

## Summary of the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

The fifteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF15) was scheduled to convene from 4-8 May 2020 at UN Headquarters in New York. However, UNFF15 quickly became yet another casualty of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of meeting in person, the UNFF15 Bureau agreed that the Forum would hold virtual informal consultations with the aim of adopting an omnibus resolution.

As outlined in the UNFF Quadrennial Programme of Work (4POW) for the period 2017-2020, UNFF15 as an “even-year” session should have focused on policy dialogue, development, and decision-making. UNFF15 was expected to adopt a resolution on several important issues including the 4POW for 2021-2024, and hold a high-level segment to adopt a ministerial declaration.

Instead, the Bureau prepared the UNFF15 draft resolution through a transparent and consultative process involving submission of inputs by members and stakeholders, and circulation of three revisions by email. To reach consensus and tackle pending issues, UNFF Member States held virtual informal consultations on 4 and 19 June 2020.

On 25 June 2020, UNFF15 Chair Boris Greguška (Slovakia) put the resulting decisions under the silence procedure until 4:00 pm New York time, on 30 June 2020. The silence procedure provides UN Member States with at least 72 hours to raise objections on a draft resolution or decision, and allows for explanations of position. The final decisions included the provisional agenda for UNFF16, the dates and venue of UNFF16, the UNFF15 draft report; and a decision to appoint Khalid Cherki (Morocco) to serve as Rapporteur for UNFF15.

The UNFF15 omnibus resolution, which covers six out of the 13 UNFF15 agenda items:

- adopts the programme of work for UNFF16 in 2021, and requests the Forum to decide on the programme of work for 2022-2024;
- requests the Secretariat to continue to develop the Forum’s concise flagship publication on progress towards achieving the Global Forest Goals and targets;
- requests the Secretariat to propose refinements to the format for reporting on voluntary national contributions based on lessons learned;

- requests the Secretariat to continue work on designing the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network clearing house, and report progress at UNFF17;
- welcomes the adoption of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests strategic vision towards 2030;
- invites the Forum to provide concise targeted inputs to annual sessions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF);
- welcomes the agreement of the General Assembly to retain the sub-programme on sustainable forest management of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and maintain the classification of the post of Director of UNFF; and
- requests the UN Secretary-General to expedite the recruitment and appointment process for the post of UNFF Director.

## A Brief History of UNFF

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:

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- 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.

The UNFF organizational session (February 2001, New York) agreed that the UNFF Secretariat would be located in New York and made progress towards the establishment of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), a partnership of 14 major forest-related international organizations, institutions, and convention secretariats. The first UNFF session was held in June 2001 in New York and adopted a 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.

### Key Turning Points

**UNFF5:** UNFF5 (May 2005, New York) agreed, *ad referendum*, to four global forest 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 on 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 finalized the 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 (April 2009, New York) adopted a resolution on forests in a changing environment, enhanced cooperation and cross-sectoral policy and programme coordination, and regional and subregional 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 (January-February 2011, New York) launched the International Year of Forests 2011. The Forum adopted a resolution on forests for people, livelihoods, and poverty eradication, which addressed, *inter alia*: procedures for assessment of progress; increased regional and subregional 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 (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 (May 2015, New York) forwarded a resolution to ECOSOC recommending, *inter alia*:

- to rename the non-legally binding instrument the "UN Forest Instrument";
- to strengthen and extend the IAF to 2030;
- to decide that the IAF is composed of the UNFF and its Member States, the Secretariat of the Forum, the CPF, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN), and the UNFF Trust Fund;
- to set clear priorities for the GFFFN in the UN Strategic Plan on Forests 2017-2030 (UNSPF); and
- to convene 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 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets, the UNSPF, and the Quadrennial Programme of Work (4POW) 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 (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*:

- requests the Secretariat to revise the format for voluntary national reporting on UNSPF implementation;
- invites the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to make further funds available for SFM and other forest-related initiatives under the GEF-7 replenishment;

- adopts guidelines for country-led initiatives in support of the Forum; and
- requests the Secretariat, with the CPF, to prepare a report on actions to accelerate progress in achieving SDG 15 (life on land) and forest-related targets, and a background study on the contribution of forests to other SDGs.

