

UNFF19 Highlights: Thursday, 9 May 2024

An all-day High-Level Segment focused on the importance of forests in combating climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. Meanwhile, negotiators toiled unsuccessfully behind closed doors to finalize texts of the declaration to be endorsed by top officials and the omnibus resolution to be adopted by the Forum. The declaration is intended to signal high-level commitment to forests going forward, while the resolution would set the mandate for specific future actions by the UNFF and its stakeholders.

High-Level Segment

UNFF19 Chair Zéphyrin Maniratanga (Burundi) opened the High-Level Segment (HLS) with a call to action on behalf of forests, particularly to halt and turn back deforestation. “Deforestation is not just a crime against nature, it’s a betrayal of our collective future.”

Ivan Šimonović (Croatia), Vice President, UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), suggested the HLS was important for articulating effective forest-based action to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and urged adoption of an action-oriented declaration.

Li Junhua, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, urged the HLS to adopt an ambitious declaration that serves as an important input to the Pact for the Future consultations.

Qu Dongyu, Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), on behalf of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), cautioned that while progress has been made since the UN Strategic Plan on Forests was adopted, only six years remain for the Plan to realize the ambitious goal of increasing forest cover 3% by 2030. He called on UNFF to work together with CPF to produce tangible outcomes by 2030.

Stressing the importance of forests for so many aspects of life and livelihoods, Dennis Francis (Trinidad and Tobago), President, UN General Assembly, said the world needs to act urgently to create outcomes that are socially just, ecologically sound and economically viable.

Roundtable on “Forest-based Solutions to the Triple Planetary Crises: A Focus on People, Science, Technology, and Finance”: The roundtable was co-moderated by Glenn Hargrove, Assistant Deputy Minister, Canadian Forest Service, Ministry of Natural Resources of Canada, and Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Guyana to the UN.

Sweden, on behalf of the EU, emphasized the need to sustainably manage consumption, build the resilience of forest communities, and reduce forest fragmentation.

Sergiu Lazarencu, Environment Minister, Moldova, called for support to small developing countries where limited access to technologies and knowledge impede progress.

Highlighting that forests represent the central pillar of mankind’s wellbeing, José Antonio Galdames, Minister of Energy, Natural Resources, Environment and Mines, Honduras, said, “We need to arrest the unsustainable consumption patterns.”

Samuel Abu Jinapor, Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, Ghana, highlighted efforts towards reforestation and improving forest production under the Green Ghana Project, saying at least USD 393 billion is needed annually to save the world’s forests.

Nik Ahmad, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Malaysia, called for establishing a formal convention on forestry to ensure global commitment to manage forests sustainably.

Maurice Ntossui Allogo, Minister of Forests, Ocean, Environment and Climate Change, Gabon, highlighted the One Forest Initiative Summit in 2023 that galvanized scientific efforts and strengthened international cooperation.

Balarabe Abbas Lawal, Minister of Environment, Nigeria, noted forests’ key role in providing nature-based solutions to address the triple planetary crisis and called on countries to leverage corporate funding in this quest.

Laurent Tchagba, Minister of Water and Forests, Côte d’Ivoire, highlighted the deterioration from 16 million hectares of forest cover in his country in 1900 to 2.97 million hectares by 2021, forcing the country to adopt a new forest policy to reverse this trend.

Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Qatar, described reforestation efforts entailing the planting of 10 million trees in his country, and

highlighted water recycling efforts and preservation of Qatar's coastline and coral reefs.

Rosalie Matondo, Minister of Forest Economy, Republic of Congo, described the value of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, particularly on sharing expertise in quantifying the value of forests' services.

Vickram Bharrat, Minister of Natural Resources, Guyana, mentioned the country's forest carbon storage ability of 19.5 gigatons, and emphasized the world's forests require greater understanding and finance.

Ève Bazaiba, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Democratic Republic of Congo, noted 27% of its territory already consists of protected forest area that acts as a buffer to extreme climate and meteorological events, and underscored the need to introduce agroforestry.

Barna Tánzos, Minister of Environment, Water, and Forests, Romania, highlighted USD 745 million funding to support small forest owners and a USD 46 million investment in improved monitoring of forest dynamics.

