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MESSAGE

**Forests and Biodiversity
2020 celebration of the International Day of Forests**

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Forests provide a myriad of economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits, all of which are essential for human well-being, sustainable development and the health of our planet. Yet, these vital ecosystems continue to pay the price for unsustainable use of natural resources, environmental pollution, rapid urbanization, population growth and the impact of climate change.

The United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 envisions a world in which all forests and trees are sustainably managed. The Plan features six Global Forest Goals and 26 targets that address combating climate change, increasing forest protected areas, mobilizing financing and inspiring innovation, promoting governance, and enhancing cooperation across sectors and stakeholders. In this context, the Plan has set forth a target to increase the world's forest area by 3 per cent by 2030.

The theme of this year's International Day of Forests on 21 March is "Forests and Biodiversity", in recognition of designating 2020 a "super year" for biodiversity and nature. Forests provide habitat for a vast majority, i.e. 80 per cent, of terrestrial biodiversity. According to some estimates, nearly one-sixth of tree species that exist today may be under threat of extinction.

The current speed, at which biodiversity loss is taking place, is unprecedented in human history. As the health of forest ecosystems decline, the impact on economies and livelihoods is likely to be severe. Forests serve as a safety net for 40 per cent of the extreme poor in rural areas, who live in forest and savannah areas. Forests and trees are important livelihood components for an estimated 2.5 billion people, who work in smallholder agriculture.

Forests strengthen resilience, in particular related to freshwater resources, food security and mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. Some 25 per cent of the world's forests are managed to protect soil and water. Forests filter, store and supply freshwater; forested watersheds supply 75 per cent of the world's accessible freshwater.

On this International Day of Forests, I urge all our partners from government, business and civil society to share their forest success stories, raise awareness of forest benefits and challenges and strengthen community engagement in sustainable forest management, so that we all come together on our shared mission and vision for forests.