**UNFF13:** UNFF13 (May 2018, New York) forwarded a resolution to ECOSOC which, *inter alia*:

- adopts a communications and outreach strategy;
- decides UNFF will consider the results of the first round of voluntary national reporting at UNFF15; and
- requests the UNFF Secretariat to initiate development of the GFFFN's online clearinghouse mechanism.

**UNFF14:** UNFF14 (May 2019, New York) forwarded a Chair's summary containing, *inter alia*:

- a summary of technical discussions, for transmission to UNFF15;
- UNFF14 inputs to the 2019 meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF);
- information on UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) reforms pertaining to the Forum; and
- an indicative list of intersessional activities suggested during UNFF14 to facilitate policy deliberations at UNFF15.

### UNFF15 Report

UNFF15 was scheduled to convene from 4-8 May 2020 at UN Headquarters in New York. However, due to the closure of UN Headquarters in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNFF15 Bureau had to determine how best to proceed. The UNFF15 Bureau held extraordinary virtual meetings on 16 and 23 March 2020, and following its discussions, decided that:

- UNFF15 would be scaled down to a half-day session to adopt the session's resolution;
- The draft resolution would be considered and agreed, following the silence procedure, which provides UN Member States with at least 72 hours to raise objections on a draft resolution or decision, and allows for explanations of position;
- To postpone the high level segment, and adoption of the ministerial declaration to UNFF16 in 2021; and
- UNFF members should participate in and contribute to Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, in order to draw important forest-related elements for the UNFF16 Ministerial Declaration and the Quadrennial Programme of Work (4POW) for 2021-2024.

Thus, in accordance with ECOSOC resolution E/2020/L.8, the Forum took place through virtual informal consultations on the draft UNFF15 resolution, and an informal agreement was reached during virtual consultations held on 19 June 2020. The UNFF15 omnibus resolution was under the silence procedure pursuant to ECOSOC decision 2020/206 until 30 June 2020, when it was then adopted by Member States.

UNFF15's virtual informal consultations tackled six out of 13 of the items on the provisional agenda (E/CN.18/2020/1) adopted at UNFF14, namely: implementation of the UNSPF; monitoring, assessment, and reporting (MAR); means of implementation; emerging issues and challenges; the 4POW for the period 2021-

2024; and information on the UN DESA reform pertaining to the Forum.

According to UNFF resolution 12/2 of 5 May 2017 calling for electing officers for two-year terms, beginning with UNFF14, the UNFF15 Bureau consists of the members elected in May 2018: Boris Greguška (Slovakia) as Chair; Javad Momeni (Iran), Khalid Cherki (Morocco), Rob Busink (Netherlands), and Kitty Sweeb (Suriname) as Vice Chairs. Cherki was appointed to serve concurrently as UNFF15 rapporteur.

In preparation for the virtual meeting, the Bureau prepared the UNFF draft resolution informed by intersessional work of the Forum, including the following expert group meetings:

- a Major Group Initiative meeting in support of UNFF15, held on 3-5 March 2020 in Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme, "Cross-Sectoral Collaboration for Inclusive Forest Landscapes";
- the Expert Group Meeting on the GFFFN Clearing House (CH), held on 12-13 November 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland, to provide the development and operationalization of phase I of the CH;
- the Expert Group Meeting on the UNFF 4POW for the period 2021-2024, held on 14-15 November 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland, to review and discuss the results of the survey on the 4POW 2021-2024, and elaborate possible elements for consideration by UNFF15;
- a capacity-building workshop on reporting on progress made towards the achievement of the Global Forest Goals and targets of the UNSPF, held in Bangkok, Thailand, on 28-30 October 2019; and
- an Expert Workshop in support of the CPF Joint Initiative on streamlining forest related reporting: Strengthening the Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the UNSPF, held in Rome, Italy, on 22-24 October 2019.

