

XII World Forestry Congress

FINAL STATEMENT

Forests, source of life

“The subject of forests is related to the entire range of environmental and developmental issues and opportunities ...”
(United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992)

Forests are a source of life: for the planet, and for its people.

Québec, Canada
September 28th, 2003

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Forests are a source of life: for the planet, and for its people.

All societies are dependent on forests and trees, and have responsibilities for biodiversity, climate regulation, clean air, soil and water conservation, food security, wood and non wood products, energy services, medicines, cultural values.

The Congress is convinced that the needs of the planet and its people can be harmonized, and that forests have enormous potential to make a vital contribution to environmental security, poverty alleviation, social justice, enhancement of human well-being, equity for present and future generations.

The Congress is impressed by the notable progress towards this end by development of principles and practice, concepts and tools; within global and regional treaties and national programmes; through varied partnerships among governments, international organizations, corporations, and non-governmental organizations; and in a variety of activities at the local level, notably those involving communities in ownership, decision-making and management, increasing the scope for enhancing their livelihoods.

At the same time, the Congress is deeply disturbed that permanent forest loss and degradation, largely due to activities outside the forest sector, continue at an alarming level. If current threats to forests continue, all human life will suffer. People in countries with low forest cover, indigenous peoples and local communities are particularly vulnerable. There is a need to address the widening gap between present trends and the potential of forests to contribute to the societal agenda, given increasing demand for forest products and services.

By harmonizing the needs of people and of the planet for forests, the world can progress along the path of sustainable development. But this harmonization cannot be achieved by the forest community alone. Bridges must be built with other sectors of society and a variety of actors.

The Congress calls on everyone for urgent and deep commitment to sustain this long-term process.

We envision a future with:

SOCIAL JUSTICE, where poverty is alleviated, livelihoods sustained, food and fuelwood secured, tenure rights and ownership recognized, and access to resources assured; where rights and benefits for forest workers are enhanced, gender equity is attained, inter-generational equity is pursued, and where access to education, training and health services is guaranteed, traditional knowledge is respected, and peace prevails.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS, where the full value of renewable and environmentally friendly forest products and services is recognized and leads to a flow of benefits, where sustainable forest management is profitable, where compensation mechanisms are established, and where the forest products industry operates competitively.

HEALTHY FORESTS which supply the full spectrum of products and services whilst conserving soils, maintaining biodiversity, regulating climate, sequestering carbon; where forest fragmentation is decreasing, deforestation is reduced, degradation is halted, and forest cover is increasing.

RESPONSIBLE USE, where forest resources are efficiently used and processed, and where consumption is sustainable.

And where:

GOVERNANCE is participatory, transparent and accountable; management and decision-making are decentralized, people are empowered, and partnerships flourish.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL DELIBERATIONS on forests have advanced to action.

RESEARCH, EDUCATION and CAPACITY BUILDING foster better understanding: of forest benefits and dynamics, of the complex relationship between ecosystems and human well-being, and of the impacts of human activities and management on forests.

Congress participants are determined to accelerate progress in closing the gap between the present situation and the long-term vision outlined above. This is in the collective interest of all. We recognize that forests exist within larger landscapes, are vitally connected to other sectors, and that they cannot be treated as enclaves in an interdependent biosphere.

To realize this vision, Congress participants highlight the following prerequisites:

- sustained political commitment and adequate financing
- a strong, responsible forest sector
- bridges with other actors and sectors
- sustained and more effective international cooperation
- policies based on best available science and information
- competencies to address issues of complexity and multiple objectives
- recognition of the considerable capital of culture, knowledge and good practice of indigenous peoples and local communities
- management of forests and trees at local and regional scales, interfacing with human settlements, agroforestry systems, non-wood forest resources and other natural resources systems

Congress participants commit themselves, and urge the world community, to actively pursue the above prerequisites and to accelerate progress through promotion of the following strategies and actions:

POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL and GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORKS

- Formulate and enforce legislation that relates to sustainable forest management.
- Recognize and respect the rights of owners, indigenous peoples, users and workers; and protect cultural values.
- Establish effective governance arrangements for ensuring meaningful participation and equitable sharing of benefits, and for facilitating a diversity of models conferring tenure and access to resources reflecting local context.
- Develop forest policies and implement programs to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in coherence and synergy with policies of related sectors.
- Encourage positive incentives and discontinue incentives that are impediments.

PARTNERSHIPS

- Draw upon the energy and talent of youth in pursuing sustainable forest management.
- Encourage collaborative partnerships involving women, forest owners, indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations, local communities, industry and public agencies.
- Foster active international and regional partnerships, including those between public and private institutions.

RESEARCH, EDUCATION and CAPACITY BUILDING

- Implement comprehensive education and extension programs designed to promote innovation at all levels and strengthen positive behaviour and attitudes toward forests.
- Reform education curricula to address inter-disciplinary dimensions, as well as global and regional considerations.
- Realize the potential synergy between traditional and scientific knowledge.
- Increase investment in research, dissemination of information, and learning processes that underpin all these strategies.

MANAGEMENT

- Develop and disseminate methodologies for assessing, reporting and managing the complete array of forest products.
- Promote the reconciliation of uses and activities for adding value to forest goods and services.
- Improve watershed management, intensify forest landscape restoration and rehabilitation activities: to support livelihoods, increase forest cover, enhance biological diversity and functionality, and minimize the impact of invasive alien species.
- Promote planted forests and planting of trees outside forest systems, including in urban areas, which make a contribution to sustainable development.
- Prevent, manage and combat forest fires, and restore forestlands as appropriate.

MONITORING

- Foster mutual recognition of criteria and indicator processes and certification schemes, which include social, cultural, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable forest management.
- Develop tools for better monitoring, assessing and reporting on the state of forests and on achieving the balance between the needs of people and the planet.

Congress participants resolve to pursue the above vision and strategies with renewed vigour and commitment to ensure that forests make a strong contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed targets.

The Congress invites all governments, related agencies, professional organizations, private companies and cooperatives, communities and individuals to urgently, and with full commitment, pursue the vision and strategies of this Statement. The Congress also requests that they promote these strategies with related professional communities and organizations in other sectors, in order to consolidate resources and efforts in realizing these goals.

The Congress requests FAO to present an assessment of progress on the strategies outlined in this Statement to the XIII World Forestry Congress and, in the interim, promote the statement through other relevant fora.

The Congress expresses its sincere appreciation and gratitude to Natural Resources Canada and to Ministère des Ressources naturelles, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec, who together have formed the Host Institution, as well as to FAO and all the people and organizations who have made this Congress possible.

The Congress invites Canada to promote this Statement to relevant bodies, in order to achieve the commitment required at all levels for pursuing this vision.

28 September 2003

The XII World Forestry Congress held from 21 to 28 September 2003 in Québec, Canada, attracted 4,061 participants from more than 140 countries. The participants, representing a cross-section of society concerned with forests, included individuals from rural communities, private forest owners, labour, indigenous peoples, youth, industry, environmental and other non-governmental organizations, scientific and academic community, various levels of government and international organizations. A wide spectrum of issues was considered in the context of the Congress theme, *Forests, source of life*, and under three Program Areas: *Forests for People*; *Forests for the Planet*; and *People and Forests in Harmony*. This final statement represents the views of the Congress, identifies areas of priority concern, and is intended to encourage decisions and action by those involved with various aspects of forests and forestry, and in other related sectors.