

**Introductory Statement by Ms. Leticia Zamora Zumbado
Vice-Chair of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Session of the
United Nations Forum on Forests**

Report of the United Nations Forum on Forests on its eighteenth session

**2023 ECOSOC Management Segment
Item 18: Economic and environmental questions:
(k) United Nations Forum on Forests**

**25 July 2023, 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
ECOSOC Chamber, UNHQ, New York**

Madam President,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Chair of the eighteenth session of the UN Forum on Forests, it is my pleasure to brief the Council on the outcomes of the eighteenth session of the Forum.

The eighteenth session of the Forum was held from 8 to 12 May 2023 at the UN Headquarters in New York. About 400 representatives from Member States, the UN system, intergovernmental organizations, regional and subregional entities and stakeholders gathered in the Forum's first fully in-person session since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

At this session, Members of the Forum took stock of progress towards the Global Forest Goals of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 and identified key opportunities and challenges in this regard.

This included opportunities related to interlinkages with the SDGs reviewed by the 2023 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, emerging issues related to forests, energy and livelihoods, challenges related to mobilizing increased financing for forests and the need to strengthen cooperation and collaboration in the context of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, regional and sub-regional entities and stakeholders, amongst others.

The opening session of the Forum featured statements by the Chair of the eighteenth session, the President of the Council, and the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. This was followed by a series of panel discussions with multilateral and regional funding institutions and banks, the private sector, and member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. The Forum also received an update on the progress regarding the preparations for the midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests.

Throughout the week-long session, Members of the Forum identified opportunities and priorities for action by Members of the Forum, partners and stakeholders.

Key points included:

- That the sustainability of forests is under threat from multiple fronts, including by deforestation, illegal logging, conversion of forests to agricultural lands, forest degradation, climate change, drought, increased forest pests and diseases, and forest fires, which in turn negatively affects forest biodiversity, climate and local communities whose livelihoods depend on forests.
- That drivers of deforestation have to be addressed in a holistic and comprehensive landscape approach, and through activities such as afforestation, reforestation, and restoration of forests.
- That there is a need to recognize the vital role of indigenous peoples and local communities as custodians of forests, and to couple efforts towards sustainable forest management with policies to support and enhance livelihoods of forest-dependent communities.
- That improved data and indicators, along with a greater focus on nature-based solutions and payments for ecosystems services, as well as promoting natural capital accounting are needed to better recognize the “full” value of nature.
- Finally, the need to scale up technical assistance, financing from domestic, international, public and private sources, South-South and Triangular Cooperation, knowledge management, and information sharing in sustainable forest management, ecosystem restoration, landscape planning and management, sustainable agricultural intensification, biofuels development, ecotourism, and linked policy areas.

In addition, during the session, the Government of India announced of its decision to organize a Country-Led Initiative on wildfires and forest certification in support of the work of the Forum in October 2023 in India. This forthcoming initiative is most welcome as it directly focuses on growing risks and impacts of forest fires in many parts of the world, and how we can join forces to address them.

As we accelerate our efforts for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and in the wake of the increasing impacts of extreme weather patterns across the globe, forest-based actions and solutions are critically important.

Healthy forests offer a path to a sustainable future for all and hold a significant potential for synergies with other sectors. For instance, raising awareness of the need to recognize the vital role of indigenous peoples and local communities as custodians of forests, and coupling efforts towards sustainable forest management with policies to support and enhance the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities have the potential to ensure an inclusive and sustainable development.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The eighteenth session of the Forum was a technical session with no negotiated outcome. The report of the session contains the Chair's summary with proposals for consideration at the Forum's policy session at its nineteenth session to be held from 6 to 10 May 2024.

At its nineteenth session, the Forum will undertake the midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests and will adopt the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for 2025-2028.

The Forum continues to serve as the only intergovernmental body that provides a global framework for forests in support of the accelerated implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 and the 2030 Agenda.

As we cross the halfway mark to 2030, we stand ready to further promote synergies and coherence on forests and their interlinkages within the ECOSOC system, and strengthen integrated policy approaches to our common agenda to deliver our 2030 promise.

Thank you.
