

Opening Remarks for AHEG Co-Chair

AHEG2 – 12 January 2015

Minister Noel Messone, Chair of the UNFF11 Bureau (or Ambassador Bibalou),

Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General of DESA,

Mr. Manoel Sobral Filho, UNFF Director,

Distinguished Experts,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of my fellow co-chair and on my own behalf, I would like to welcome you to the second meeting of the open-ended intergovernmental ad hoc expert group (AHEG2) on the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF).

You are very well aware that the UNFF11, according to provisions of several resolutions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), has to review the effectiveness of the IAF and decide on the future of the IAF beyond 2015.

Just to remind, the IAF basically refers to the UNFF as an intergovernmental body, its member states acting individually or collectively, the UNFF Secretariat, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), major groups and regional entities, the Forest Instrument and its Global Objectives on Forests (GOFs), financing of sustainable forest management, implementation of the decisions of the Forum, and the interconnections of the IAF with the broader issues of sustainable development.

At its tenth session in Istanbul in April 2013, the Forum recognized the need for thorough preparations for an informed decision of UNFF11 on the future of the IAF and, therefore, agreed on intensive intersessional activities to be undertaken in the period between UNFF10 and UNFF11. These intersessional activities included soliciting the views of all stakeholders on the future of the IAF, conducting an independent assessment of the IAF and establishment of the AHEG on the IAF to meet twice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The views submitted by stakeholders were overwhelming and profoundly honest. The first set of submissions was reviewed during AHEG1, which met last February in Nairobi. The discussions during that meeting made it clear that UNFF has had important achievements since its inception and is making a strong impression; however, there is room for change and improvement. Indeed, the discussion during AHEG1 set a very positive tone for the intersessional activities and the ways in which the members of the Forum would like to see the future IAF. The discussions were rich and full of productive ideas; in particular, in regard to proposals to address the weaknesses and improve the work of the future IAF.

The IAF Independent Assessment report also provided another important input that was finalized and submitted on time. This report is the result of intensive work of a group of independent consultants representing each of the United Nations' regional groups, whose work was facilitated by the two Bureau appointed co-facilitators. Their report, which was finalized and released in September 2014, contains an assessment of the performance and effectiveness of the various components of the current IAF, considers a full range of options for the future IAF, and suggests preferred options for the post-2015 IAF. Later this morning, the members of the independent assessment team will present their findings and the recommendations contained in this report.

In addition to the first round of views by countries and stakeholders on the IAF which were presented to AHEG1, upon the decision of the UNFF11 Bureau, a second round of views was also solicited on the future of the IAF. The compilation of these views is submitted to this meeting and is available at the UNFF website. I would also like to refer to the recent Chinese Country-Led Initiative (CLI) which was held last October in Beijing. Some of you were present at that important event and are therefore aware of its results. CLIs, as well as other stakeholder-led activities held in support of the work of the Forum, have been fundamental for furthering the work of the UNFF, and the CLI in Beijing was no different.

Dear Colleagues,

As you see, extensive intersessional activities were carried out successfully for nearly the last two years, involving various stakeholders, including government representatives, experts, individual consultants and international organizations, as well as civil societies. As a result, several suggestions have been made on what should constitute the future IAF, how it should work, what should be the future direction, function, format and mandate of the UNFF, UNFFS, and the CPF, and how implementation and financing aspects of SFM, as well as involvement of regional components and major groups should be strengthened in the future arrangement.

This AHEG is the best opportunity to review the proposed actions and options, to answer comments and questions, and to provide further information on the implications of some of the proposed actions and options, in particular, in the IAF report. Fortunately, we have all members of the independent assessment team present at this meeting, who will be here for the entire week. At this meeting, we should also provide our views on what should be included in the resolution of UNFF11 on the future of the IAF.

We should use this meeting to make up our minds as clearly as possible about the future of the IAF through engaging in a productive and positive discussion to narrow down the actions and options, and to identify the most feasible, efficient and politically viable actions and options for the post-2015 IAF. As AHEG Co-Chairs, we assure you that we spare no effort to achieve this objective.

Distinguished Experts,

The negotiation on the post-2015 development agenda also begins soon. The UN Secretary-General synthesis report was released and the modality resolution for the September 2015 General Assembly Summit on Sustainable Development (known as the post-2015 development agenda) was adopted last month. One major input to this process is the result of the work of the Open Working Group of the GA on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Forests are now prominently featured in the proposed SDGs. As a result of the extensive work of many stakeholders, in particular, member states of the UNFF, UNFF Secretariat and other members of the CPF, forests are addressed directly under two SDGs (SDG6 and SDG15), with four concrete targets. This is a significant development, and will certainly be an element that should be integrated in designing the future IAF.

Next week here in New York, the first of the proposed seven sessions to negotiate the outcome for the September 2015 Summit will take place. Consultations on the content of the outcome of the September Summit on three important issues of the Declaration of the Summit, SDGs and targets, and means of implementation and global partnership, will happen before UNFF11, and one session after the Forum's meeting on the follow-up and review.

In light of the venue and timing of this meeting, we wish to stress that a strong outcome of AHEG2 would pave the way for a solid outcome of UNFF11 on the future IAF, and this subsequently would lead to higher placement of forests in the post-2015 development agenda. We should take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity, take a proactive role and integrate and elevate forests at the core of the post-2015 development agenda and the fight against climate change. We cannot afford to lose this tremendous opportunity.

Let's work together toward this objective, let's be united at this critical time, and let's provide the best recommendations on the future of the multilateral institutions and policies on forests to UNFF11.

Thank you.