

UNFF

Preparations for First Forest Forum

The organisational session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) met in New York on 12 February 2001, to develop the Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) in advance of the first UNFF meeting in June 2001. The aim of the Meeting was to set the framework for the discussions to be held in June. Items on the agenda included the election of the UNFF Bureau, organisational matters, consideration of all options and proposals for the location of the UNFF secretariat, and progress towards the establishment of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF). The supporting CPF would focus more on implementation of the Programme of Action (POA) as proposed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF).

The one-day organisational session was followed by four days of informal consultations, from 13-16 February, which dealt with the UNFF's multi-year programme of work.

Background

On 18 October 2000, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted resolution E/2000/L.32, outlining an international arrangement on forests and establishing the UNFF as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC (see *Environmental Policy & Law*, Vol. 30, No. 6 at page 274), with the goal of promoting internationally agreed actions on forests at the national, regional and global levels.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests preceded the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, established in 1995 by the CSD to continue the intergovernmental forest policy dialogue. During its two-year mandate, the IPF developed some 150 negotiated proposals for action on issues relating to sustainable forest management (SFM). However, delegates could not agree on a few major issues, including financial assistance and trade-related matters, and whether to begin negotiations on a global forest convention. The fifth session of the CSD, in April 1997, and the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS), in June 1997, endorsed the IPF's outcome and recommended a continuation of the intergovernmental policy dialogue on forests. Subsequently, ECOSOC established the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests to continue this work under the auspices of the CSD.

Organisational Session

UNFF Bureau: The session elected the Bureau and agreed to the duration of Bureau membership. Ambassador Mubarak Hussein Rahmtalla (Sudan) was elected UNFF Chair. Ambassador Shamat Hidayat (Indonesia), Alexey Kormienko (Russian Federation), Gustavo Suarez de Freitas (Peru) and Knut Oistad (Norway) were elected Vice-Chairs. Knut Oistad was also appointed Rapporteur.

The EU called for yearly election of Bureau members; retaining the same Bureau for the first and second years; and rotating chairmanship. The G-77/China supported annual rotation of the Bureau members to allow for equal regional representation during the first five years. These matters were addressed again later, in the course of the informal consultations through bilateral and informal discussions.

On 16 February, delegates adopted a proposal deciding that: 1) Following the closure of a regular session the Forum will hold the first meeting of its subsequent regular session, with the sole purpose of electing the Chair and other Bureau members. 2) The members of the Bureau shall hold office for a term of one year. 3) Provisions of paragraph 5 of ECOSOC resolution 2000/35 (regarding travel expenses) apply only to the substantive part of the Forum's sessions.

Broad consensus was reached on: the role of the CPF; commitment to implement the Plan of Action, focusing on action, targets, timetables, actors and financial provisions; issues to be addressed in future – use of valuation and criteria and indicators; forestry reporting requirements to be streamlined; the importance of multi-stakeholder dialogue; and raising the profile of forests in the political arena.

However, there was no clear consensus on all elements for the Organisational Session. In particular, the provision for *ad hoc* expert groups linked to CPF activities; the outcome of the UNFF regarding monitoring and assessment; linking international trade with sound forest management and certifications systems; high-level links to Earth Summit 2002; and timing of debate around a Forest Convention.

Secretariat: The most contentious topic during the organisational session was the secretariat's location. Costa Rica, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Switzerland had all submitted offers to host the Secretariat. Bilateral negotiations on the topic continued throughout the week to ensure the issue would not go to a vote and thus set a hostile tone for the UNFF at its first meeting. A face-saving compromise was achieved, linking the secretariat's location with the venues for the UNFF meetings. The UNFF Secretariat will be in New York. The first and fifth substantive session of the UNFF will take place in New York and the three intervening sessions in Switzerland (Geneva) and Costa Rica (San José). Any ministerial segment held between these sessions would take place in San José. The United States delegation noted that the venues were not on a regional basis, and expressed concern that this would inhibit the involvement of local experts.

Earth Summit 2002: The UNFF Secretariat proposed

holding a high-level segment in 2002 in order to gain ministers' endorsement of the POA to prepare a message for the Rio+10 Summit. Although many delegations approved this proposal, several others were not supportive. While Norway supported the proposal, Costa Rica, the US and New Zealand preferred holding the high-level meeting in 2003 to avoid an already full international agenda in 2002.

Forest Convention: Some delegations supported establishing a working group on legal arrangements early in the UNFF programme. Others felt that the discussion concerning a convention should be avoided initially to prevent distracting delegates from more pressing issues.

Collaborative Partnership on Forests: Broad consensus was reached on the role of the CPF. Most delegations agreed that the CPF should be a high-level partnership, both informal and of limited size. The FAO proposed that the CPF be limited to 12 international forest-related organisations, but relevant international and regional institutions, non-governmental organisations and the private sector could also be involved in specific programmes, expert meetings and consultations.

Informal Consultations

During the informal consultations, delegates addressed seven aspects of the MYPOW. These related to:

- Facilitation and promotion of implementation.
- Monitoring, assessment and reporting.

- Enhancing cooperation and policy and programme coordination.
- Fostering international and cross-sectoral cooperation.
- Fostering a common understanding of sustainable forest management and addressing forest policy issues and emerging areas.
- Strengthening political commitment.
- Review of UNFF to take place at the fifth substantive session.

Summary of Informal Consultations

The Chair noted that the Summary was intended to facilitate the Secretariat's drafting of the Secretary-General's report. Many delegates opposed text stating that consensus had been reached on many issues, noting that it was erroneous in the context of a non-negotiating forum. However, the Chair pointed out that the final Chair's summary would not commit anyone to a specific course of action and invited comments for a revised Chair's summary.

At the resumed organisational session on the afternoon of the final day, it was announced that for the Secretary-General's report for UNFF-1, two documents would be produced, one which addresses the MYPOW and another which addresses the POA. An informal briefing on the documents will be organised prior to UNFF-1.

