

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



Opening Statement

of

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Diversity

to the

**Fourth meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group
(AHTEG) on the Review of the Expanded Programme of
Work on Forest Biological Diversity**

FAO, Rome, 28 May 2007

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

I am honoured to address the distinguished participants in the fourth meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Review of the Implementation of the Programme of Work on Forest Biological Diversity. This meeting is held at a crucial time. The ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in less than one year from now in Bonn, Germany, will rely on your advice when it carries out the in-depth review of the programme of work.

Resilient ecosystems are increasingly understood as the key infrastructure for the twenty-first century, and forests are among the richest and most diverse ecosystems on Earth. They directly provide the livelihoods for several hundred million people worldwide. Furthermore, over 90% of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty depend on forests. Hence, forest biodiversity can play a critical role in alleviating poverty. And, while all citizens of the world benefit in some form from the economic use of forest biodiversity, forests also play an important cultural and spiritual role in many societies, in particular for indigenous communities.

Despite global, regional and national action to support the conservation and sustainable use of forests, we are still losing an estimated 9.4 million hectares of forests per year, or 18 hectares per minute. The Colosseum here in Rome, the largest amphitheatre ever built in antiquity, has an area of around three hectares. Thus, every minute, forests around six times the size of the Colosseum are being lost.

The urgency of concerted, comprehensive and focused action to halt biodiversity loss in forest ecosystems is well understood and broadly recognized. The expanded programme of work on forest biological diversity provides a basis for these actions. It addresses the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity: the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and the equitable sharing of its benefits. However, the draft review of the implementation of the programme of work, which is based mainly on the third national reports of Parties to the Convention, shows that some goals, objectives and actions in the programme of work need to be more clearly communicated and better supported.

In this respect, I am very pleased that several representatives from organizations within the Collaborative Partnership on Forests are participating in this AHTEG meeting, including from the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests, and we are looking forward to your contributions, both for the review of the programme of work, and for its further implementation. I would especially like to thank our sister organization, FAO, for hosting and actively participating in this meeting. FAO is the most authoritative source for the compilation and analysis of global forest data, and many aspects of the implementation of decisions adopted under the Convention benefit from the expertise and efforts of the FAO colleagues here in Rome and in the field offices.

I would also like to stress the importance that successful regional processes, such as COMIFAC or the MCPFE, have for forest biodiversity. Their achievements and challenges can provide guidance for the improvement and better implementation of the programme of work.

Ultimately, this review process should result in suggestions for improvement to the forest work programme and ways forward. We appreciate that you have accepted the important role and responsibility as experts in this review process to identify and fill the information gaps, and we expect that your contributions will support the Secretariat in answering the following questions:

- Has the forest work programme been a helpful tool in reducing the loss of forest biodiversity?
- How has the forest work programme been helpful in addressing the three objectives of the Convention?

- What should be future priorities, and what are opportunities and challenges for further implementation?

The great American essayist and philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, recommended that we “adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience”. However, since I started this statement, around 100 hectares of forests have been lost. In the face of this pace of deforestation and forest degradation in many regions of the world, and in light of the ambitious 2010 target, we are running out of time. The G8+5 Environment Ministers acknowledged in their meeting in Potsdam in March 2007 the urgent need to halt human-induced extinction of biodiversity as soon as possible. Unprecedented efforts of States, companies, and civil society are needed to turn the tide of biodiversity loss.

The work of experts such as you is of the utmost importance to achieve this goal. You provide Governments and international institutions and processes with the required expertise to develop and implement effective policies.

I thank you cordially for your strong support to the Convention on Biological Diversity and for your participation in this review process, and wish you a very fruitful meeting.