Noting that the world is offtrack to achieve the Global Forest Goals (GFGs), GERMANY said "we must be more resolute than we have been in the past." She called for more UNDESA support for UNFF.

NORWAY urged balancing support for forest industries with sustainable forest management and emphasized its role in bilateral partnerships with important forested countries such as Brazil, Indonesia and Colombia.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION suggested developing a regular UNFF online information component as part of its communication efforts, and perhaps a tree-planting activity at UN headquarters.

INDONESIA urged more international cooperation to bridge forest information gaps between countries.

KYRGYZSTAN noted the role forests play in his country in the mountain context, his country's work to draw more international attention to mountain issues, and its plan to host the 2027 Global Mountain Summit.

UZBEKISTAN noted his country's increased forest cover, to 15%, and its efforts to reforest mountain areas.

The US stressed the importance of acknowledging and addressing the drivers of deforestation, the largest of which is agricultural expansion. He noted that his country is developing a policy on commodities associated with deforestation.

The CZECH REPUBLIC called for reliable predictions of forest sector changes due to climate change to guide policymakers.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA noted challenges it faces from the fact it restored most of its forests simultaneously, and the emphasis it places on technological innovation.

CHINA called for integrated approaches to forest management, strengthening the use of technology in supervising forests, and providing incentives to SFM.

TÜRKIYE stressed the role that UNFF and CPF can play in promoting the exchange of scientific knowledge and innovation regarding forests.

The PHILIPPINES called for strengthening political commitment to SFM and reaffirming our dedication to forests.

GEORGIA underscored the importance of effective communication and collaboration between scientific institutions and policymakers regarding forests.

JAPAN offered to share its experiences with a forest environment tax and community support systems for forests, and emphasized the high importance it places on international cooperation through technical organizations such as FAO.

The UK called for strengthening the UNFF's role as convenor to address the precarious status of forestry worldwide, and highlighted Britain's forestry initiatives including supporting REDD+ efforts in Brazil's Amazon Fund.

MOROCCO mentioned planting 600,000 hectares of forest plantations by 2030 as part of the new "Forests of Morocco 2020-2030" strategy.

PARAGUAY reported on initiating a system to monitor forest cover to ensure economic decision making, which is available in an online portal.

COLOMBIA highlighted unless governments promote viable forest economies, this leaves a pathway to various illicit actors, and she encouraged including ancestral knowledge and education as critical tools.

INDIA outlined a significant increase in forest cover during the past decade resulting from a scientific approach to SFM.

PORTUGAL welcomed the international Landscape Fire Governance Framework as an instrument to tackle the growing occurrence of wildfires.

THAILAND noted its forest cover increase of 7.2 million hectares, thereby significantly expanding forest cover and green spaces, and called for raising global awareness and sufficient finance.

SAUDI ARABIA spoke about the ambitious Saudi Green Initiative to restore 40 million hectares through planting 10 million trees, as well as its USD 2.5 billion pledge to the Middle East Green Initiative.

BHUTAN said his country plans to be carbon neutral by 2030 because the government has recognized the importance of SFM.

URUGUAY noted the government's subsidies have increased forests by 28% and by one million hectares during recent years and called for the use of remote sensing technologies.

COSTA RICA reported its payment for ecosystems programme initiated in 1997 which has ensured regeneration and conservation of vast swathes of forest across the country.

ECUADOR called for implementation of bioeconomy strategies, strengthening national governance capacities to achieve more ambitious voluntary national contributions, and said it is important to develop non-market based instruments.

The Director General of BRAZIL's Forest Service read a statement from Environment Minister Marina Silva noting the importance of forests in combating climate change. Underscoring the importance of sufficient and predictable resources toward

that end, she highlighted Brazil's Tropical Forests Forever Fund proposal.

JAMAICA supported the calls to maintain and increase momentum by mobilizing resources, particularly from multilateral sources. He highlighted the role of forests in his country's Nationally Determined Contribution and its mangrove plan.

Noting his country was the first to offer a national REDD+ strategy, SURINAME urged scaling up financial and technical assistance for developing countries, including debt relief.

NEPAL suggested UNFF facilitate carbon trading and promote global carbon markets and urged greater cooperation in digital aspects of forest management.

PERU called for greater international cooperation and exchange of best practices in forest management.

