

United Nations Forum on Forests
Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the UNFF15 Bureau via teleconference
11:00 am- 1:30 pm, 16 March 2020
10:00 am-12:30pm, 23 March 2020

Participation

Bureau Members: Mr. Boris Greguška (Slovak Republic), Ambassador Kitty Sweeb (Suriname), Mr. Javad Momeni (Iran), Mr. Rob Busink (The Netherlands), Mr. Khalid Cherki (Morocco)

UNFF Secretariat: Mr. Hossein Moeini-Meybodi

UNFF Secretary: Mr. Ziad Mahmassani

Summary of Key Actions/Decisions

1. UNFF15 will be scaled down to adopt the resolution during one half-day session, within the first or second week of June 2020. The exact date will be decided in consultation with the ECOSOC Bureau.
2. There will be no high-level segment during UNFF15. The high-level segment is recommended to be organized during the 16th session of the Forum in 2021 to adopt a ministerial declaration. The ongoing consultation on the draft ministerial declaration is suspended until further notice.
3. The UNFF15 draft resolution will be concise and focus on key substantive and operational issues in the agenda of UNFF15.
4. The programme of work for UNFF16 in 2021 will be agreed upon as part of UNFF15 resolution. Through UNFF15 resolution, the Forum would postpone decision on the programme of work of the Forum for 2022-2024 to UNFF16.
5. The Bureau will lead a consultative process for finalization of the draft resolution in advance of UNFF15 through electronic means. The draft resolution will be considered agreed following the silence procedure.
6. The Chair will officially communicate decisions of the Bureau about UNFF15, as well as the agreed timelines for finalization of UNFF15 draft resolution to Members of the Forum.

Agenda of the Extraordinary Meeting of the UNFF15 Bureau

1- Impact of the global pandemic of COVID-19 on UNFF15 and the way forward

Bureau Discussion

Mr. Greguška, Chair of the UNFF15 Bureau, welcomed members of the Bureau, the UNFF Secretariat, and UNFF Secretary to the extraordinary meeting of the UNFF 15 Bureau. The Chair referred to the unprecedented challenge caused by the global pandemic of COVID-19 and its impacts on all aspects of the daily work, including the work of the United Nations. He reminded that UNFF15 was planned to be held from 4 to 8 May 2020 in New York. As a policy session, UNFF15 was expected to adopt a resolution and decide on several important issues, in particular, the Quadrennial Programme of Work of the Forum for 2021-2024. UNFF15 was also expected to include a high-level segment to adopt a ministerial declaration.

Mr. Greguška also noted the ongoing work within the ECOSOC Bureau to address the implications of current situation on the work of ECOSOC and its functional commissions, including UNFF. In this context, he emphasized that UNFF15 Bureau had to assess the impacts of the global pandemic of COVID-19 on UNFF15, decide on how to proceed with UNFF15, and inform Members of the Forum on the next steps, consistent with the ECOSOC Bureau decisions.

All Bureau members recognized the seriousness and uniqueness of the situation. The Bureau emphasized the need to provide clear guidance on the way forward regarding UNFF15, and ensure business continuity for the Forum, its Members and the Secretariat.

In light of the above, members of the Bureau thoroughly discussed and elaborated the feasibility and practicality of different scenarios for UNFF15 from substantive and procedural aspects, including ideas and suggestions brought forward by some Members of the Forum. In its discussion, UNFF15 Bureau also took into full account relevant decisions of the ECOSOC Bureau, as well as the letters of the ECOSOC President on 16 and 26 March 2020. The main ideas discussed during the Bureau meeting were: i) To hold a brief opening session of UNFF15 in May 2020 to adopt a procedural decision to postpone UNFF15 to next year, then suspend UNFF15, and ~~it~~ resume it in May 2021 to go through its provisional agenda as stands now; ii) To organize UNFF15 or a shorter UNFF15 session later in 2020 or early 2021 and, iii) To organize a scaled down UNFF15 to make procedural decisions and adopt UNFF15 resolution on key operational issues, before the conclusion of the 2020 ECOSOC cycle (July 2020).

