

Remarks by H.E. Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile

President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations

2022 Celebration of the International Day of Forests

21 March 2022

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- 1.** I am pleased to address the opening segment of this special event on the occasion of the International Day of Forests, which has been co-organized by the Permanent Mission of Kyrgyzstan to the UN and the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat in UNDESA.
- 2.** It may seem incongruous to be celebrating forests, at a time when we are beset with multiple crises. We are two years into a global pandemic that has reversed decades of progress towards sustainable development. At the same time, warning signs are flashing on the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

- 3.** But what we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and the triple planetary crises is that we cannot continue with a business-as-usual approach. We need to do more to change how we live, produce, consume and interact with nature.
- 4.** We need to work together, across borders and sectors, at all levels and as a global family that is united by a common purpose. This is why the theme of today's International Day is particularly timely -- as it focuses on the interlinkages between forests and sustainable production and consumption.
- 5.** Forests cover nearly one-third of our planet's land mass. Healthy and well-managed forests are an important part of nature-based solutions to the triple planetary crises and social development crises we face today.
- 6.** Sustainably managed forests not only offer solutions to offset current crises, but also strengthen our long-term resilience to withstand the shocks of future crises.
- 7.** Forests provide a crucial foundation to support the livelihoods and sustainability of communities around the world. They provide ecosystem services, from clean water and renewable energy, to regulating the global climate and sheltering 80% of terrestrial biodiversity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- 8.** Forests have long been a priority for the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Twenty years ago, the Council established the UN Forum on Forests as the global intergovernmental body to deliberate on all aspects of forests and trees. Five years ago, the Forum adopted the landmark UN Strategic Plan for Forests, as a response from the forest community to the 2030 Agenda.
- 9.** As the UN Principal Organ dedicated to socio-economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, ECOSOC greatly values the work of the Forum in promoting sustainable forest management and the contributions of forests to global sustainable development.
- 10.** Forests are an important safety net for some of the most vulnerable populations in our societies – especially those living in extreme poverty; those working in the informal sector, in particular women; indigenous peoples and local communities. For many in these communities, forests support their subsistence and provide food, energy and health security.
- 11.** It is well recognized that to get back on track and build back better from this pandemic, our recovery measures must be guided by the objective to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. We therefore have not many other alternatives, than to embark on intensified SDGs-guided recovery during the remainder of the Decade of Action.

- 12.** Forests are particularly relevant to **SDG 15 on Life on Land**, which will be among the Goals to be reviewed in-depth at the upcoming High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), convened under the auspices of ECOSOC in July.
- 13.** At the heart of SDG 15 is the commitment to halt deforestation, protect, restore and sustainably use forest ecosystems. While this requires a multi-pronged approach, a good place to start is by supporting sustainable production and consumption of forest products.
- 14.** Let me conclude by assurance that, as President of ECOSOC, I am committed to strengthening multilateralism, international cooperation and fostering solidarity among all nations and peoples for the common good including joint efforts for nature conservation. I truly believe that -- if we work together -- we can still meet the ambition of the 2030 Agenda, together with the Paris Agreement, and thus ensure that no one is left behind.
- 15.** On this International Day, I hope that you will all join me and other advocates by being a champion for forests; by being a voice for the vulnerable communities that depend on forests for their livelihood; and by being a better global citizen and steward of this planet that we all call home.
- 16. I thank you, and wish you a pleasant International Day of Forests!**