

The United Nations Forum on Forests, UNFF

A New Organization in the UN System

Background

In February 2000, the Ad-Hoc Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) concluded its deliberations and issued its final report. In this report, the IFF recommended that, at its 8th session in April/May 2000, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) should endorse the establishment of an International Arrangement on Forests (IAOF) by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The IFF recommended that this arrangement should include the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF), as well as a Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) of the relevant organizations of the UN system and international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments. The CSD adopted the report of the IFF and called upon ECOSOC to establish the IAOF. On 18 October 2000, ECOSOC adopted resolution E/2000/L.32*, establishing the IAOF.

The objective of the IAOF is "to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end." The arrangement should "provide a coherent, transparent and participatory global framework for policy implementation, coordination and development" and promote the implementation of forest-related decisions of the international forest regime. In carrying out principal functions of the arrangement, the work should be based on the Rio Declaration, the Forest Principles, Chapter 11 of Agenda 21 and the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action.

It is unique that within the UN system a new organization, the UNFF, has been approved and supports forestry substantially. The UNFF acts on the same level as the CSD and reports, similarly as CSD, directly to ECOSOC, which, in turn, reports to the General Assembly of the UN. UNFF's predecessors, IPF and later IFF, which were initiated in the UNCED process, had to report to CSD, and, thus, were hierarchically below CSD.

For the working modalities of the UNFF, the IFF Report proposed to establish a multi-year programme of work (MYPOW), drawing on the elements reflected in the aforementioned UNCED decisions and the IPF/IFF Proposals for

Action. It is envisaged that the UNFF should adopt its programme of work at its first substantive session and develop a plan of action for the implementation of the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action.

Multi-year programme of work

The government-led Initiative: "Shaping the Programme of Work for the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)" was formed and steered by eight countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria and Germany. The meeting took place from 27 November to 1 December 2000 in Bonn, Germany. IUFRO contributed to this through its President and its Secretary.

The Initiative worked in close collaboration with the extant IFF Secretariat and the international organizations and secretariats of global instruments which formed the high-level Informal Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests (ITFF). FAO, CIFOR, but not IUFRO were represented in this Task Force, which will be involved in the establishment of the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) consisting of UNFF and CPF. It is supposed that the CPF will become more or less the follow-up of the ITFF. It would be important for IUFRO to get the chance to be a member.

The Eight-Country Initiative aimed at assisting the international community in developing the programme of work for the UNFF and its concept and basic elements. The MYPOW of the UNFF is based on the ECOSOC decisions (six functions, see (a) to (f)) with detailed amendments by the Report of the Expert Consultation of the Eight-Country Initiative. Please find details of the Report of the Expert Consultation in the form of hard copies at the IUFRO Secretariat; the full details of the UNFF process are at <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/forests.htm>

(a) Facilitate and promote the **implementation** of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action as well as other actions which may be agreed upon, including national forest programmes and other integrated programmes relevant to forests; catalyze, mobilize and generate financial resources; and mobilize and channel technical and scientific resources

to this end, also by taking steps towards the broadening and development of mechanisms and/or further initiatives to enhance international cooperation;

(b) Provide a **forum** for continued policy development and dialogue among Governments, which would involve international organizations and other interested parties, including major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, to foster a common understanding of sustainable forest management and to address forest issues and emerging areas of priority concern in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner;

(c) Enhance **cooperation** as well as policy and programme coordination on forest-related issues among relevant international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments, as well as contribute to synergies among them, including coordination among donors;

(d) Foster **international cooperation**, including North-South and public-private partnerships, as well as cross-sectoral cooperation at the national, regional and global levels;

(e) Monitor and **assess progress** at the national, regional and global levels through reporting by Governments, as well as by regional and international organizations, institutions and instruments, and on this basis consider future actions needed; and

(f) Strengthen **political commitment** to the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests through: ministerial engagement; developing ways to liaise with the governing bodies of international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments; and the promotion of action-oriented dialogue and policy formulation related to forests.

One of the most important results of the MYPOW proposal was mentioning IUFRO under function (e) Monitoring and assessment, where it reads as follows: "...bring together and harmonize already existing elements such as the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment, IUCN protected areas monitoring system and the Global Information Service currently developed by IUFRO and be linked to reporting systems of other forest-related instruments".

This government-led Initiative was transparent and open to all interested countries, as well as to forest-related in-

ternational organizations and global instruments such as NGOs.

Establishment of the UNFF Bureau

From 13 to 16 February, several meetings concerning the organization of UNFF were held in New York.

Organizational Meeting of the UNFF

The Organizational meeting decided to locate the UNFF Secretariat in New York and to hold the first and the fifth meeting of UNFF in New York, two meetings in Geneva and one in Costa Rica. It also decided to elect a new Bureau every year, along the lines adopted by the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The current Chairman of the UNFF is Ambassador Mubarak Rahmtalla of Sudan and the Vice-chairs are Slamet Hidayat (Indonesia), Knut

Oistad (Norway), Gustavo Suarez de Freitas (Peru) and Alexey Kornienko (Russia). Furthermore, at the organizational meeting, the ITFF presented a Statement of Intent to form the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF).

Informal Consultations on the UNFF MYPOW

A common view shared by delegations was that the UNFF's major tasks include facilitating the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action as well as monitoring progress in the implementation.

The first substantive session of the UNFF is scheduled to take place on 11-22 June 2001, in New York. Its agenda items include, inter alia, the MYPOW and the POA as well as the initiation of the UNFF's work with the CPF.

ITFF/CPF: The latest meeting of the informal, high-level Interagency Task Force on Forests (ITFF) was held on 11 February 2001 in New York. The summary report of this meeting is available on the website, under the "Interagency Co-operation: ITFF" at: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/iffiac.htm>. The members of the ITFF have initiated the process to form the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) by the first substantive session of the UNFF. The Statement of Intent to form the CPF, presented by Mr. Hosny El-Lakany, FAO, on behalf of all the ITFF members, is also available on the above mentioned website address. *The next ITFF meeting is scheduled for 4-5 April 2001, at FAO, in Rome.*

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