

United Nations Forum on Forests
Minutes of the Second Meeting of the UNFF16 Bureau (Virtual)
16 December 2020 (8:00–10:00 am, NY Time)

Participation

Bureau Members: Ambassador Kitty Sweeb (Suriname), Mr. Javad Momeni (Iran), Mr. Jesse Mahoney (Australia), Mr. Tomasz Markiewicz (Poland);

UNFF Secretary: Mr. Ziad Mahmassani, Ms. Jori Joergensen;

UNFF Secretariat: Mr. Hossein Moeini Meybodi, Ms. Afsa Kemitale-Rothschild, Ms. Mita Sen, Mr. Ryo Nakamura, and Ms. Yan Lang.

Summary of Key Actions/Decisions

- 1. The Bureau agreed on the provisional organization of work of the UNFF16 session and decided that the UNFF16 session would be held in a virtual format.**
- 2. The Bureau expressed its preference to hold all meetings of UNFF16 in the morning, and requested the Secretariat to follow up on this matter and explore relevant options.**
- 3. The Bureau decided to submit its initial input to the 2021 HLPF prior to UNFF16 to meet the deadline of 15 March 2021 set by the ECOSOC President, and provide the Forum's input after the conclusion of UNFF16.**

Provisional Agenda

Second Virtual Meeting of the UNFF16 Bureau- 16 December 2020

- 1. Adoption of the provisional agenda**

- 2. Preparations for UNFF16:**
 - a. Discussion on the modality and draft organization of work of UNFF16**
 - b. UNFF16 official documents**
 - c. Update on the preparation of the assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector, and related Expert Group Meeting**
 - d. Update on the preparation of the flagship publication**
 - e. Update on the ongoing consultation with China on the proposed office for GFFFN in Beijing**
 - f. Update on the operationalization of the GFFFN Clearing House**
 - g. UNFF Input to the 2021 session of the HLPF**

- 3. Other matters**
 - a. Update on the recruitment of the Director of the UNFF Secretariat**
 - b. Update on preparation for the International Day of Forests 2021**

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda

Ambassador Kitty Sweeb, Chair of the UNFF16 Bureau, welcomed members of the Bureau, the UNFF Secretary and the UNFF Secretariat to the second virtual meeting of the UNFF16 Bureau. The Chair introduced the provisional agenda for the meeting. After a brief discussion, the Bureau adopted the agenda with two sub-items added under item 3, a. update on the recruitment of the Director of the UNFF Secretariat, and b. update on preparation for the International Day of Forests 2021.

2. Preparations for UNFF16

a. Discussion on the modality and draft organisation of work of UNFF16

The Bureau considered the proposed draft organisation of work of the sixteenth session of the Forum (UNFF16), which was prepared by the Forum's Secretariat. The Secretariat and the Secretary of the Forum briefed the Bureau regarding the organisation of meetings at UN Headquarters, and the continued challenges and limitations for holding any physical “in person” meetings at UNHQ, due to the current global pandemic of COVID-19. The Bureau also considered the letter of the ECOSOC President, and its annex on “consideration of implications of COVID-19-related limitations on in-person meetings for sessions of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies during the 2021 session of the Council”.

In its deliberation, the Bureau emphasized the importance of timely dissemination of information and documents with member states and stakeholders of the Forum, as well as its decision on the modality for UNFF16. The Bureau also discussed the means to ensure broad-based participation of country representatives from capitals, stakeholders, and civil society at UNFF16. In response, the Secretariat informed that advance unedited version of all UNFF16 official documents would be posted on the UNFF website by the end of February 2021. In addition, the Secretariat proposed that the decisions of the Bureau at this meeting could be communicated by the Chair of the Bureau to Member States before the end of this year.

The UNFF Secretariat pointed out that the time difference between New York and other parts of the world could impact broad participation of representatives from capitals, as well as those Bureau members who were not based in New York. The Bureau concurred that holding the meetings of UNFF16 during the morning hours in New York could result in broader participation of delegations. Subject to the availability of conference services, one option could be to exceptionally request holding both morning and afternoon sessions of UNFF16 in the morning.

Regarding effectiveness of virtual meetings and associated challenges that delegations could face in using virtual platforms, the Secretary of the Forum informed the Bureau of the successful convening of many recent virtual informal meetings of UN intergovernmental bodies. He also added that relevant guidance and training materials would be shared with representative from Member States in advance of the UNFF16 session, to further familiarise delegates with all technical aspects of the virtual platforms that were utilized by the UN.

After thorough consideration of all different scenarios and the prevailing conditions, the Bureau concluded that a physical “in person” session for the UNFF16 from 26 to 30 April 2021 would not be feasible, and decided that the session should be held virtually. The Bureau agreed to maintain the flexibility of revisiting this conclusion, should there be a drastic change in the prevailing situation by mid February 2021. In this regard, the Secretary of the Forum advised the Bureau that as the Forum will hold its session virtually, formal adoption of a resolution/decision by the Forum could be conducted through silence

procedure, the same way it was done at UNFF15. The Bureau also expressed its agreement and preference to hold all the meetings of the UNFF16 in the morning during the week of 26-30 April 2021, and requested the Secretariat to explore all possible options.