The drafting of the resolution also involved a transparent and consultative process through which Forum members, CPF members, Major Groups, and other stakeholders could provide inputs through three versions circulated as follows:

- zero draft circulated on 26 March 2020;
- first revised draft circulated on 20 April 2020; and
- second revised draft circulated on 12 May 2020.

In order to resolve contentious and pending issues, UNFF Member States held virtual consultations on 4 and 19 June 2020. The final draft resolution was then circulated and put to a silence procedure until 4:00 pm New York time on 30 June 2020. The silence procedure was respected, and with no objection or additional issues, the UNFF15 omnibus resolution and accompanying decisions were adopted.

Following the adoption of the omnibus resolution, Chair Greguška commented that the successful UNFF15 outcome was the result of a three-month long intensive consultative process, which included three rounds of written inputs and numerous virtual consultations. By working together, we were able to create an inclusive, transparent, and productive consultation process, which led to a meaningful and credible outcome. He added that the UNFF15 omnibus resolution includes agreement on key substantive and operational issues and effectively ensures continuity in the work of the Forum, its members, and the Secretariat until

the next UNFF session in April 2021. The successful adoption of the UNFF15 omnibus resolution, he said, demonstrates the effectiveness, importance, and relevance of the work of the Forum and its Secretariat, and the solid commitment of Member States in this regard.

He concluded by emphasizing that, in many ways, forests build our resilience like an immune system that protects us from threats—against catastrophes, climate change, poverty, hunger, diseases, and even violent conflicts. This is why, now more than ever, forests and sustainable forest management should be at the heart of the post COVID-19 recovery effort and act as a safety net for the most vulnerable.

### **Omnibus Resolution**

The omnibus resolution (E/CN.18/2020/L.4) contains seven sections and three annexes. The sections address:

- the 4POW for the period 2021-2024;
- voluntary national contributions;
- monitoring, assessment, and reporting;
- means of implementation;
- engagement and contribution of partners;
- the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and major conferences; and
- information on reforms of the UN DESA

The annexes include: the programme of work for UNFF16; the proposed draft programme of work for UNFF17, 18 and 19; and a simple format for UNFF member communication to the Secretariat on voluntary national contributions.

On the **4POW for the period 2021-2024**, UNFF15, *inter alia*:

- adopts the programme of work for UNFF16 in 2021, and requests the Forum to decide on the programme of work for 2022-2024;
- invites the UNFF Bureau to decide on thematic priorities for the 2021-2022 biennium; and
- requests the Secretariat to organize a high-level round table during UNFF16 to discuss major forest-related developments.

On **voluntary national contributions (VNCs)**, UNFF15 welcomes the announcements made to date by UNFF members on their VNCs, and invites members that have not done so to announce their contributions at UNFF16 using the simple format for communicating VNCs provided in Annex III to the resolution.

On **monitoring, assessment, and reporting**, UNFF15, *inter alia*:

- welcomes national reports submitted by 51 UNFF members on progress towards implementing the UNSPF, the Forest Instrument, and VNCs;
- requests the Secretariat to continue to develop the Forum's concise flagship publication on progress towards achieving the Global Forest Goals and targets;
- also requests the Secretariat to propose refinements to the format for VNC reporting based on lessons learned;
- invites the Forum to synchronize future voluntary national reporting with the five-year global forest resources assessment process; and
- invites the CPF to advance its work on the global core set of forest-related indicators, and report progress at UNFF16.

On **means of implementation**, UNFF15, *inter alia*:

- welcomes assistance provided through GFFFN in supporting countries' mobilization of financial resources for SFM, and support to the Network through voluntary contributions to the UNFF Trust Fund;
- requests the Secretariat to continue work on designing the GFFFN clearing house, and to report progress at UNFF17;
- invites the CPF to strengthen its joint initiative on forest finance facilitation to support the clearing house;
- requests the Secretariat to provide regular updates, and a progress report to UNFF17 regarding the proposed office of the GFFFN in Beijing; and
- also requests the Secretariat to compile an initial assessment for UNFF16 of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SFM, the forest sector, forest-dependent people, indigenous peoples and local communities, forest financing, and international cooperation.

