



# Earth Negotiations Bulletin

UNFF-O  
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A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

UNFF online at <http://www.iisd.ca/forestry/unff/org/>

Vol. 13 No. 68

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development

Tuesday, 13 February 2001

## UNFF-O HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2001

The organizational session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-O) took place at UN Headquarters in New York City on Monday, 12 February. The one-day meeting elected the UNFF Bureau, considered proposals to host the UNFF Secretariat, and heard an update on progress toward establishing the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF).

### PLENARY

UNFF Chair Mubarak Hussein Rahmtalla (Sudan) welcomed participants to the newly-established Forum. Jag Maini, Coordinator and Head of the UNFF Secretariat, made opening remarks on behalf of Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs. He drew attention to the partnership of the eight international organizations in the Interagency Task Force on Forests (ITFF), which has supported the international forestry process, and noted that the UNFF is the first subsidiary body of ECOSOC since establishment of the CSD in 1992. Highlighting the unique nature of the UNFF, he pointed out that it has universal membership, includes a ministerial segment for high political visibility, and focuses on implementation.

Maini stated that the international community has already started contributing to the UNFF through two recent expert meetings. He highlighted the strong relevance between the concurrent Financing For Development meeting and the UNFF, and advised delegates to remain aware that there are future challenges associated with, *inter alia*, deforestation and implementation. He emphasized agreement on the multi-year programme of work (MYPOW) as a first step toward demonstrating the UNFF's collective commitment, stating it should be practical and pragmatic and identify priorities. He reaffirmed the Department of Economic and Social Affairs' support for the CPF, and wished the group great success in deliberations to formulate the MYPOW.

**UNFF BUREAU:** Maini announced the results of elections for the UNFF Bureau members: Chair, Ambassador Mubarak Hussein Rahmtalla (Sudan); Vice-Chairs, Ambassador Slamet Hidayat (Indonesia), Alexey Kormienko (Russian Federation) and Gustavo Suarez de Freitas (Peru); and Rapporteur, Knut Øistad (Norway).

Chair Mubarak Hussein Rahmtalla expressed his sincere appreciation and gratitude to the officers. SWEDEN, on behalf of the EU, said that, in accordance with ECOSOC resolution 2000/35, the Bureau needs rules of procedure to guide the UNFF proceedings. He called for yearly elections of Bureau members, but said the Bureau should remain the same for the first and second years. He also called for a rotating chairmanship. NIGERIA, on behalf of the G-77/China, proposed that the chair engage in consultations with all countries and agencies interested in hosting the Secretariat, in order to expedite the decision-making process. He congratulated new members on their election and hoped the UNFF would complete its work in an efficient and timely fashion. Delegates adopted the provisional agenda (E/CN.18/2001/1).

The G-77/CHINA called for meaningful contributions and suggested Bureau membership rotate every year to allow for equal regional representation during the first five years. He said Bureau members should be elected during UNFF substantive sessions, following the system adopted by CSD.

NORWAY proposed, and delegates supported, that an agenda item be added on progress toward establishment of the CPF. NORWAY also said the duration of the first substantive session of UNFF must be addressed.

**CONSIDERATION OF ALL PROPOSALS AND OPTIONS ON THE LOCATION OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE UNFF:** COSTA RICA offered to host the UNFF Secretariat and highlighted Costa Rican participation in the broad consultation process on an international instrument on forests and work toward sustainable forest management, even in the face of financial constraints. He underscored continued efforts toward forest restoration in Costa Rica, highlighting

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that 26% of Costa Rica's forests are under protection and proper management and that criteria and indicators are being implemented. He highlighted the need for clear commitment and implementation of the IPF and IFF proposals for action to address growing environmental concern. He noted Costa Rica's proposal to host the Secretariat had received support by several Central American countries, drew attention to the role of Costa Rica in promoting world peace and human rights, and highlighted its capacity for fund raising and participation in environmental issues.

SWITZERLAND reaffirmed its offer to host the Secretariat and called for the best logistic and administrative base for the Secretariat. He identified financial and administrative contributions Switzerland would provide if the Secretariat were to be based in Geneva, including funds to support developing country participation. He said locating the Secretariat in Geneva would provide a good working environment for the UNFF because of the high concentration of international bodies relevant to forests and the UN facilities there. He remarked that the presence of many permanent representatives in Geneva would cut down travel expenses for delegations.

