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UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS (UNFF) ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION AND INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS ON THE MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMME OF WORK 12-16 FEBRUARY 2001

The organizational session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-0) will take place today at UN Headquarters in New York. Items on the agenda for the one-day meeting include the election of the UNFF Bureau, organizational matters, consideration of all options and proposals for the location of the UNFF Secretariat, and progress towards the establishment of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF). The organizational session will be followed by four days of informal consultations, from 13-16 February, on the UNFF's multi-year programme of work (MYPOW).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNFF

The possibility of developing international forest policy and a mechanism to coordinate such policy was discussed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, but delegates eventually agreed only to the "Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests," also known as the "Forest Principles," and Chapter 11 of Agenda 21 "Combating Deforestation."

INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON FORESTS: In 1995, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), at its third session, established the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) to continue the intergovernmental forest policy dialogue. During its two-year mandate, the IPF developed some 150 negotiated proposals for action on issues relating to sustainable forest management (SFM). However, delegates could not agree on a few major issues, including financial assistance and trade-related matters, or whether to begin negotiations on a global forest convention. The fifth session of the CSD, in April 1997, and the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS), in June 1997, endorsed the IPF's outcome and recommended a continuation of the intergovernmental policy dialogue on forests. Subsequently, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) to continue this work under the auspices of the CSD.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON FORESTS: The IFF met four times between October 1997 and February 2000, with its deliberations resulting in approximately 120 proposals for action on a range of topics, including: promoting and facilitating the implementation of the IPF proposals for action; monitoring implementation of the IPF proposals for action; financial resources; trade and environment; transfer of environmentally sound technologies; issues needing further clarification; and forest-related work of international and regional organizations and under existing instruments. At its fourth and final session in February 2000, the IFF concluded its deliberations and issued its final report, which included a recommendation for an international arrangement on forests. Delegates agreed to recommend the establishment of the UNFF and invite the relevant international organizations, institutions, and instruments and UN organizations to participate in a Collaborative Partnership on Forests. Delegates at CSD-8 in April 2000 endorsed the IFF's conclusions and proposals for action and invited the President of ECOSOC to initiate informal consultations on options for placing the UNFF within the intergovernmental machinery of the UN system.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNFF: On 18 October 2000, ECOSOC adopted resolution E/2000/L.32*, outlining an international arrangement on forests and establishing the UNFF as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC.

The ECOSOC resolution states that the main objective of the international arrangement on forests is to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end. Its purpose is: to promote the implementation of internationally agreed actions on forests at the national, regional and global levels; and to provide a coherent, transparent and participatory global framework for policy implementation, coordination and development; and to carry out principal functions, based on the Rio Declaration, the Forest Principles, Chapter 11 of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the IPF and the IFF, in a manner consistent with and complementary to existing international legally binding instruments relevant to forests.

The resolution sets out six principal functions for the international arrangement on forests to meet its objective:

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(a) Facilitate and promote the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action as well as other actions that may be agreed upon, including through national forest programmes (NFPs) and other integrated programmes relevant to forests; catalyze, mobilize and generate financial resources; and mobilize and channel technical and scientific resources, including by taking steps toward the broadening and development of mechanisms and/or further initiatives to enhance international cooperation;

(b) Provide a forum for continued policy development and dialogue among governments, which would involve international organizations and other interested parties, including major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, to foster a common understanding of SFM and to address forest issues and emerging areas of priority concern in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner;

(c) Enhance cooperation as well as policy and programme coordination on forest-related issues among relevant international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments, as well as contribute to synergies among them, including coordination among donors;

(d) Foster international cooperation, including North-South and public-private partnerships, as well as cross-sectoral cooperation at the national, regional and global levels;

(e) Monitor and assess progress at the national, regional and global levels through reporting by governments, as well as by regional and international organizations, institutions and instruments, and on this basis consider future actions needed; and

(f) Strengthen political commitment to the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests through: ministerial engagement; developing ways to liaise with the governing bodies of international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments; and promoting action-oriented dialogue and policy formulation related to forests.

