

**United Nations Forum on Forests**  
**Minutes of the First Meeting of the UNFF17 Bureau (Virtual)**  
**7 July 2021 (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)  
**Absent:** Mr. Abu-Juam (Ghana)

**UNFF Secretary:** Mr. Ziad Mahmassani

**UNFF Secretariat:** Mr. Hossein Moeini Meybodi, Ms. Afsa Kemitale-Rothschild, Ms. Mita Sen, Mr. Tomasz Juszczak

**Summary of Key Actions/Decisions**

1. The Bureau emphasized the significance of UNFF17 as a policy session and recognized the importance of holding the session in-person. Nevertheless, the Bureau also recognized that it was too early, at this point in time, to agree on any specific modality for UNFF17, given the evolving situation. The Bureau agreed to discuss this matter towards the end of 2021, at which point they would reassess the situation and take relevant decisions as needed.
2. The Bureau welcomed the planned intersessional activities by the UNFFS in preparation for UNFF17.
3. The Bureau agreed to extend the term of the IAG until May 2022, to enable the group to conclude its work in promoting the flagship publication and in gathering lessons learned from the flagship process which would provide valuable input to the intersessional work related to the refinement of the format for national reporting.

## Provisional Agenda

First Meeting of the UNFF17 Bureau- 7 July 2021 (Virtual)

- 1- Adoption of the provisional agenda
- 2- Preparations for UNFF17
  - a. Date and venue of UNFF17
  - b. UNFF17 thematic priorities
  - c. Key intersessional activities:
    - i. Preparations for the midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests
    - ii. Preparation of an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector
    - iii. Extension of the term of the Informal Advisory Group to promote the flagship publication and gather lessons learned, and updates on the intersessional work on refining the format for voluntary national reporting
- 3- Other matters
  - a. Update on the recruitment of the Director (D2), on the proposed upgrade of a P5 post to D1 post
  - b. Update on the proposed office for the GFFFN in China

## **1. Adoption of the provisional agenda**

Ambassador Kitty Sweeb, Chair of the UNFF17 Bureau, welcomed members of the Bureau, the UNFF Secretary and the UNFF Secretariat to the first virtual meeting of the UNFF17 Bureau. The Chair introduced the provisional agenda for the meeting. The Chair proposed to add a subitem under agenda item 3 to receive an update on the recruitment of the Director of the UNFF Secretariat. Mr. Jesse Mahoney, Bureau member from Australia also suggested to add three subitems: on the GFFFN intersessional work (under item 2Ci), on an update on the proposed office for the GFFFN in China, and on the proposed upgrade of a P5 post to a D1 post, and downgrade of a P3 post to a P2 post in the UNFFS in the context of the 2022 UN Programme and Budget Proposal of DESA. The Secretariat informed that it would address issues related to the GFFFN intersessional activities, as part of its explanations regarding the preparations for the midterm review under item 2Ci. The provisional agenda was adopted with these additions.

## **2. Preparations for UNFF17**

### **a. Date and Venue of UNFF17**

The UNFF Secretariat and Secretary of the Forum recalled the ECOSOC decision on the date and venue of UNFF17. Accordingly, the next session of the Forum will be held from 9 to 13 May 2022 at UNHQ in New York. At present, arrangements are being made to hold this meeting in person. The Bureau recognized the importance of UNFF17 being held in an in-person format, given the importance of the meeting as a policy session. Nevertheless, the Bureau also stressed the need to monitor the situation and make necessary adjustments as needed, including the possibility of organizing hybrid or virtual sessions to enable maximum participation by delegations. In this respect, the Bureau agreed to reassess the situation before the end of the year and take necessary decision.

### **b. UNFF17 Thematic Priorities**

The Secretariat recalled that in accordance with the UNFF15 resolution, UNFF16 and UNFF17 are thematically linked. The Secretariat also recalled the decision of the Bureau to have Global Forest Goal 1 and 2 as the main substantive thematic priorities for UNFF16 and UNFF17, with GFG4, 5 and 6 as the cross-cutting thematic priorities. In this respect, the thematic priorities for UNFF17 remain unchanged, and the relevant UNFF16 Chair's proposals on the thematic priorities from UNFF16 will be considered at UNFF17.

### **c. Key intersessional activities**

#### **i. Preparations for the midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests**

UNFF17 will discuss preparations for the midterm review of the IAF in 2024 and decide upon actions and steps to be taken, as well as outputs to be prepared in preparation for the midterm review of the IAF in 2024. In this respect, the Secretariat will undertake several intersessional activities, with the engagement of Members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders, to identify the required actions, steps and outputs for the midterm review of the IAF in 2024, for consideration and decision of UNFF17. These intersessional activities may include gathering inputs and views from Members of the Forum and relevant stakeholders, preparation of a concept note and facilitating discussions through an intersessional expert group meeting. The key outcome of the expert group meeting would be incorporated into relevant official document for consideration by UNFF17. The Secretariat emphasized that the task of UNFF17 is to devise a plan or roadmap of required actions, steps, and outputs related to the midterm review which have to

be in place at UNFF19 in 2024, in order to enable the Forum to assess the effectiveness of the IAF and make recommendations on the way forward at that time. Regarding the work of the GFFFN, the Secretariat informed that as reflected in the UNFF16 Chair's summary, the review of the work of the GFFFN, as one of the main components of the IAF, would be carried out after UNFF17 and based on the Forum's guidance at that time. Meanwhile, the routine activities of the GFFFN in supporting countries would continue until UNFF17.

