

Statement from the UNECE/FAO Workshop on Forests and
SDGs: views from experts from the UNECE Region



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Mr. Co-Chair,

Excellencies,

Forest Friends,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you the outcome of the Expert Workshop on Forests and SDGs that was held on 22 and 23 January, 2014, in Geneva. The workshop was organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Forestry and Timber Section in Geneva.

Forest experts from across the UNECE region, from governments, international organizations and stakeholders attended the workshop. For two days, experts discussed the importance of forests in sustainable development and, thus, the need to be well represented in the SDGs considering different options.

Just as we have heard throughout this session, participants at the workshop were convinced that forests play an essential role in sustainable development, the green economy and poverty eradication. We believe that forests and trees are crucial to sustainable development in their own right, in addition to being an integral part of a wide range of other priority areas for the SDGs. Sustainable forest management is at the heart of tackling challenges within the forest sector, and, at the same time, it is a way of: improving food security, water quality, and health; transitioning towards a green economy; combating climate change; improving disaster prevention; promoting sustainable production and consumption patterns by providing sustainable products and materials; as well as, promoting gender equality, good governance and the rule of law.

Forests have been instrumental to sustainable development for a long time. Actually, the concept of sustainability was first coined in forestry science some 300 years ago. Throughout the sustainable development discourse within the UN, forests have always played a key role. As a result, we already have clear objectives and targets on forests to build upon, such as the MDG 7, the Global Objectives on Forests developed in the context of the United Nations Forum on Forests and the Aichi-targets developed within the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Thanks to their high environmental and economic values, forests are a resource that is well monitored and assessed. International organizations and regional processes, such as FAO, at the global level, and the UNECE and FOREST EUROPE, at the regional level, regularly monitor the state of our forests. It is important to keep in mind that we already have a good set of forest-related indicators when developing targets, since measurability on the ground is one key to success.

This session of the Open Working Group on the SDGs is the last of a string of thematically focused sessions carried out over the past year. Now starts the difficult task of fitting all these interlinked issues together and deciding on the architecture for SDGs. During our workshop, we discussed the pros and cons of the different options for including forests in the SDGs, i.e. a stand-alone goal on forest; integrating forests under a broader goal such as natural resources or landscapes; or spreading forest targets over several goals.

The expert workshop concluded that the overall architecture of the SDGs is a political decision and all we ask is that you acknowledge the interconnectivity, the linkages to many sectors, and the multi-

functionality of forests when designing the goals and targets. Let's remember that 1.6 billion people depend on forests, that these forests cover one third of the global land area, contain 80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity and store more carbon than does the atmosphere.

The workshop discussed many different possible targets. These are forest-related targets that could be used in whichever SDG-architecture you decide upon. All of these targets are clearly linked to the contribution that sustainably managed forests and trees make to sustainable development and to the livelihoods of people that depend on them for income and well-being.

The illustrative targets identified are universal and achievable and have been grouped under three headings.

A. Social and cultural benefits from forests and trees are improved

1. Income and employment from forests and trees in rural areas are increased
2. Rights, tenure and governance of forests are strengthened
3. Food security and the nutritional contribution of forests and trees are enhanced

B. Resilience and ecosystem benefits of forests are enhanced

4. Forest resources sustainably managed and enhanced (quantity and quality)
5. Biodiversity of forests is conserved and improved
6. Water quantity and quality contribution of forests is enhanced
7. Climate resilience and mitigation contribution of forests is strengthened

C. Green economy contribution of forests and trees is increased

8. Energy from forest resources is increased, safe and sustainable
9. Efficiency of forest resource use is increased
10. Investment in, and use of, products from sustainably managed forests is increased

In conclusion, the message of the expert meeting is that there is a profound and mutually supportive relationship between forests and SDGs. Forests are essential to SDGs and SDGs are essential for forests. Well formulated forest targets will ensure that forests will enhance their role in sustaining people's livelihoods and the environment. As the process goes forward, forest experts are willing to provide further inputs; for example, on possible indicators.

I thank you for your attention.