



International Day of Forests

21 March 2014



Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

Colleagues,

At the outset permit me to commend the organizers for arranging this important event today.

Forests are a crucial global resource that provides Humankind with a wide range of products and environmental services. The global climate is adequate for life thanks to the remaining, vast area of the Earth, 30% covered by forests. Thanks to Forests, land is protected and water is regulated, especially in mountain environments.

Forests as well host most of the terrestrial biodiversity. In addition forests are the sustenance of millions of rural people living in the most disadvantaged areas (deforested degraded land) by providing food, employment, products and income.

A third of the World's population relies on wood as cooking fuel.

Finally, forests are the world first source of renewable raw materials crucial for moving to green economies (wood and bamboo).

All these products and services are not provided by forests in an unlimited way nor are all forests in optimal conditions to provide them. There is a crucial need to know and adjust what we ask from the forest with their actual carrying capacity, to restore them and to establish consistent governance mechanisms that ensure that the carrying capacity is not trespassed. Also, we need to ensure that commensurable resources are devoted to the sustainable management and restoration of forests to ensure the long term provision of the goods and services we are requesting from forests.

Due to their relevance forests have a critical role in the post 2015 agenda, including the SDGs.

The SDGs are supposed to address each of the 3 sustainability pillars in a synergetic way. Forestry is one of the most advanced areas in that sense due to long lasting sustainability experience and multifunctional management. If forests are approached from the perspective of only one of the 3 pillars, the full potential of forests will not be mobilized and the challenges they face today will hardly be addressed and solved.

We therefore invite countries to consider the way in which the full contribution of forests to sustainable development is best captured, in order to overcome the limited focus of forests in the MDGs.

There are huge opportunities now to overcome the threat of deforestation. Many countries in the past have turned a long history of deforestation into forest restoration. REDD+ is one of the key ways this is being done. Political momentum on all levels while sharing experiences of the many successful cases will allow them to be spread around.

And what of the role of women in the forestry sector?

Here, again, reliable sex-disaggregated data is at a premium, yet the story seems familiar. In forests, as well as fisheries and agriculture, discrimination faced by rural women is undermining development on many levels.

FAO with its strong presence in many countries is working closely with the countries to assess, preserve, sustainably manage, restore and govern their forests for the benefits of the present and future generation.

An endeavor to which we invite you all to join.