised reporting format, cycle and timeline for future national reporting, which would synchronize reporting on the UNSPF with other forest-related reporting cycles. Participants also endorsed the possibility of producing a “flagship report” to be prepared by the UNFF Secretariat, focusing on progress towards the achievement of the Global Forest Goals, as a means to strengthen the ability of the UN to speak with a single voice on major forest issues.

**International Conference “Working Across Sectors to Halt Deforestation and Increase Forest Area - from Aspiration to Action”:** Organized by CPF, this conference held on 20-22 February 2018 in Rome, Italy, explored ways to accelerate progress towards achieving SDG target 15.2 on halting deforestation by 2020, and UNSPF Target 1.1, which calls for reversing the loss of forest cover and increasing forest area by 3% worldwide by 2030. The meeting produced a Co-Chairs’ summary of discussions and a set of key messages and proposals for action to be considered by UNFF13 and the HLPF.

**Expert Meeting on the Contribution of the GFFFN to the Implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests:** Held on 6-8 March 2018 in Chengdu, China, the meeting considered draft guidelines for the operation of the Network, and forwarded them to UNFF13. It also: offered recommendations to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Network; considered the experiences and lessons learned from pilot activities of the Network; and considered information and experiences from similar mechanisms used by other organizations.