

Message from the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat

Expert Level Meeting for the preparation of the Extraordinary Ministerial Conference

Cuenca, Spain, 6 –7 November 2014

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to express the sincere appreciation of the United Nations Forum on Forests – UNFF Secretariat, for your kind invitation to this important meeting. We follow our regional partners very closely and Forest Europe is certainly going through a very important process. In this regard, I would like to specially thank the Liaison Office in Madrid for organizing this meeting in the beautiful city of Cuenca, and I am positive that our surroundings will serve as inspiration during the next few days; we also appreciate that Forest Europe answered our voluntary questionnaire; this will contribute to the elaboration of UNFF11's report on enhanced cooperation.

It is fortunate that we are gathered here to prepare the next FOREST EUROPE Extraordinary Ministerial Conference after forests received significant deserved attention in the discussions of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. As you know, the proposed SDGs show the role sustainable forest management - SFM - may play in an effective and stronger post-2015 development agenda. Forests are addressed directly under SDG6 and SDG15, which mentions forests in its title; the pertinent targets are 15.2, related to SFM and 15.b, which deals with means of implementation for SFM. Moreover, targets 6.6 and 15.1 show the multiple functions of forests, in particular, regarding water supply. This is a very important development and will certainly serve as input for our deliberations.

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the UNFF front, as you are well aware the time has come to evaluate and review the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF). The second meeting of the Ad Hoc Expert Group – AHEG – on the IAF, which will gather next January in New York, will count on high-quality substantive input to serve as the basis for discussions. AHEG1, which took place earlier this year in Nairobi, was the venue for a comprehensive, in-depth and honest exchange of ideas; since then, the Independent Assessment of the International Arrangement on Forests, conducted as per the mandate of the tenth session of the Forum, by a group of independent consultants representing each of the United Nations' regional groups, provides us with careful analysis and proposals which constitute most valuable food for thought. The report is available at the UNFF website.

The key achievements of the current IAF were highlighted on the Independent Assessment, as well as the areas for improvement. Suggestions and recommendations for the

future were presented. Of the ten options for the way forward provided in the report, the four considered the most feasible and suitable maintain the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs – DESA – as the basis for the Arrangement.

The regional component of the current IAF is maintained and strengthened among the various possibilities for the future. One of the building blocks considered by the Independent Assessment entertains the holding of biennial regional meetings, with broad participation, including all relevant stakeholders, and with a thematic context, such as temperate, boreal and tropical forest issues, as well as specific matters related to Small Island Developing States and Low Forest Cover Countries. The consultants clearly believe that the regional and sub-regional entities are an integral part of a successful and strengthened IAF.

As you see, the discussions and outcome of AHEG1, as well as the IAF Independent Assessment, have provided us with a strong and solid basis to discuss the way forward regarding the International Arrangement on Forests. We are positive that AHEG2 will be an excellent opportunity to continue the consensus building exercise for UNFF11 and encourage you to attend.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2015 will be a fundamental year for forests for a number of reasons, one of them being the results of the European Ministerial Conference. The UNFF Secretariat therefore wishes our Forest Europe partners very fruitful discussions, which will hopefully lead to an even brighter role to be played by Sustainable Forest Management in this continent.

Thank you.