

**First International Conference on the Future of Poplar Culture
Rome, 13 November 2003**

Opening Speech

***M. Hosny El-Lakany
Assistant Director-General
Forestry Department***

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Director-General of FAO and my colleagues in the Forestry Department, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this first International Conference on the Future of Poplar Culture hosted by the National Poplar Commission of Italy, with the Italian Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and Agricultural and Forest Policies. FAO is pleased to collaborate with the Government of Italy as long standing and fruitful partners in forestry sector development globally.

The theme “The Future of Poplar Culture” is particularly relevant to FAO and the International Poplar Commission, which was founded in 1947 as a Technical Statutory Body of FAO.

Just a reminder, the functions of the IPC are to:

- study the scientific, technical, social and economic aspects of poplar and willow cultivation;
- promote the exchange of ideas and material among research workers, producers, users and other stakeholders;
- arrange joint research programmes; and
- report and make recommendations to FAO and National Poplar Commissions of member countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Trees and shrubs of the Salicaceae are at the forefront of developments in forest plantations, tree breeding, conservation of genetic resources and environmental functions. They are native to the temperate and subtropical zones where their adaptability to a wide range of climatic and soil conditions has led to their widespread use in developed and developing countries and in countries with economies in transition. They are mostly fast growing and provide a wide range of goods and services. They have an important role in rural life in developing countries and those with economies in transition. Traditionally the growing of poplars has been integrated in many temperate and subtropical agricultural systems, while

new fields of interest include the use of poplar and willow as biomass for renewable energy, combating desertification, rehabilitation of degraded lands and for phyto-remediation of severely degraded sites.

This meeting has the potential to provide important feedback on the major issues and necessary actions to translate principles and policies into practice in poplar and willow culture. The beneficiaries of the outputs can be Governments, European Union, the National Poplar Commissions and the Working Parties of the IPC.

Increasingly the economic, social and environmental benefits of forests are being recognized, requiring Governments to focus on initiatives to address sustainable and equitable management of forest resources. FAO through Technical Cooperation and Trust Fund Projects with our partners have been providing strong support to Governments and National institutions to develop National Forest Programmes; harmonize forest related definitions, conduct forest resources assessment, define the criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, reform legal, policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks; review forest research, education and training priorities; and enhance the role forests and trees in support of livelihoods and reducing poverty.

This meeting has representation of post-industrialized (developed) countries, countries with economies in transition, developing countries and international agencies within the EU, non-EU and other regions of the world, there is an opportunity to recognize the unique constraints and opportunities which exist in poplar and willow culture and to pursue potential collaboration in technical assistance, marketing and trade, and possibly even investment between countries and international organizations.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to express my appreciation to the Italian Government for taking the initiative in hosting this conference and wish participants a rewarding and successful outcome. I will be looking forward to the outputs as directions for the IPC and other matters relating to FAO's work in support of sector development in Forestry.

Thank you.