On **engagement and contribution of partners**, UNFF15, *inter alia*:

- welcomes the adoption of the CPF strategic vision towards 2030;
- invites the CPF to develop its workplan for 2021-2024 in line with the 4POW;
- emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral involvement in the activities of the Forum;
- takes note of the workshop on "cross-sectoral collaboration for inclusive forest landscapes," held in Nairobi, on 3-5 March 2020 in support of UNFF15; and
- emphasizes the importance of involving regional and subregional organizations, and processes to share lessons learned and best practices

On the **HLPF and major conferences**, UNFF15 stresses the significance of the UNSPF as a global framework for forest-related actions to facilitate achieving the SDGs, and invites the Forum to provide concise targeted inputs to annual sessions of the HLPF.

On **information on the UN DESA reform pertaining to the Forum**, UNFF15, *inter alia*:

- welcomes the outcome of the consideration of the General Assembly to retain the sub-programme on sustainable forest management in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs programme, and maintain the D-2 classification of the post of UNFF Director; and
- requests the UN Secretary-General to expedite the recruitment and appointment process for the post of the UNFF Director.

### **Date, Venue and Provisional Agenda for UNFF16**

The decisions on the provisional agenda, and on the dates and venue for UNFF16 are contained in documents E/CN.18/2020/L.1 and L.2, respectively.

The provisional agenda of UNFF16 includes:

- Implementation of the UNSPF;
- Monitoring, assessment, and reporting;
- Means of Implementation;
- UNFF Trust Fund; and
- Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector, as an emerging issue.

The Forum decided that UNFF16 will be held at UN Headquarters in New York from 26-30 April 2021.

## A Brief Analysis of UNFF15

The year 2020, envisioned as a super year for nature and people, did not live up to expectations for nature or people. On the contrary, 2020 has experienced a series of disastrous forest fires in the Canadian Arctic, Siberia, California, the Amazon, and Australia with massive impacts on endemic flora and fauna, and forest cover. In addition, 2020 has seen a re-emergence of the Ebola crisis in Central Africa and a number of other humanitarian crises due to natural disasters and conflicts. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has taken center stage causing a global human crisis characterized by high mortality, loss of livelihoods, and a rapid disintegration of social interactions as borders have been closed both internationally and nationally, and people have retreated into quarantine and social distancing to contain its spread. It is with this backdrop that a face-to-face meeting of the fifteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF15), originally scheduled for 4-8 May 2020, had no choice but to be cancelled. In its place, the UNFF15 Bureau decided to hold virtual consultations to adopt a resolution on important issues to ensure continued work of the Forum, particularly the Quadrennial Programme of Work for 2021-2024.

This brief analysis looks at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Forum, the links between pandemics and forest degradation, and opportunities granted to the Forum to influence policies that ensure recognition of the contribution of forests—and thus the role of the UNFF—in ensuring a post-COVID-19 resilient world.

### *Human Crisis from Ailing Nature*

*“COVID-19 is like a forest fire. It is not slowing down, where there is wood to burn the fire will continue.” – Michael Osterholm, Epidemiologist, University of Minnesota.*

The COVID-19 crisis that has been responsible for massive loss of human lives, livelihoods, and disruption of social interaction has in 2020 united humankind in a battle for survival and exposed the level of vulnerability of societies, both rich and poor and everyone in between. The closure of borders, quarantines, social distancing, and other measures were put in place to curb the spread of the virus while the world awaits a vaccine and considers how best to combat the virus and “build back better.”

This crisis has raised the profile of nature-induced pandemics due to its global and non-discriminatory nature. Whereas Ebola has created human-health concerns over the past decade, its localization in pockets of central and western Africa did not incite global action. However, both crises share a common link: ailing nature.

