



**Opening remarks by His Excellency Ambassador Munir Akram, President of the Economic and Social Council and Permanent Representative of Pakistan to United Nations in New York, at the Virtual High Level Round Table Sixteenth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests**

26 April 2021  
New York

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

It is a great pleasure to join you at the opening of the High-Level round table of the sixteenth session of the UN Forum on Forests.

This year, we are meeting in the midst of the greatest crisis since the founding of the United Nations. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated societies and economies.

The poorest and most vulnerable countries and peoples have suffered the most. 131 million people will be pushed back into poverty, 400 million jobs have been lost, 34 million people face starvation, and with vaccines available only to some of rich, the inequality and suffering in the developing world are likely to persist even as advanced economies spend trillions to recover from the crises.

The environmental crisis is also impacting the poor and vulnerable the most; 75% of the land surface has been significantly altered globally, over 85% of wetlands have been lost, and one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction, along with severe environmental degradation. The need to restore equity among humans and harmony with nature has never been so urgent and pressing.

The world's priority must be to end poverty and hunger while also safeguarding our planet. We need to support a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient model for global recovery. Reforestation and nature-based solutions will be a central part of such a sustainable development model. Healthy forests sustain human well-being, livelihoods, and survival in both rural and urban communities. They provide essential ecosystem services including clean water, renewable energy, biological diversity, and climate regulation. Halting and reversing deforestation can also reduce the risks and conditions that lead to the spread of zoonotic diseases.



There are successful examples of reforestation. My own country has embarked on a journey of ‘Clean and Green Pakistan’ through our Prime Minister’s Ten Billion Tree Tsunami and ecosystem restoration plan that includes poverty reduction strategies through the creation of green jobs.

Dear Colleagues,

The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July will reflect on how we can promote a resilient and sustainable recovery from the pandemic that puts us on a track to realize the SDGs and protect people and the planet.

I have identified three areas for priority action: SDG financing, sustainable infrastructure investment, and science and technology.

I am glad that the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development has been able to arrive at a far-reaching consensus on measures to facilitate recovery from the current crises through creation of additional liquidity including SDR creation and reallocation, debt relief, larger concessional finance, and fulfilment of climate finance commitments made by developed countries. Financing for sustainable forest management must be part of the use of such new liquidity.

If the world is to achieve net-zero carbon emission by 2050 and restore planetary health, we must transfer to sustainable and environmental-friendly development model where the investment of at least a trillion dollars in sustainable infrastructure, energy, transportation, and housing is needed annually in developing countries to ensure such a transition. Sustainable agriculture and forest management goes hand in hand with sustainable infrastructure investments. This will provide communities which are dependent on forests with alternative sources of energy than wood and can create millions of green jobs. Therefore, it is essential to clearly identify the areas of scientific and technological breakthroughs required to achieve the global goals. The rapid production of the COVID-19 vaccine is a testament to the ability of science to achieve innovation when the scientific priorities are clearly identified and adequately financed. We should identify the scientific breakthroughs required for sustainable development.

Excellencies,



Technological and digital innovation has a clear role to play in forests- ranging from the use of remote sensing and processing of geospatial data to the use of drone technology, big data, and artificial intelligence in forest inventories and monitoring activities. These technologies too must be accessible to all countries.

The ECOSOC has the mandate and the responsibility to respond to the present challenges and restore the balance with nature in the era of pandemic, climate, and natural challenges that we face. Those challenges can be addressed only through strengthened international cooperation. I look to your Forum to launch a strong call for international solidarity in those times of crises.

I look forward to the contributions of the UN Forum on Forests as we strive to recover and 'Build Back Better'.

Thank you.