

UNFF13 Highlights: Monday, 7 May 2018

The thirteenth session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF13) opened on Monday, 7 May 2018, at UN Headquarters in New York. In the morning, delegates addressed a number of organizational matters, heard opening statements and began discussion on the implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 (UNSPF), including announcement of voluntary national contributions (VNCs) to the UNSPF. In the afternoon, a Ministerial Roundtable was held on forest-based solutions for accelerating achievement of the SDGs.

Organizational Matters

On Monday morning, 7 May, UNFF13 Chair Muhammad Shahrul Ikram Yaakob (Malaysia) opened the meeting. He explained that Vice-Chair Macharia Kamau (Kenya) had resigned from the Bureau, and presented the African Group nomination of Koki Muli Grignon (Kenya) to replace him. Members approved the replacement and agreed Vice-Chair Luciana Melchert Saguas Presas (Brazil) will serve as UNFF13 Rapporteur.

Delegates approved the provisional agenda (E/CN.18/2018/1) with an amendment proposed by SWITZERLAND for a new agenda item to obtain information regarding UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) reform pertaining to UNFF. Delegates also approved the proposed organization of work.

Opening Statements

Chair Yaakob urged UNFF to create momentum toward the goals set in the UNSPF and underscored the importance of UNFF13's input to the 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

Marie Chatardová, President, UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), said she was pleased to see UNFF "taking ownership" of the forest-related SDGs and targets and encouraged the Forum to present evidence-based, proactive and visionary input to the 2018 HLPF.

Liu Zhenmin, UN Under Secretary General, Economic and Social Affairs, welcomed the achievements of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) in supporting sustainable forest management (SFM). He said UNFF13 is an ideal opportunity to enhance coherence between the UNSPF and the SDGs, and make SFM an essential building block for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNFF Director Manoel Sobral Filho highlighted expectations of UNFF13, including discussions on promoting awareness of the UNSPF; tracking progress through monitoring, assessment and reporting; and mobilizing financing for SFM at national level. He emphasized that VNCs are the backbone to achieving SFM.

Implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030

The Secretariat introduced its Note on implementation of the UNSPF (E/CN.18/2018/2) and the Secretary General's report (E/CN.18/2018/6) on actions taken by UNFF members, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and other stakeholders on implementation of ECOSOC Resolution 2015/33.

Announcement of VNCs: Numerous countries announced VNCs including, *inter alia*:

- A national forest inventory, increased forest cover and protected areas, and improved timber tracking (UKRAINE);
- A national forest policy and management plan (JAMAICA);
- A strategic forest management plan to meet a zero deforestation target by 2030 (ECUADOR);
- Planting one billion trees by 2027 (NEW ZEALAND);
- Protecting 98% of forest area and increasing reforestation to one million trees per year (MOROCCO);
- Over US\$10 million over 10 years for restoration of forests (MALAYSIA);
- Improving 100,000 hectares of degraded forest (GHANA);
- A "green belt" initiative to transform areas of conflict into landmarks for peace (COLOMBIA);
- Valuing and financing non-marketed forest ecosystem services (SLOVAKIA);
- Improving timber production while conserving biodiversity and restoring four million hectares of forest by 2030 (MADAGASCAR);
- Increasing conservation areas and forest management plan coverage and allocating US\$13 million for enhancing social and economic benefits of forests (INDONESIA);
- Enhancing watershed management, community forest management and protected areas, and creating jobs in SFM and non-wood forest products (NEPAL);
- Building a national information network on forest and wildlife, which includes the private sector, civil society, and indigenous communities (PERU);
- Designing incentives for the private sector to promote conservation, reforestation and restoration of forests (COSTA RICA);
- Rehabilitating 120,000 hectares of forest in 2018 and 100,000 hectares in 2019 (THE PHILIPPINES);
- Investing in building a national infrastructure to support the achievement of the Global Forest Goals (PARAGUAY);
- A commitment to rehabilitate 30 million forest hectares (INDIA);
- A national plan to increase forest area to 23 million hectares by 2023 (TURKEY); and
- Containing deforestation and forest degradation by 2030 by supporting small producers to implement sustainable production practices (MEXICO).

Policy Dialogue on the Thematic and Operational Priorities, Priority Actions and Resource Needs for the Period 2017-2018: EGYPT, for the Group of 77 and CHINA (G-77/China),

underscored the need for UNFF Communication and Outreach Strategy to highlight best practices and success stories in the UNSPF implementation and inspire action in areas deemed to need further support; strengthening the GFFFN; fostering and enhancing other financing sources and mechanisms for forests; and strengthening the UNFF's Trust Fund.

The EU called for strengthening coordination, cooperation and synergies among forest-related instruments and initiatives, including the CPF. He underscored the need for good governance at all levels, including law enforcement and accountable institutions, as well as for including all stakeholders in implementation.

Noting the deforestation caused by the need for food, NIGERIA, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for placing more emphasis on nutrition and food security, as well as for integrating the UNSPF with other international agreements on desertification, water, oceans and climate. He underscored the need for closing the gap in technological capabilities, strengthening forest governance structures at all levels, and including women and youth in SFM.

Ministerial Roundtable on Forest-based Solutions for Accelerating Achievement of the SDGs: In the afternoon, UNFF13 Chair Yaakob chaired the first Ministerial Roundtable panel sharing visions and experiences regarding how SFM will accelerate the achievement of SDGs.

In a keynote, Naoko Ishii, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility, said UNFF13 provides an opportune time to take stock of progress on forests' contribution to sustainable development. She noted current actions on forest defragmentation, saying there is a need for joint work and financing to connect food, land use and reforestation programs.