SYRIA said it looks forward to finding long-term non-politicized financing and technical support for its forest restoration efforts, and the lifting of unilateral coercive measures.

Dialogue with CPF Heads and UNFF Partners on: Achieving Globally Agreed Goals on Forests, Climate Change, and Biodiversity: This session was moderated by Aurélie Flora Koumba-Pambo, Ambassador-at-Large, Climate, Environment, and Sustainable Development (Gabon), and Wu Zhimin, Director, Forestry Division, FAO.

Robert Nasi, Director General, Center for International Forestry Research, and Chief Operating Officer, Center for International Forestry Research-World Agroforestry Centre, said there is no conflict between agroforestry, conservation and SFM. He decried compartmentalization of land management and advocated a more integrated, landscape approach.

Ivonne Higuero, Secretary General, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), said that, by promoting frameworks for SFM, "Goal 5 of the UNSPF resonates soundly with CITES' mandate." She noted that CITES already regulates international trade of around 800 tree species and mentioned its current work of developing new standard guidance on non-detrimental findings for tree species.

Sheam Satkuru, Executive Director, International Tropical Timber Organization, said tropical forests can be the most cost-effective nature-based solution if managed sustainably. She called for turbocharging global efforts to invest in SFM. Noting efforts to improve collaboration within the CPF, she called for international donors to also strengthen their own collaboration.

John Parrotta, President, International Union of Forest Research Organizations, said science and information can empower producers and consumers to understand their impact on the environment, society, and the economy. This knowledge, he continued, can encourage producers to adopt more sustainable practices and motivate consumers to choose products that are produced sustainably. Parrotta suggested scientific research can provide insights into key obstacles and opportunities for changing to sustainable behavior.

Christian Peter, Global Manager for Environment and Forests, World Bank, said the World Bank Group understands that issues facing forests cannot be viewed as environmental issues alone: managing forests and building sustainable forest economies that deliver for people require whole-of-society efforts, including both the public and private sectors. He described the Bank's Global Challenge Program (GCP) on Forests for Development, Climate, and Biodiversity to scale up the ambition on sustainable forest economies that deliver for people and the planet.

Antonio Herman Benjamin, Justice, Supreme Court, Brazil, noted forest laws are frequently fragmented, not enforced, and/or lacking in guarantees of citizen participation. He said good laws are science-based and coherent and judges have "the last word." He commended the Model Forest Act Initiative (MoFAI).

David Brand, Convening Chair, International Sustainable Forest Coalition: highlighted the wide spectrum of forest values, saying public attitudes have shifted; called forests one aspect of landscape management; and advocated expanding production systems only on degraded or previously cleared land.

Sunpil Jin, Vice-Executive Director, Asian Forest Cooperation Organization, stressed public-private collaboration and knowledge sharing among geographically similar countries on best practice, technical expertise and innovative solutions. He said regional organizations represent their region's voice in forestry and catalyze action.

Mia Crawford, Forest Director, EU and International Affairs, Federation of Swedish Family Forest Owners, stressed Major Group collaboration to provide creative input to forest-related processes; a "whole-of-society" approach; coordination and partnerships with change makers and all stakeholders; and a rights-based approach in growing a bioeconomy and climate-resilient ecosystem.

BELGIUM, for the EU, commended the CPF, encouraged streamlining reporting and data-sharing activities, stressed coherence and cooperation, and said tangible on-the-ground results increase awareness of the GFGs.

José Antonio Galdames, Minister of Energy, Natural Resources, Environment and Mines, Honduras, emphasized his country's progress in increasing forest recovery fivefold by assigning 10% of the armed forces to protection of parks and biosphere reserves.

Nik Ahmad, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Malaysia, stressed the economic contribution of the trade in forest products and tree species, and mentioned the de-gazettement of some protected forests.

Ève Bazaiba, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Democratic Republic of Congo, described efforts to mobilize significant resources from the commercial sectors to conserve forests and biodiversity, alongside establishing a fund that will support such projects.

Balarabe Abbas Lawal, Minister of Environment, Nigeria, stated that nationally determined contributions will support increasing awareness about forest management, and reducing pollution and plastic waste.

Rosalie Matondo, Minister of Forest Economy, Republic of Congo, lamented “slash-and-burn” practices and stated the intention to replace this with innovative methods including smart agriculture and alternative wood replacement technologies.