The Secretariat advised that postponing UNFF15 to 2021 will have domino effect on the entire programme of work of UNFF until 2030. Consistent with the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33 and the current programme of work of the Forum for 2017-2020, UNFF15 as a policy session should take place in 2020. Postponing UNFF15 to next year would also interrupt the work of the Forum, its Members and partners, as well as the Secretariat, as there would be no mandate or task to be carried out by them until next session. As an alternative solution, the Secretariat referred to the first technical session of the Forum (UNFF12) in 2017, in which the Forum also took ~~some~~ a few policy decisions to meet the important needs. The secretariat advised that part of UNFF16 could be devoted to policy discussion and decision-making on some key issues.

The Secretary of the Forum also advised of unavailability of conference services for rescheduling UNFF15 later in the year. He further advised that 2020 meetings of the ECOSOC Functional Commissions have to be concluded within the ECOSOC 2020 cycle which would end in July 2020.

As the result of its extensive discussion and taking into full account the ECOSOC Bureau decisions, the Bureau made the following decisions regarding UNFF15:

1. UNFF15 would be scaled down to adopt the resolution during one half-day session. This session was recommended to be held, either in person or virtually, within the first or second week of June 2020. The draft resolution would be considered agreed, following the silence procedure as outlined below. The Bureau would keep you posted on any new development on this matter, considering the evolving situation.
2. There would be no high-level segment during UNFF15. To maintain the momentum, however, the Bureau of UNFF15 recommended to organize the high-level segment during the 16th session of the Forum in 2021 to adopt a ministerial declaration. In this regard, the ongoing consultation on the draft ministerial declaration should be suspended until further notice.
3. All Members of the Forum should be urged to actively participate in and contribute to the CBD and UNFCCC Conferences of Parties, whose forest-related outcomes would be important elements for consideration in the context of UNFF16 Ministerial Declaration and the Forum's programme of work for 2021-2024.
4. Additional update on the important issues in the agenda of UNFF15, like ~~an~~ flagship publication, should be prepared by the Secretariat and shared with Members of the Forum as soon as possible.
5. The UNFF15 draft resolution should be concise and focus on key substantive and operational issues in the agenda of UNFF15 which were critical for the work of the Forum and its Secretariat. Regarding the Quadrennial Programme of Work of the Forum for 2021-2024, UNFF15 would decide only on the programme of work for UNFF16 in 2021. Decision on the programme of work of the Forum for 2022-2024 would be made at UNFF16.
6. The Bureau would lead an inclusive, transparent and consultative process for finalization of the draft resolution in advance of UNFF15, through virtual means, as follows:
 - a. Members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders would be invited to submit their concrete input on the zero-draft resolution to the Secretariat by 15 April 2020.
 - b. Considering the submitted inputs, the Bureau would share the revised zero draft with Members and stakeholders on 20 April 2020. Members of the

Forum and relevant stakeholders would be invited to submit their concrete input on the revised draft to the Secretariat by 8 May 2020.

- c. Based on additional submitted inputs, the Bureau would further revise the draft resolution and share it with Members and stakeholders on 12 May 2020. Members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders would be invited to submit their final input on the revised draft to the Secretariat by 26 May 2020.
 - d. Chair would circulate final draft resolution of UNFF15 on 1 June 2020, and would put it on silence procedure, for agreement, until 4 June 2020 at 12:00 noon (NY time).
7. On behalf of the Bureau, the Chair would officially communicate decisions of the Bureau about UNFF15, as well as the agreed timelines for finalization of UNFF15 draft resolution to Members of the Forum.
 8. The Bureau also agreed to constantly monitor the situation and to meet regularly via electronic means, to ensure smooth consultation process on the draft UNFF15 resolution, and to discuss issues regarding half day session of UNFF15 in June 2020.

The Chair closed the meeting at 12:30pm.