

UNFF17 Highlights **Thursday, 12 May 2022**

During the second day of the informal consultations, the Forum undertook a second reading of the revised draft omnibus resolution, as well as lengthy informal-informal discussions on points of contention. A third reading of revised text on paragraphs not treated in the “informal informals” began in the evening and covered such contentious issues as condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and an Iranian proposal.

Implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF)

Several delegates continued to resist proposed compromise language referencing the Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests and Land Use. They argued that:

- the Declaration is a political declaration, not an inter-governmentally negotiated text;
- it is not universal;
- aspects of the Declaration go beyond the remit of the UNFF; and
- that welcoming it would ignore the views of the 60 UN member states who are not endorsers of it.

Those in support of the reference stressed that the Declaration was a transformative event entirely relevant to UNFF work.

Given the entrenched positions, delegates undertook informal-informal consultations to try to find compromise language. It was agreed that the reference would be retained in a new paragraph that took “note with appreciation” of recent forest-related developments, declarations and pledges, including but not limited to the “forest-related contributions” of the Declaration.

A proposal to include an explicit reference to the sustainable commodity production and consumption element of the Declaration was defeated by opposition from delegates cautioning against cherry picking elements from the Declaration.

A proposal to also reference the Seoul Forest Declaration adopted by the XV World Forestry Congress failed to win inclusion in the resolution.

A reference to “national circumstances” in the context of implementation of the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) was also subject to debate, with supporters stressing the need to acknowledge the specific challenges faced by developing countries and opponents expressing concern that such references are not in line with the GFGs. During the informal-informal discussion, compromise language was agreed that stemmed from ECOSOC Resolution 2017/4, through which the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) was originally adopted.

There were diverging views on how to refer to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Some sought to bring the text in line with the Kunming Declaration adopted in 2021 by the High-Level Segment of the UN Biodiversity Conference, while others cautioned against prejudging the outcomes of ongoing negotiations on the framework. A lengthy discussion ensued, focusing on which qualifiers around the GBF to use and whether to highlight the contributions of forest-based activities that generate social, economic and environmental benefits.

Acknowledging that the focus of the UNFF is on forests rather than biodiversity, it was agreed to focus on highlighting the contributions of forests and sustainable forest management and their economic, social and environmental benefits, for the protection, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in working towards a framework.

There were also concerns with a proposed reference to the “One Health” approach, as several delegates felt this was outside the scope of the UNFF and some pointed out the concept is still being defined. Others emphasized the need to acknowledge the link between deforestation and land use changes and the increased transmission of zoonotic diseases.

Means of Implementation (MOI)

Different views were expressed on MOI, with some highlighting the importance of seeking all sources of financing to support sustainable forest management (SFM), and others emphasizing the need for developed countries to honor past pledges to provide new and additional resources for developing countries.

Some stressed that implementing the various forest-related commitments places a disproportionate burden on developing countries, for which they need support. Others pointed to the need to mobilize all sources of financing, including private and philanthropic, particularly given recent pledges at the Glasgow Climate Conference and the 8th Global Environment Facility replenishment (GEF8), and noted this would align with the spirit and scope of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN).

To acknowledge the challenges faced by developing countries and the importance of all sources of financing, delegates agreed to lift language on this from ECOSOC Resolution 2017/4.

A proposal to ensure the GFFFN acknowledges the special needs and circumstances of middle-income countries was put forward and enjoyed support, given the challenges faced by these countries in accessing financing.

Others questioned the retention of references to “economies in transition,” as they felt this term was outdated. Others noted, however, that this was previously-agreed language under ECOSOC 2017/4.

One delegation emphasized the importance of promoting fair access to financial mechanisms by local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

Monitoring, Assessment, and Reporting

A proposal to ensure that the voluntary national contribution reporting cycle aligns with the Global Forest Resources Assessment enjoyed broad support. A proposal to delete the specific reference to primary forests as a focus of voluntary national reporting was also supported by many delegates.

Preparations for the Midterm Review (MTR)

In the subparagraph calling for implementing the actions contained in the annex to the resolution in a transparent and independent manner, one delegate sought unsuccessfully to qualify action with “relevant.”

Another delegate suggested requiring that the open-ended intergovernmental *ad hoc* expert group (AHEG) on the preparation for the MTR, to be convened in 2023, be conducted in the six official UN languages, but others cautioned that this suggestion should not be accepted without first hearing an assessment from the Bureau and Secretariat about the budgetary implications of providing translation services to the AHEG. A third delegate offered to submit a proposal for text on providing for virtual participation in the AHEG.

One delegate expressed concern about a provision deferring until 2030 the final review of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) mandated by Resolution 2015/33 on the IAF.

In the Corridors

“We are not the CBD,” remarked a number of delegates during a particularly protracted negotiation on references to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Indeed, a recurrent question throughout the day’s sometimes fraught negotiations was the issue of the UNFF’s identity. Some noted with incredulity the inability of the Forum, as the primary global policy body on forests in the UN system, to welcome significant forest-related commitments such as the Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration. Others retorted that since the Glasgow Declaration covered far more than just forests, such as health and sustainable commodity production and consumption, they had been unable to endorse it and were actually demonstrating great flexibility to even note the Declaration “with appreciation.” It is not clear that the Forum will be able to answer the question of whether UNFF should “just stay in the forest,” as one delegate put in, or acknowledge interlinkages with other issues in the omnibus resolution. However, there is a reason for optimism: delegates were able to show flexibility and compromise on key issues such as the means of implementation. As a result, in the end, delegates did not need enough chocolate to last throughout the night as they used to in some UNFF sessions of old...

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