



**Opening Remarks by Ms. Bjørg Sandkjær  
UN Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination  
Twentieth Session of the UN Forum on Forests  
5 May 2025, 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. EDT  
Trusteeship Chamber, UNHQ, New York**

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of Mr. Li, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, it is my pleasure to address the twentieth session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF20) at the start of its work this week.

This session of the Forum is being organized at a turbulent time for people and the planet. Geopolitical tensions, inflation, increased prices of commodities and services, conflicts, and migration are threatening the welfare and livelihoods of many peoples and societies. High inflation unleashed an erosion of real income, and a global cost-of-living crisis has pushed millions into poverty and economic hardship. The current global economic slowdown cuts across both developed and developing countries. The United Nations is also facing an unprecedented liquidity crisis, impacting the scope and level of its delivery support to member states.

The world also remains vulnerable to disruptive shocks and slow-onset natural and man-made disasters. These result directly and indirectly from the ravaging effects of global warming, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and ecosystem degradation. This ultimately impacts food availability and the economic stability of communities dependent on forests. Efforts to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation, and the achievement of the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continue to be hampered by political instability, security threats, fragmented global forest governance, low political priority to forests, and weak financing and implementation arrangements.

These complex challenges are interconnected, across borders and all other divides, and can only be addressed by an integrated, coherent and well-designed policies that have multiplier effects on advancing goals both within and among countries.

**Dear Colleagues,**

In addressing these challenges, forests play a fundamental role. Forests are a foundation of health, vitality and life of our planet, providing enormous environmental, economic, and social benefits to all of us. Despite their undeniable benefits for a health environment, forests continue to be under threat. Every year, seven million hectares of natural forests are converted to other land uses.

There has been growing awareness and recognition by the international community of the role of forests in addressing many global challenges. At the Summit of the Future in September 2024, world leaders took important strides forward in the “Pact for the Future”, and highlighted the importance of protecting, conserving, and restoring nature and ecosystems, and the close interlinkages between forests, biodiversity, and climate change.

The outcomes of recent Conferences of Parties to the Rio Conventions and their follow up also provided additional avenues for further integration of forest-based actions and solutions into the Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement and the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

**Distinguished Delegates,**

We have five years left to turn our shared goals into reality, with a clear lesson in front of us. We must strengthen global cooperation on all fronts, now more than ever. A coherent approach is vital to effectively address financial, technical, and technological needs of countries through strengthening multilateralism, and in implementing forest-related commitments, including the outcomes of UNFF19 on the midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests and its High-Level Segment Declaration.

In these trouble times, the work of the Forum is more essential than ever as the Forum plays a critical role in our efforts to reinvigorate effective multilateralism on forests. The upcoming Fourth International Conference on

Financing for Development in Spain, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York, and the UN Climate Change Conference COP30 in Brazil will be a critical step to that end.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and a successful session.

Thank you.