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**MR. MANOEL SOBRAL FILHO  
DIRECTOR, UN FORUM ON FORESTS SECRETARIAT**

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## **Opening Statement**

**12th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests**

**1 May 2017, Trusteeship Council Chamber, UNHQ, New York**

Your Excellency, Ambassador Peter Thomson, President of the UN General Assembly,  
Mr. Peter Besseau, Chair of 12th session of the UN Forum on Forests,

Your Excellency, Ambassador Marie Chatardová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the UN and Vice President of the UN Economic and Social Council

Your Excellency, Ambassador Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the UN

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to UN Headquarters and to this twelfth session of the UN Forum on Forests.

Since time immemorial, forests have provided vital resources to support the development and prosperity of human populations. Wood products have been used to build homes, provide energy and warmth, cook food, and provide essential goods needed for economies, industry, transportation, and urban development. Wood and non-wood forest products have been an economic foundation of nations around the world.

Forests are dynamic ecosystems, shaped both by natural and human influences. When sustainably managed, forests provide essential goods and services worldwide. For millions of people living in poverty, forests serve as safety nets in crises and often provide pathways out of poverty.

The theme of this year's High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is "Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing World". So the question we face is how can forests contribute to international efforts to eradicate poverty and leave no one behind?

By adopting the first ever UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030, the Forum and the United Nations as a whole have clearly communicated that the needs of current and future generations can only be met if we take urgent action to ensure all types of forests are managed sustainably - be they natural, semi-natural or planted.

As the distinguished speakers before me have highlighted, the UN Strategic Plan for Forests builds on the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It sets a shared global vision and mission on forests, as well as 6 ambitious Global Forest Goals and 26 associated targets, including ground-breaking targets to increase forest area globally by 3% or 120 million hectares, and to eradicate extreme poverty for all forest dependent people, by 2030.

The Global Goals and targets also cover combating climate change, increasing forest protected areas, mobilizing financing and inspiring innovation, promoting governance, and enhancing cooperation across sectors and stakeholders.

It is important to emphasize that realizing our shared vision and mission and achieving the Goals Forest Goals and targets will depend entirely on the voluntary actions by countries, partners and stakeholders at all levels.

Enshrined in the Plan is the concept of Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs) as the framework for countries to communicate their individual commitments to the Global Forest Goals and targets, taking into account national circumstances and capacities.

Last week, on the occasion of the UN General Assembly's adoption of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, His Excellency Mr. Peng Youdong, Vice-Minister of China's State Forestry Administration indicated that China plans to communicate a Voluntary National Contribution in support of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests.

The past two years have seen unprecedented action and decision-making by the UN Forum on Forests to define a vision for forests in 2030.

As foresters, we know that many of the drivers of deforestation lie outside the forest sector, rooted in challenges related to reducing poverty, urban development and land use policies that favor sectors with higher and more rapid financial returns, such as agriculture, energy, mining and transportation. At the same time, the health and productivity of forests are also impacted by threats such as illegal or unsustainable logging, illicit trafficking in wildlife and forest products, pests, fragmentation and impacts of climate change.

To create a better, greener future, we need the right enabling environment - from governance systems that combat illegal deforestation, to policies that ensure equitable sharing of benefits from forests. The effective implementation of sustainable forest management is critically dependent upon adequate resources. To this end, the launch of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network is helping provide a bridge between the financing needs of countries and global funding sources, such as the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund.

With the opening of the 12th session of the UN Forum on Forests, we are embarking on a new structure and modus operandi for the Forum. UNFF12 will focus on technical issues related to sustainable forest management and strategies to promote implementation of the Strategic Plan. I look forward to the lively debates and creative ideas that will come forth during the course of this week. As always, our Secretariat stands ready to support Member States and stakeholders in your deliberations.

Thank you.

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