

Opening Remarks by Mr. Ismail Belen

Chair of the Twentieth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

5 May 2025 – 10:00 a.m., Trusteeship Council Chamber, United Nations Headquarters

His Excellency Mr. Philemon Yang, President of the United Nations General Assembly,

**Ms. Bjørg Sandkjær, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination in the
Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations,**

Ms. Juliette Biao, Director of the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

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It is my great honor to welcome you all to the twentieth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

This Forum is unique. It is the only global intergovernmental platform with universal membership that focuses on all forest-related issues.

As the central part of the international arrangement on forests, this Forum brings together Member States, international and regional organizations, civil society, and the private sector.

Since its creation, the Forum has promoted political commitment to sustainable forest management. It has strengthened cooperation among countries and institutions, both within and beyond the system of the United Nations.

Since the Forest Principles were adopted in Rio in 1992, this Forum has achieved several important milestones. It was the first intergovernmental body to agree on global policy frameworks for forests—most notably the international forest instrument and the global strategic plan for forests, both adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In 2015, the Forum adopted a fifteen-year roadmap for the international arrangement on forests, with a midterm review in 2024 and a final review in 2030. Last year, during

the nineteenth session, the Forum successfully completed the midterm review and adopted an omnibus resolution and a high-level declaration. These outcomes now serve as a roadmap until 2030.

Since the nineteenth session, we have seen more global developments and forest-related commitments, including those in the Pact for the Future and the outcomes of the 2024 Conferences of the Parties to the Rio Conventions. These again show how important forests are to solving global challenges.

At the same time, the United Nations is facing a serious financial crisis. This affects all aspects of its work. In this context, I would like to highlight three priority actions.

First, forests and sustainable forest management must play a leading role in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, and poverty. Forest action also supports the achievement of the global goals on forests, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Global Biodiversity Framework adopted in Kunming and Montreal, and the land degradation neutrality targets.

Second, we need to invest in healthy forests. This includes more financing, new and creative approaches, support for science and technology, and capacity building. It also requires strong participation from forest owners, smallholders, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and young people.

Third, we must improve access to data, knowledge, and good practices. This means closing gaps in forest information and building stronger partnerships—especially with those who finance and support forest-related work.

I strongly believe that the decisions we make here—through consultation and cooperation—can inspire real change. Even a small contribution at this Forum can guide national policies and actions.

The United Nations Forum on Forests has a powerful and inclusive structure. It connects with governments through Permanent Missions in New York. It reaches national implementation through focal points in capitals. It represents all regions through the Vice-Chairs of the Bureau. It brings together global institutions through collaborative partnerships on forests (CPF). And it ensures that no one is left behind through the full engagement of Major Groups.

This Forum is not only a space for negotiation. It is a place for building trust, sharing knowledge, and strengthening global solidarity.

These meetings, under the United Nations, are moments when the global forest community comes together—to reconnect, reflect, and recommit.

As Chair of this session, and together with the Vice-Chairs of the Bureau, the Secretariat, and the United Nations family, I am pleased to welcome you once again. Please consider this Forum your platform. We are here to support you.

Before closing, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Vice-Chairs of the Bureau,

- For the Asia-Pacific Region, I thank Mr. Javad Momeni of Iran.
- For the African Region, I thank Mr. Abderrahim Houmy of Morocco.
- For the Latin American and Caribbean Region, I thank Mr. Andrés Napuri Pita of Peru.
- For the Eastern European Region, I thank Ms. Maria Sokolenko of the Russian Federation.
- For the Western European and Other States Group, I have had the honour of serving as Chair, representing the Republic of Türkiye.

I thank all Bureau members for their excellent cooperation, commitment, and collegial spirit. Sure, I also thank to Secretariat headed by Ms. Juliette Biao and the Secretary of UNFF Ms. Ziad Mahmassani for their wonderful works.

And I warmly greet all participants in this chamber, and those joining us online around the world.

I wish you all a productive, inspiring, and successful session.

Thank you.