The Secretariat also updated the Bureau on the preparation for the High-Level Roundtable of UNFF16. After explanations by the Secretariat, the Bureau decided that invitations to be sent by the Bureau Chair to the President of the General Assembly and other UN senior officials to secure their involvement at the UNFF16 High-Level Roundtable.

b. UNFF16 official documents

The Secretariat briefed the Bureau on the preparation of the seven official documents for UNFF16 including the provisional agenda and annotation and six Notes by the Secretariat addressing various UNFF16 agenda items. The Secretariat informed that the advance unedited provisional agenda and annotations would be made available on the UNFF website shortly. The advanced unedited versions (in English only) of all UNFF16 official documents were expected to be available on the UNFF website late February 2021.

c. Update on the preparation of the assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on forests and the forest sector, and related Expert Group Meeting

The Secretariat informed the Bureau on the progress in preparation of background documents in various regions on the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector, as mandated by the UNFF15 resolution. These background documents would be ready by early January 2021 for discussion at the upcoming Expert Group Meeting from 19-21 January 2021. The outcome of the meeting would be incorporated into the relevant UNFF16 official document.

d. Update on the preparation of the flagship publication

The Secretariat updated the Bureau on the preparation of the flagship publication. The Secretariat informed that the publication was being prepared based on the 52 national reports with the support of two consultants, and a writer and editor. The draft of the six main chapters of the publication, which focus on each of the global forest goals has been prepared. These drafts are currently under review to ensure its coherence and flow. The publication is expected to have two launches, as requested by the UNFF15, one at the sixteenth session of the Forum and the other at the XV World Forestry Congress. With the postponement of the World Forestry Congress, which was originally scheduled in May 2021, the publication would first be launched at the UNFF16 and would be launched again at the Congress, when it would be convened. The Bureau emphasised the importance of the flagship publication, and welcomed the steps taken by the Secretariat for its timely preparation.

e. Update on the ongoing consultation with China on the proposed office for GFFFN in Beijing

The Secretariat informed the Bureau that a virtual meeting was held in November 2020 with the Chinese counterpart to continue consultation on the draft Host Country Agreement (HCA). Some progress was made during this meeting. Further consultations were required on other issues, including the nature and scope of the activities of the proposed office. The Secretariat informed that there had been no further consultation on the draft Memorandum of Understanding.

f. Update on the operationalisation of the GFFFN Clearing House

The Secretariat made a presentation on the progress in operationalising Phase I of the Clearing House. So far, over one hundred data entries have been uploaded on the search portal of the Clearing House's website under development. The Secretariat informed that Phase I of the Clearing House was developed in a cost-effective manner by leveraging the UN's in-house resources, and by using existing data and working in partnership.

The Bureau welcomed the progress in the development of the Clearing House and acknowledged the amount of work involved in the development of the Clearing House. The Secretariat informed the Bureau that extra-budgetary post supporting the development of the Clearing House was partially financed by the German project fund and other extrabudgetary resources for its first year period, which came to conclusion soon. Yet, the long-term maintenance and development of the Clearing House would be an area of work that would continue to be dependent on voluntary contributions by donor countries. The Bureau acknowledged the fact and expressed its support to Clearing House and the Secretariat on this matter.

g. UNFF Input to the 2021 session of the HLPF

In response to the letter of the ECOSOC President to the Bureau Chair regarding the Forum's input to the 2021 HLPF, the Secretariat informed the Bureau of the practice of the two-step approach taken in the past few years. The first step was to submit a concise input from the Bureau in consultation with member states to meet the deadline for its submission, and the second step was to submit the Forum's input based on the discussion held during its session. The Bureau acknowledged the effectiveness of this approach and decided to follow it for the 2021 session of the HLPF.

The Bureau further discussed means to improve the visibility and effectiveness of the Forum's input to the HLPF. The Secretariat informed that two areas of work had been important on this matter. In the past few years, the Secretariat had been successful in assisting in preparation of inputs, their inclusion in the compilation of inputs to the HLPF, as well as in ensuring participation of the UNFF Chair in the HLPF sessions. The Secretariat would continue to make similar efforts in 2021. In terms of the final outcome of the HLPF, the Secretariat stressed that participation of Forum's members in the consultation of the outcome document and the deliberations of the HLPF would be the most effective way to ensure visibility of forests and the inclusion of the Forum's input in the final outcome of the HLPF.

3. Other matters

a. Update on the recruitment of the Director of the UNFF Secretariat

The Secretariat recalled the advertisement of the post of the Director of the Secretariat would be closed by 24 December 2020. The Secretariat broadly disseminated the vacancy. The Secretariat indicated that it could not provide a specific timeline for recruitment of the Director, as the decision would be made by the senior review board, considering several factors such as geographical representation and gender. The Bureau welcomed the initiation of the process for recruiting the UNFFS Director.

b. Update on preparation for the International Day of Forests 2021

The Secretariat informed the Bureau that the theme of the 2021 International Day of Forests had been proposed by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests as "Forest restoration: a path to recovery and

wellbeing". The event for the celebration of the International Day for Forests had been scheduled on 19 March in a virtual format. The event would feature high-level participation, a technical panel, and a dialogue segment featuring statements from member states. The messaging of the event would involve elements of forest restoration and COVID being central in the recovery process.

The meeting finished at 11:20 am