Nicolau dos Santos, Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Livestock, Guinea-Bissau, said his country's 2015 Forest Policy aims at ensuring long-term SFM and sustainable rural development in order to achieve forest-related SDGs.

Peng Youdong, State Forestry and Grassland Administration, China, reported on actions to achieve the UNSPF including improvement of forest tenure reforms and formulation of national SFM programs.

Maria Patek, Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism, Austria, highlighted the enhanced role of the forest sector in the Ministry. She said inclusion of tourism in the Ministry has fostered cross-sectoral cohesion in the sustainable development agenda.

In the ensuing discussion, BULGARIA, speaking for the EU, called for urgency in up-scaling activities to halt forest degradation and for progress in tackling competition between forest protection and agricultural development.

CONGO reported its commitment to: legal sourcing of timber; reforestation for supplying fuelwood; REDD+ activities; and reforestation and conservation of forest-related ecosystems.

SLOVAKIA called for payments for non-marketed ecosystem services. LESOTHO called for a knowledge hub for sharing SFM-related experiences and challenges and a simple template for members to follow.

ROMANIA noted its strategic objectives, including pursuing SFM, halting deforestation and degradation, combatting illegal logging and related trade, contributing to the green economy and conserving biodiversity.

PAKISTAN noted commitments to, *inter alia*: address forests in communal lands and urban areas; regenerate forests; reduce fragmentation; involve local communities in forest management; and enhance forests as carbon sinks.

KENYA, noting its current 7.2% forest cover, reported reforms to reduce pressure on forests and increase cover to 10% through capacity building, a temporary moratorium on logging, and national tree planting.

BOLIVIA stated that its comprehensive vision for forests focuses on the rights of local communities, its 30 indigenous groups, Mother Earth, and all people, under a democratic approach to land distribution.

Beth MacNeill, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, moderated the second Ministerial Roundtable, on challenges and issues surrounding forests' contributions to the SDGs.

John Peter Amewu, Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, Ghana, identified challenges including, *inter alia*: overdependence on forest goods; lack of alternative livelihood options; limited private sector participation; climate change; increasing population; and lack of access to technologies, financial resources and capacity.

Patrick Mlynář, Ministry of Agriculture, Czech Republic, called for addressing forest dieback through water management, rural development, and nature conservation. He asked that the HLPF recognize forests' multifunctional roles.

Ezechiel Joseph, Minister, Agriculture, Fisheries, Physical Planning, Natural Resources and Co-operatives, Saint Lucia, noted: Saint Lucia's hurricane belt location, with increasing frequency/severity of storms, landslides, floods, droughts and extreme temperatures; competition for land; and fragility and connectivity challenges in its ecosystems. He called for risk assessment to measure impacts of disasters on islands and for international awareness-building, expressing gratitude for GFFFN assistance.

In the ensuing discussion, MADAGASCAR called for designing sustainable financing instruments for SFM. THAILAND announced national efforts to increase forest area from 32% to 40% by 2068. VENEZUELA noted the recent inauguration of a park that protects the largest forest in the world.

GERMANY called for strengthening synergies among forest-related instruments and initiatives, especially within the CPF. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA announced the launch of ASEAN-ROK Forest Cooperation (AFoCo), a new ASEAN mechanism that will contribute to enhancing cooperation on forests.

CAMEROON said timber and wood markets need to be sustainable in order to enable afforestation. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION stressed the importance of forests to water resources and thus SDG6. FINLAND underscored the need to create mechanisms for multi-stakeholder participation in UNSPF implementation, especially for women and youth.

TANZANIA announced SFM plans for 90 national forests. PAPUA NEW GUINEA announced his government's first-ever forest inventory, which will enable evidence-based forest planning. NEPAL called for a mechanism for assessing forests' contributions to the SDGs.

UZBEKISTAN announced its efforts to reforest thousands of hectares. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN presented its global outreach campaign on forests' contributions to clean energy.

TURKEY emphasized the need to mainstream gender in SFM programs and plans. POLAND highlighted the importance of the UNSPF to implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change.

MALAYSIA called for environmentally sound technologies for developing countries for implementing the UNSPF. VIET NAM called on the GFFFN to mobilize sustainable and predictable financing resources to support developing countries in implementing the UNSPF. ARGENTINA underscored the need for multi-stakeholder participation in UNSPF implementation. The MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH noted the inaccessibility of the UNSPF to civil society and indigenous peoples.

Closing the meeting, Chair Yaakob explained that a summary of the key ideas presented during the Minister Roundtable will be included in the Chair's summary, and serve as input to the HLPF.

In the Corridors

UNFF13 opened to what some expected to be a low-key meeting, armed with what one participant characterized as "a pretty straightforward agenda." As the first policy dialogue on the UNSPF began, numerous participants reflected on UNFF milestones. Many expressed pride that UNFF is not only on track to achieve progress on actions requested under ECOSOC Resolution 2015/33 but has also "achieved relevance thanks to the UNSPF."

However, before the meeting started many delegates privately expressed concerns about current UN DESA reforms, and their lack of transparency. One seasoned delegate worried that these reforms might "chop UNFF's legs off" just at the moment it was gaining momentum. Another delegate said "We've come too far to look back," and said the reforms should not be undertaken without consulting UNFF members, adding, "It's a matter of accountability." Numerous delegates questioned the motives behind the rumored reforms and supported a proposal that UNFF13 address this issue so as to dispel fears. It was therefore no surprise that the proposal, inserting a new item into the UNFF13 agenda, received unanimous agreement.