

Video message by
Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General,
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
to the opening ceremony of 24th IUFRO World Congress
“Forests at the heart of the Post-2015 Development Agenda”
6 October 2014, Salt Lake City

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, I extend our deep appreciation to Professor Niels Elers Koch, Dr. John Parrotta and Dr. Richard Guldin and our hosts, the United States Forest Service, for their kind invitation to address you at the opening of the 24th International Union of Forests Research Organizations World Congress.

Here at the United Nations Headquarters, the Member States are embarking on a year of negotiations that will be crucial in shaping our common development agenda for the next 15 years.

Throughout 2014, an Open Working Group of the United Nations General Assembly, established at Rio+20, worked to agree on Sustainable Development Goals. This has galvanized the global community to think creatively on how to advance a more sustainable development path for all. Throughout, forests have been a key element in this discourse.

Forests are addressed under two of the proposed Sustainable Development Goals. Under goal (6) on water and sanitation, and under goal (15) on terrestrial ecosystems. In particular, the proposed goal on terrestrial ecosystems highlights the need for global action to implement sustainable forest management, while at the same time stressing the need for resource mobilization and other means of implementation. In addition, both goals pay attention to the multiple functions of forests, especially in their vital role as watersheds. These references to forests should be viewed as a major

achievement for the international forest community, including the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, of which IUFRO is an active member.

I believe that these policy debates are highly relevant to you in the scientific and research community.

Member States of the United Nations continue to stress the need for solid scientific advice and research to reinforce policy discussions. From the 2012 Rio+20 outcome, to the recently released report of the Independent Assessment of the International Arrangement on Forests, there have been numerous calls to strengthen the science-policy interface with regard to sustainable development and to forests.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda is well underway. In one-year's time, the United Nations is expected to launch a transformative development agenda that will make a difference to the world's people, and in our shared undertaking to achieve a sustainable future.

But the challenges are immense and compounded by new and spreading crises in a global arena of competing priorities and demands.

Sustainable development – in its three interrelated dimensions – is the only path to fully understanding how interwoven our lives, economies and environments are. This understanding therefore requires an integrated, cross-sectoral approach that can balance complex trade-offs among competing priorities.

One example can be found in the trade-offs we face in balancing forests, agriculture, and climate change priorities. Here, scientific input can help foster informed decision-making on cross-sectoral strategies. We need your help in identifying the most optimal policies for sustainable development.

As you know, the eleventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests in May 2015, will make an important decision on the future of the current International Arrangement on Forests. This convergence of both timing and issues within various intergovernmental processes, provides the forest community with a tremendous

strategic opportunity: to integrate the rich spectrum of forests' contributions to the broader post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

The current International Arrangement on Forests has made significant achievements in raising the profile of forests. Many of these achievements have been highlighted in the recently released report of the Independent Assessment of the International Arrangement on Forests.

As we envision the future of this Arrangement, the key priorities of increasing political commitment, catalyzing implementation of sustainable forest management and mobilizing resources for sustainable forest management, remain.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is working hard to facilitate informed decision-making by Member States on the future of forests and sustainable development in a post-2015 era. We will work closely with partners such as the International Union of Forest Research Organizations to raise the profile of forests in the deliberations.

Lastly, to end on a personal note, the nexus between forests, communities and science is something that has shaped both my personal and professional background. I have had the privilege of working on forest issues, ranging from development cooperation projects, to research on plant genetic resources.

I am therefore aware that long before sustainability became a buzzword, foresters and forest scientists were grappling with balancing silviculture needs with the needs of local communities. I am confident that your deliberations will plant the seeds for innovative, forest-based solutions for a greener, more sustainable future.

Thank you.