

Forests in the Changing Environment
3 to 5 September 2008 Koli National Park, Finland

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Opening remarks

Mr. State Secretary, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address this meeting as a representative of the General Coordinating Committee of the MCPFE.

The primary role of the MCPFE is to tackle specific forest policy priorities in our region. But our priorities in Europe have been strongly connected with global concerns. Through the MCPFE, European countries have taken emerging global challenges as a point of departure and addressed these challenges in a cooperative manner.

Since the early nineties, the MCPFE has responded to the global discussion on sustainable development by developing a conceptual frame for, and a common understanding of sustainable forest management in the Pan-European region. The specific issues for discussion at this workshop – like forest degradation, forest biological diversity and forests and climate change - have also been frequently addressed at MCPFE conferences and through follow-up activities.

The fifth MCPFE conference held in Warsaw in November last year is – so far – the latest in a series of milestones in our work for sustainable forest management in our part of the world. The Warsaw Conference aimed at deciding on ways and means to meet challenges that the European forest sector faces today. The focus was on the importance of forests for quality of life and for safeguarding our future.

In the Warsaw Declaration, the ministers committed to contribute to the international forest policy dialogue, including the achievement of the Four Global Objectives on Forests and the implementation of the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests. They also committed to contribute to the Multi-year Programme of Work of the UNFF and to develop inputs from the pan-European region to the work of the UNFF.

This workshop – Forests in the changing environment - is one of the activities of the MCPFE Work Programme, which was adopted in May this year. The workshop is also a direct response to the invitation by the UNFF to regional entities, requesting them to address the issues and agenda items planned for UNFF 8.

We should, however, have a broader perspective when providing our messages, not limit ourselves to the UNFF. Forest policy issues are currently in the core of several international processes and priority concerns in the global community, notably within the areas of climate, energy, biological diversity, food security and water. Our task is to work through the MCPFE, and through the UNFF with the view to contribute towards proper solutions in these areas.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank the Government of Finland for organising and hosting the workshop, and for all the preparatory work you have done. As I know the hospitality of our colleagues from Finland, I am sure we will have some very pleasant days here in Koli.

Finally, I look forward to the outcome. In addition to achieving the objectives specified for the workshop, I both hope and believe that this meeting also will be very helpful for us in Europe when preparing for our participation at the next UNFF session in April next year.

Thank you.