The Bureau welcomed the update on the work of the Secretariat in planning the intersessional activities on the preparations for the midterm review and relevant decision of UNFF17 on the required preparatory work. The Bureau asked about the possible timeline for the proposed expert group meeting and its modality. The Secretariat indicated that it would expect this EGM to be held by the end of this year or by early January 2022. Regarding the modality for the meeting, the Secretariat indicated that it was planning for a physical meeting, possibly in Geneva, Vienna or another UN-based venue. However, if the pandemic situation wouldn't allow physical organization of the meeting, the meeting would be held virtually.

**ii. Preparation of an assessment of the challenges faced by countries, and the strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector**

The Secretariat recalled the broad support recognition of the value of the analytical work carried out by the Secretariat on the impacts of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector. Referring to the substantive discussions during UNFF16 and strong demand by Members of the Forum, the Secretariat informed that it was planning to conduct the second assessment, with a different focus, for consideration of UNFF17. In line with the UNFF16 Chair's summary, this would be on the assessment of the challenges faced by countries, including strategies, recovery measures and best practices for reducing the impact of COVID-19 on forests and forest sector. This assessment would be built on the experience gained and lessons-learned from the previous assessment. The Bureau recognized the substantive discussion on this matter during UNFF16 and the demand for a new assessment. Mr. Jesse Mahoney emphasized the need to avoid duplicating and repeating issues which have already been addressed in the previous assessment, and asked the Secretariat to consult with the Bureau on the scope of the new assessment. The Secretariat indicated that the new assessment would be guided by the Chair's proposal as contained in UNFF16 report and it would share the key areas of focus of this assessment with the Bureau.

**iii. Extension of the term of the Informal Advisory Group to promote the flagship publication and gather lessons learned, and updates on the intersessional work on refining the format for voluntary national reporting**

Recognizing the positive role played by the Informal Advisory Group (IAG) in developing the Flagship Publication, in light of the postponement of the 15<sup>th</sup> World Forestry Congress (WFC) to May 2022, and the intersessional work on refining the format for the next cycle of voluntary reporting, the Secretariat proposed that the term of the IAG could be extended until May 2022 to enable the IAG to conclude its work on promoting the flagship publication and in developing the lessons learned from the flagship process. The Secretariat noted the lessons learned from the IAG would serve as valuable input to the intersessional consultation process on the proposed refinements to the format for national reporting. The Bureau recognized the important and positive role of the IAG in the process of development and launch of the Flagship Publication and agreed that members of the IAG could be invited to continue its work until May 2022. In this respect, the Bureau also agreed that the Secretariat would update Members of the

Forum on these matters, as per past practice, through relevant notifications on the ongoing intersessional activities related to MAR.

The Secretariat also updated the Bureau on its planned intersessional activities to consult with Members of the Forum, experts from CPF member organizations and stakeholders on preparing refinements to the format for voluntary national reporting for consideration of UNFF17, as reflected in its provisional agenda. In this respect, as per past practice, the Secretariat would gather inputs during the intersessional period, including by organizing an expert group meeting on this matter.

### **3. Other matters**

#### **a. Update on the recruitment of the Director of the UNFF Secretariat and the proposed upgrade of a P5 post to D1**

The Secretariat informed that a representative from DESA provided explanations on the latest status of the recruitment of the Director of the UNFFS at the D2 level during the ECOSOC Management Segment on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021. At this meeting, delegations were informed that the UN liquidity crisis had caused unexpected delays in the timely advertisement of the post of the Director. Nevertheless, this post was advertised before the end of last year. The follow up steps have been also taken and it was expected that the interview of the qualified candidates to be carried out in June and July 2021.

In response to Mr. Mahoney's inquiry about the background of the proposed upgrade of a P5 post to a D1 and lack of documents during the ECOSOC Management Segment on this matter, the Secretariat provided detailed explanations. It was mentioned that all background documents were provided since April 2021 to the Committee on Programme and Coordination, and subsequently to the ACBAQ as the relevant UN bodies for consideration of 2022 UN proposed programme and budget. In this respect, ECOSOC Management Segment was not the relevant body. Furthermore, the UNFFS remains an exception among nine divisions within the Department, without a D1 post in its organizational structure. This structural gap has resulted in numerous programmatic, administrative and managerial problems, and frequent temporary managerial arrangements and reliance on external human resources. In the past, this gap had been addressed by the secondment of D1 staff from other organizations or extrabudgetary resources. However, due to budgetary situation of those organizations and their structural reforms, such secondment ceased since 2007, and were no longer available/possible, even for a much more lower level post. All previous Directors of the UNFFS, as well as the Bureaus of the Forum have constantly tried to find a way to address this structural gap. The previous Director of the UNFFS included the addition of five posts, including a new D1 post in the PBI of the ECOSOC resolution 2015/33. All these posts were agreed upon, except the D1 due to its financial implications. The Bureau of UNFF14-UNFF15 also discussed informally this matter and took decisions to follow up on this matter. Bureau Chairs also brought this matter to the attention of the USG of DESA in several occasions. In light of these requests and to address this long-standing problem, the Department decided to address this gap in the most cost-effective manner by suggesting the upgrade of an existing P5 post in the UNFFS to D1.

#### **b. Update on the proposed China office for the GFFFN**

The Secretariat informed that there had been no new development or consultation since UNFF16 on this matter.

*The meeting finished at 10:20 am*