NORWAY stressed the importance of the CPF respecting the roles and mandates of its members and called for ensuring Indigenous Peoples’ and other forest owners’ participation, and including gender-responsive access to finance.

SWEDEN suggested the different mandates of CPF partners can be challenging, but there is also a clear benefit in having diverse partners.

INDONESIA described the country’s reorientation from wood-based and commodity-based approaches to forest management to prevent further damage to conservation areas.

CHINA pledged support for members in formulating plans at the landscape level, and called for actionable guidelines of different forest types, including adaptive management approaches.

TÜRKIYE emphasized the vital role of indigenous communities in implementing sustainable forest management, saying youth, women and local communities are significant stakeholders.

PHILIPPINES said achieving the SDGs without recognizing the importance of the GFGs is impossible, particularly with current unprecedented economic pressures and unsustainable land use practices.

GEORGIA described doing a natural inventory from 2019-2022, and the discovery of the extent of degradation of the forests and subsequent intensive efforts to move to sustainable forest management practices.

COLOMBIA noted a declining trend in deforestation in her country and highlighted its national plan to tackle deforestation.

INDIA complimented CPF’s contributions to capacity building, and urged the UNFF, with support of the CPF, to establish universally accepted standards and principles for SFM which could guide forest management and certification programs globally.

JAMAICA highlighted its efforts to improve its scientific capacities in forest management, including in monitoring and assessment in support of science-based policy decisions. He noted that Jamaica’s forest cover has increased by 6% since 2013.

SURINAME said it cannot fully realize its forest, climate, and biodiversity goals without global solidarity and partnership, including scaling up financial and technical support and capacity building in forest monitoring and reporting and the creation of community-centered approaches.

SAUDI ARABIA discussed his country’s ambitious canopy project to plant six million trees and 13 million mangroves.

PERU highlighted his country’s work to promote carbon-neutral forest products and integrate these into national norms.

NEW ZEALAND encouraged the CPF and FAO to continue promotion of wood use, raising consumer awareness and demand for legally and sustainably-sourced wood products, and strategic

collaboration between forestry and other land-based sectors like agriculture.

ALGERIA discussed its efforts to expand the “Green Dam” to 600,000 hectares, reforest 100,000 hectares by planting fruit trees, and initiate a special program on track and limit the spread of forest fires.

FRANCE urged greater coherence and complementarity in forestry efforts and emphasized his country’s forest partnerships with Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Negotiations on the Draft High-Level Declaration and Omnibus Resolution

The informal group tackling the draft declaration met in the morning in parallel to the HLS and again after the HLS finished in the afternoon, being unable to finalize the declaration in time for adoption by the session. In that session the group was able to produce a final draft, leaving a placeholder for language on the bioeconomy to reflect what the omnibus resolution eventually agrees on.

For its part, the informal group working on the omnibus resolution met before the HLS in the early morning to try to break logjams on issues such as new and additional financial resources for forests, gender, resources for the UNFF Secretariat, linkages to other environmental agreements and the SDGs, and the use of unilateral coercive measures. The group will meet again on Friday morning in the hopes of finalizing the resolution for adoption by the Forum plenary on Friday afternoon.

In the Corridors

Hosting a full-day High-Level Segment provides an opportunity to bring greater visibility and attention to an entity by giving ministers, CEOs, and other high-level personages the space to share views and hear from their counterparts as well as giving insight on levels of commitment and creating momentum among members.

Such an opportunity presented itself again on Thursday, yet some delegates and seasoned observers were left scratching their heads over questions as to the *raison d’être* of this high-level segment. While the main events were called a “roundtable” and a “dialogue,” as is customary, an observer asked innocently whether a “dialogue” does not imply at least some form of response between parties. Another responded that it is not the first time reference has been made to roundtables or dialogues when of course no real conversation or debate has taken place, nor is it the first to be tasked with producing a “High-level Declaration” to be adopted at the end of the day which has in fact nothing to do with the event or the high-level personages in attendance and will not be finalized until at least the day after they have gone home. It raised the question in the minds of many as to whether this is a good working model for raising the UNFF’s visibility.

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of UNFF19 will be available on Monday, 13 May 2024 at enb.iisd.org/un-forum-forests-unff19