

Fifteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF15)

Closing statement by Boris Greguška, the UNFF15 Chair

Dear Members and stakeholders in the United Nations Forum on Forests,

As you know, the fifteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF15) was originally scheduled to be held from 4-8 May 2020 at UN Headquarters in New York. However, due to the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the United Nations, and in accordance with relevant ECOSOC decisions, it was not possible for UNFF15 to meet, either in-person or virtually. It is a testament to the extraordinary commitment of Members of the Forum, that despite these unprecedented circumstances, the UNFF15 resolution and procedural decisions were successfully developed and eventually adopted through a silence procedure.

This successful outcome was the result of a three-month long intensive consultative process which included three rounds of written inputs and numerous virtual consultations. By working together, we were able to create an inclusive, transparent and productive consultation process, which led to a meaningful and credible outcome.

The UNFF15 omnibus resolution includes agreement on key substantive and operational issues and effectively ensures continuity in the work of the Forum, its Members and the Secretariat until the next UNFF session in April 2021. The successful adoption of the UNFF15 omnibus resolution demonstrates the effectiveness, importance and relevance of the work of the Forum and its Secretariat, and the solid commitment of Member States in this regard.

Dear colleagues,

Forests are often described as the green lungs of our planet. Yes, they are. But, as we in the forest community know that forests are so much more than that. Forests affect the health of the planet and people in a multitude of ways. Forests act as the planet's kidneys by filtering and protecting our freshwater sources. They protect land against erosion and degradation. They store carbon and regulate our global climate. They are a unique bank of genes and biodiversity. They are the backbone of sustainable and green economies.

In many ways, forests build our resilience like an immune system that protects us from threats – against catastrophes, climate change, poverty, hunger, diseases, and even violent conflicts. This is why, now more than ever, forests and sustainable forest management should be at the heart of the post COVID-19 recovery effort and act as a safety net for most vulnerable. This is what forests do when they are protected and managed sustainably.

In recognition of the importance of COVID-19 as an emerging issue, the UNFF15 resolution calls for an initial assessment to be prepared on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainable forest management, the forest sector, forest-dependent people, indigenous peoples and local communities, forest financing and international cooperation, for presentation at the Forum's sixteenth session in 2021.

Looking into the future, I feel we can do more to raise awareness of the importance and multiple benefits that sustainably managed forests offer to society and in achieving sustainable development. This is why I believe that a goodwill ambassador for forests could help increase the visibility of forests and work of the Forum at the global level.

In closing, I would like to begin by thanking my colleagues on the UNFF15 Bureau. They were a source of great support, through their positive spirit, outstanding contributions, and excellent cooperation during these challenging times. This was vital to our success. Many thanks to Kitty, Javad, Khalid, and Rob.

I would like to especially thank the UNFF Secretariat for their consistent support in the intergovernmental consultations and intersessional activities. The Secretariat had an undeniable role in ensuring that we could continue to carry out the work of the Forum.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank you, the Members and stakeholders of the Forum. Without your support, flexibility, empathy and constructive approach we would never have succeeded.

I would also like to warmly congratulate the newly-elected members of the Bureau for the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Forum. The 14th and 15th sessions of the Forum were a memorable and rewarding experience, and I wish them the best of luck for their upcoming term.

Thank you.