Theories of degraded forests as sources of such pandemics have been discussed in halls of science for years, but COVID-19 has provided epidemiologists and biodiversity experts a spotlight. Many have shown that empty forests, depleted of natural biodiversity and devoid of prey species, particularly large mammals, are vulnerable to alteration of the pathogen-host species balance. This, it has been said, causes cross-species transmission, including transfers to humans. In fact, some have concluded that nature is sending humans a message through the COVID-19 crisis: the tipping point has been reached and nature is ailing due to unsustainable resource extraction and destruction.

### *The Need for Forest Stewardship*

*“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.” – Socrates*

The current impasse between nature and people, many have said, is neither from a lack of evidence of unsustainable human interaction with nature nor from a lack of options for sustainable living. The main culprit is the lack of willingness to act for nature. The international community has long sought world leaders or influential people to be the voices for nature. These ambassadors or stewards for nature have helped to raise awareness, but unfortunately have not succeeded in sustaining adequate commitment for societal change.

Political leadership is also important in order to create necessary policies, enabling conditions for lifestyle changes, and a platform for leading by example. Leadership comes with great responsibility, which combines political goodwill with a plan to achieve results. Such leadership within the UN is also key to ensuring that the forest agenda is not downgraded.

The International Day of Forests (IDF), which is celebrated worldwide on 21 March, also fell victim of the COVID-19 pandemic this year. The theme for 2020’s celebration, “Forests and Biodiversity,” highlights the connections between forests and the rich biodiversity they support. This theme, many agreed, was a major catalyst in elevating the role of forests for biodiversity, and consequently the links between ecosystem health and human wellbeing. UN Secretary-General António Guterres in his 2020 IDF speech highlighted the alarming rate of species extinction and decline of ecosystems, noting the need to act quickly to reverse this. He added that safeguarding forests is part of the solution.

Such signals are a relief for many due to the uncertainties posed to the forest agenda in previous years due to ongoing reforms of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). These doubts about whether forests are getting the recognition they deserve within the UN arose since UNFF has been without a Director for over two years and there were fears the position might be demoted. Thus, the decision by the UN General Assembly to retain the D-2 classification of the UNFF Director position was welcomed by UNFF15, and viewed as a signal of recognition of the importance of the Forum’s work. The onus is now on the Forum to prove its worth and for Member States to demonstrate their commitment to implementing the UNSPF.

Another challenge to the forest agenda and UNFF was the virtual nature of UNFF15. While on one hand some view the virtual adoption of the UNFF15 resolution a great achievement, many have cited constraints and risks. Some countries were not able to participate virtually due to technological constraints, even as discussions on technology transfer for developing countries remain unresolved. The UNFF15 omnibus resolution, as some noted, also excluded a broader representation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While NGOs were involved in providing written input, they were excluded from the informal session that was open only to Member States. While holding virtual meetings may be more environmentally sound, they are less representative due to challenges with simultaneous interpretation, the inability to effectively ascertain legitimacy of representation, and audio/video quality compromised by internet connectivity.

### Green Recovery from COVID-19

*“Forests at the heart of a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.”* – UN DESA Policy Brief #80, June 2020

Many see forests at the heart of a green recovery from COVID-19. Forests have also been referred to by some as the lungs of the earth, due to their function in carbon sequestration and air purification. In addition, forests are indeed recognized as a crosscutting issue in several multilateral environmental agreements due to the ecosystem services that support climate regulation, biodiversity, clean water, food and health, and are therefore lauded for their ability to enable achievement of several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In its recommendations to the 2020 session of the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF), UNFF15 emphasized that “ecosystem services and functions inherent to forests offer solutions to the transformation required to achieve the SDGs; and forests interact with wide-ranging sectors and issues, including agriculture, water, energy, tourism, and health, among others.”

These characteristics undoubtedly provide forests, and therefore the UNFF, a platform for greater engagement in global COVID-19 recovery strategies. But the path to recovery requires more than just recognition of the role of forests. It requires a strengthened and adequately financed and politically supported UNFF.