The FAO also highlighted its offer to host the Secretariat in Rome. Chair Mubarak Hussein Rahmtalla recalled that the ECOSOC resolution 2000/35 states that, unless otherwise decided, the Secretariat will be housed at UN Headquarters in New York City. The EU supported hosting the Secretariat outside of New York, calling for further partnership on forests and involvement of civil society.

**PROGRESS TOWARD THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CPF:** Hosny El Lakany, Assistant Director General of the Forestry Department, FAO, speaking on behalf of the ITFF, updated delegates on progress towards the establishment of the CPF. He noted that the CPF is envisioned as a partnership between international organizations, institutions and instruments in support of the UNFF objective of conservation, management, and sustainable development of all types of forests, and, particularly, implementation of the IPF proposals for action.

He commented that the ITFF has initiated a process to identify the modalities and membership for the CPF, and noted a process underway to seek endorsement of the CPF by the governing bodies of ITFF members. He highlighted ITFF members' commitment to continued partnership under the CPF. With regard to the CPF's structure, he suggested that it operate as a high-level, informal and manageable body, and suggested that membership should be limited to approximately twelve international forest-related organizations, with other bodies, such as NGOs and regional organizations, contributing to the CPF's work in situations where their expertise would be most relevant. Remarking that the CPF provides a unique chance to develop political commitment and mobilize international cooperation, he commented that the CPF will establish an active communication network with all partners and stakeholders. He welcomed the ministerial segment of the UNFF as a forum for discussion between the heads of CPF members and ministers. In closing, he reiterated ITFF member organizations' commitment to the UNFF and to the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action.

COSTA RICA asked for further clarification on how other entities, such as regional organizations, would be brought into the CPF. El Lakany responded that a proposal on this matter will be prepared by the first substantive session of the UNFF.

The G-77/CHINA commented that the CPF should not be another forum for dialogue or a "talk shop," but rather an action-oriented body that focuses on implementation. He noted that the G-77/CHINA would offer a statement on this matter during the informal consultations. The EU stressed that while the ITFF should serve as a model, some additional members may be essential, such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

**ORGANIZATION OF WORK OF THE INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS:** Chair Mubarak Hussein Rahmtalla invited delegates to adopt a proposed organization of work for the informal consultations on the MYPOW, which had been circulated in the meeting room. The EU requested additional time to review the proposed organization prior to its adoption. A representative of the GLOBAL FOREST POLICY PROJECT suggested that programme elements relating facilitation and promotion of implementation be addressed early in the informal consultations. The proposed organization of work will be considered at the start of the informal consultations.

**OTHER MATTERS:** The EU suggested that, after this week's informal consultations, the first substantive session of the UNFF may not require a two-week meeting.

### **IN THE CORRIDORS**

The UNFF organizational session eased into motion with a light agenda and a meeting that was largely a formality. Although the atmosphere was congenial and relaxed, some delegates confided their expectations of more lively and interesting debates during the informal consultations. A number of delegates anticipated intense deliberations over the prioritization of programme elements, something that has been a bone of contention within the forestry process since the IPF.

### **THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY**

**INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS:** The informal consultations on the MYPOW for the UNFF will begin at 11:00 am in the Trusteeship Council Room. Delegates will first address the organization of work. Next, Jag Maini, Coordinator and Head of the UNFF Secretariat, will introduce information notes -- entitled Suggestion for a MYPOW of the UNFF, and Proposed Framework Towards the Development of the UNFF Plan of Action -- prepared by the UNFF Secretariat to facilitate discussions during the informal consultations. A general exchange of views on the MYPOW and its structure will follow.

The Secretariat has also prepared two background documents: Work Programmes of the Functional Commissions of Economic and Social Council, 1998-2002; and Calendar of Major International Forest-Related Events. These documents are available in the Trusteeship Council Room as well as on the Secretariat website: [www.un.org/esa/sustdev/forests](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/forests).