

**Forests in a Changing Environment:**  
*Pan-European contributions in support of the preparations for UNFF8*

Statement by the UNFF Secretariat  
Koli, Finland  
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Mr. State Secretary, Mr. Chair, Distinguished Experts, Dear Colleagues,

It is a real pleasure for me to make some remarks on behalf of the UNFF Secretariat, and to congratulate the Government of Finland for organizing this workshop at a moment when the discussion on “Forests in a Changing Environment” could not be more opportune. 2007 was a crucial year for forests, with a number of remarkable developments, from adopting the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests, to the Bali Action Plan, to mention just a few. You would agree with me that the major agreements of 2007 are not an end in themselves, but rather, opened new avenues and set new challenges for the international community.

UNFF will have very important tasks to accomplish at its next session. The Forum will discuss one of the most difficult issues of sustainable forest management - the means of implementation - and will consider a voluntary global financial mechanism/portfolio approach/forest financing framework. But as an equally important task, it will consider “Forests in a changing environment”, which encompasses issues related to climate change, biodiversity, deforestation and desertification. In addition, the Forum will exercise its main task, which is, “*At each session, ... a discussion on the achievement of the global objectives on forests and the implementation of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests*”. UNFF8 will be the first opportunity for the global forest community to review to what extent the world of forests and the forests of the world became different as a result of the NLBI, and this, undoubtedly, is a challenge in itself.

To illustrate how important the issue of “Forests in a changing environment” is, it is enough to mention some important decisions by the Rio Conventions. We all are aware of, and the background documents for this workshop superbly explain, the relevance of these decisions. Decision 3 of COP8 of the UNCCD on its 10-year strategy, Decision 1 and 2 of COP13 of the UNFCCC on the Bali Action Plan and on REDD, and Decision 5 of COP9 of the CBD on forest biodiversity directly address forest issues, and offer opportunities, sometimes explicitly call for, enhanced cooperation between processes and instruments. It is clear from the timetables of the various processes that UNFF8 will be a unique, and perhaps the only opportunity for the Forum to provide direct input to the implementation of those decisions.

Having said this, some burning questions may arise that would need careful consideration prior to and during the eighth session. The first question could be:

*What is the role of the UNFF and the Non-Legally Binding Instrument in advancing the work on climate change, biodiversity and deforestation?*

I am confident that the discussions ahead will reinforce commonly-voiced opinions on the most urgent issues affecting forest policy and management. They can add tremendous value if we

consider that the NLBI is a rich set of recommended measures and actions aimed at SFM, but it does not spell out explicitly how these measures could contribute to addressing the issues of climate change, biodiversity or desertification. It seems appropriate to establish these clear links, and perhaps further enrich the concepts included in the NLBI, by addressing the emerging challenges. UNFF8 will provide a unique opportunity for the Forum to develop a “forest community’s response” to these challenges, which are being considered by several other fora, obviously from different perspectives.

Consideration of ways of linking the outcome of the discussions to the NLBI and the MYPOW, thereby developing a method for keeping them evolving and dynamic, and for sharing the results with other relevant processes, could enhance implementation both within and outside of the UNFF.

A second important question could be:

*Where and how to enhance the profile of SFM in other international forest-related conventions and processes?*

SFM appears, to a varying extent, in global discussions at several fora, therefore, the role of UNFF in fulfilling its purpose, notably, “*to provide a transparent and participatory global framework for policy implementation, coordination and development*” is becoming more and more important and challenging at the same time. While collaboration with other sectors is a must, forests should not be limited as a means to an end for climate change, biodiversity or preventing desertification. All these forest-related topics also need to serve as a means to advance SFM. Thus, it is of utmost interest to find the best ways for UNFF and the NLBI to recommend or advise how other sectors and processes could contribute to the advancement of SFM.

The tasks for UNFF8 are really demanding. In preparing for this challenge and to ensure that the experiences of Member States are fully utilized, the Forum secretariat called for information on progress made in the implementation of the NLBI and towards the achievement of the Global Objectives on Forests. The secretariat also prepared a suggested format to facilitate voluntary submissions, in accordance with the monitoring, assessment and reporting tasks of the Forum’s multi-year programme of work. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to submit your contribution.

In addition, we also attempted to utilize cost-efficient ways such as web-forums, for collecting input from a wide range of stakeholders on how best to prepare for and facilitate the Forum’s considerations on forests in a changing environment. While a richness of views was obtained through three web-forums, I must also admit that these generated less-than-expected interest; in particular, contributions from UNFF focal points and experts are strikingly missing. This is another reason why we can’t emphasize enough the importance of this workshop.

Finally, let me recognize that regional cooperation and information exchange will stand out prominently at the Forum’s eighth session. Undoubtedly, your input will provide an essential link between global policy deliberations and regional specificities, and help UNFF to review the

progress in achieving global forest-related commitments. This workshop offers a valuable opportunity to discuss relevant forest policy matters from a regional perspective. I am convinced that the Pan-European region will provide a relevant contribution to the Forum for its eighth session in April 2009.

In this spirit, I thank you for your attention, and I look forward to the workshop's important discussions.