To carry out these functions, the resolution establishes the UNFF as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC and, to support its work and to enhance cooperation and coordination, the CPF. Other provisions include that the UNFF will consider, within five years, the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests, with a view to making a recommendation to ECOSOC and the UN General Assembly, and take steps to devise approaches toward appropriate financial and technology transfer support to enable implementation of SFM as recommended under the IPF and IFF.

The resolution also decides that the UNFF will operate under the rules and procedures of ECOSOC and that it should, *inter alia*: be open to all States and operate in a transparent and participatory manner, with relevant international and regional organizations, including regional economic integration organizations, institutions and instruments, as well as major groups involved; build upon the transparent and participatory practices established by the CSD, IPF and IFF; and ensure the opportunity to receive and consider inputs from representatives of major groups, in particular through the organization of multi-stakeholder dialogues.

The resolution states that the UNFF will initially meet on an annual basis for up to two weeks and have a high-level ministerial segment for two to three days, as required. It suggests the UNFF may convene *ad hoc* expert groups for scientific and technical advice.

The resolution decides that the UNFF will work on the basis of a MYPOW to be adopted at its first meeting. The UNFF is also tasked with developing, at its first meeting, a plan of action for the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action, which will address financial provisions.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

EIGHT-COUNTRY INITIATIVE: The Eight-Country Initiative, Shaping the Programme of Work for the UNFF, was launched by Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Iran, Malaysia and Nigeria in September 2000. The Initiative aimed to assist the international community in developing the MYPOW of the UNFF. Building on the consensus reached at IFF-4, the Initiative first conducted a survey of stakeholders' views on the UNFF and, based on these views, produced a synthesis report to provide background information on the range of ideas and positions regarding the MYPOW. Next, an International Expert Consultation was held from 27 November – 1 December 2000, in Bonn, Germany. At the Consultation, participants exchanged views and discussed possible basic elements and structures of the MYPOW. The Initiative culminated in the Report of the Expert Consultation, which was submitted to the UNFF Secretariat to be used as input in preparing a Secretary General's Report on the MYPOW for consideration at the UNFF's first session.

OSLO WORKSHOP ON FINANCING SFM: The International Workshop of Experts on Financing SFM convened in Oslo, Norway, from 22-25 January 2001. This Workshop was a government-led initiative co-sponsored by Brazil, Denmark, Malaysia, Norway, South Africa and the United Kingdom and organized by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). It brought together participants representing governments, financing institutions, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, academia and UN agencies to consider the advantages of alternatives for financing SFM.

The goals of the Workshop were to: identify ways of implementing decisions on financial resources resulting from the IPF and IFF; identify and better understand the broader issues that constrain or promote new and additional flows of finance in the forest sector from all sources; and contribute to the proposed UNFF by advising on its programme of work on finance. Among the approaches to financing SFM that Workshop participants discussed were greater private sector involvement, an investment promotion entity, a global forest fund, a consortium approach and better use of existing resources. The Workshop resulted in a record of highlights that captures the breadth of views expressed. This record of highlights will be submitted to the UNFF to contribute to ongoing debates on this topic.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

The organizational session of the UNFF begins at 10:00 am in the Trusteeship Council Room. Jag Maini, Head of the UNFF Secretariat, is expected to open the session. As the first matter of business, delegates will elect the new UNFF Bureau. Delegates will then consider all proposals and options on the location of the UNFF Secretariat. Costa Rica, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Switzerland have all submitted offers to host the Secretariat and will most likely comment on their proposals. The final substantive agenda item is progress towards the establishment of the CPF. Hosny El-Lakany, Assistant Director General of the Forestry Department, FAO, is expected to deliver a presentation on the topic on behalf of the Inter-agency Taskforce on Forests.