In its recent communications on the pandemic, the UNFF reports that the path for recovery has already been charted clearly in the UNSPF and the SDGs, and has recommended: the establishment of post-COVID-19 recovery programmes to improve the livelihoods and build the resilience of forest-dependent people; increased investment in forestry-related jobs as part of COVID-19 economic recovery stimulus packages; and strengthening national forest authorities to enhance forest law enforcement. Such guidance, although important, still requires measurable actions and indicators. This adds urgency for the completion of the ongoing UNFF work to develop a core set of forest indicators to be used in national reporting.

### Re-emerging into a COVID-present World

*“I will disappear into the forest and be rejuvenated by the beauty of the mountains.”* – Wangari Maathai, late Kenyan environmentalist and Nobel Peace Prize winner

Many people are trying to envision what a post-COVID world will look like. As people begin to come out of quarantine, lockdowns are lifted, and international borders re-open, leaders around the world are contemplating the new normal. Although measures to curb the spread and severity of COVID-19 are seen by many as a necessary political decision while medical experts and pharmaceutical companies seek a cure and vaccine, it has become clear that this will not be the last pandemic to impact humankind.

At the same time, many recognize that deliberate action must be taken to sustain a healthy planet for nature and people, and to prevent the rise of the next zoonotic virus. Many countries are putting in place mitigation measures, which are now more and more informed by environmental experts. UNFF has long advocated for a resilient world, where nature protection is of utmost importance.

Many questions remain on the future of the Forum in this new world. Will UNFF members rise to the new challenges, and back the

Forum’s ambition? Will the recruitment of a new Forum Director be prioritized and expedited? Will countries act on national policies and support sustainable forest management and implementation of the UNSPF? As intersessional work in preparation for UNFF16 begins, many hope that the Forum is up to the task ahead, and can ensure that the forest agenda remains central to nature-based solutions for COVID-19 recovery. The opportunity, as some would say, has been served to the Forum on a silver platter.

### Upcoming Meetings

**HLPF 2020:** The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is addressing the theme, “Accelerated Action and Transformative Pathways: Realizing the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development.” The meeting includes several thematic discussions on the building back better after the pandemic. **dates:** 7-16 July 2019 **location:** virtual **email:** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/contact/> **www:** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020>

**ITTC-56:** The 56th session of the International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC-56) and sessions of the associated committees are expected to take place to discuss wide-ranging issues of interest to members, including those related to the legal trade of tropical timber and the sustainable management of tropical forests. **dates:** 9-14 November 2020 **location:** Yokohama, Japan **email:** [itto@itto.int](mailto:itto@itto.int) **www:** <https://www.itto.int/>

**59th Meeting of the GEF Council:** The Global Environment Facility Council, which meets twice annually, develops, adopts, and evaluates the operational policies and programs for GEF-financed activities. It also reviews and approves the work program (projects submitted for approval), making decisions by consensus. **dates:** 8-10 December 2020 **location:** Washington D.C., US **contact:** GEF Secretariat **email:** [Secretariat@thegef.org](mailto:Secretariat@thegef.org) **www:** <https://www.thegef.org>

**UNFF16:** The 16th session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF16) will address implementation of the UNSPF, monitoring, assessment, and reporting; means of implementation; the UNFF Trust Fund; and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on forests and the forest sector. **dates:** 26-30 April 2021 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **contact:** UNFF Secretariat **email:** [unff@un.org](mailto:unff@un.org) **www:** <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/>

For additional meetings, see <http://sdg.iisd.org>

### Glossary

4POW	Quadrennial Programme of Work
CPF	Collaborative Partnership on Forests
ECOSOC	UN Economic and Social Council
GFFFN	Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network
HLPF	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IAF	International Arrangement on Forests
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFM	Sustainable forest management
UN DESA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNFF	UN Forum on Forests
UNSPF	UN Strategic Plan on Forests 2017-2030
VNCs	Voluntary national contributions