



Press Release ECE/TIM/08/P05

Geneva, 17 October 2008

Europe's forests enrich our lives and help save the planet: European Forest Week, 20-24 October

- **Forests cover 44 per cent of Europe's land area and continue to expand.**
- **Europe's forests combat climate change by continuously absorbing and storing harmful greenhouse gases.**
- **In our changing climate, wood, our oldest renewable source of material and energy, is still the smart choice in the 21st century.**



All over Europe next week, the forest sector is seeking to raise awareness of the role of forests in addressing key social, economic and political concerns related to issues such as climate change mitigation, market integration, renewable energy supply and many others. Hundreds of in-country events, and regional meetings in Rome and Brussels, will persuade high level policymakers, experts from other sectors, and the general public of the importance of sustainable forest management and explain the many ways in which European forests contribute to the continent's well being.

The European Forest Week was declared by the ministers responsible for forests of 46 European countries. It is jointly prepared by the European Union, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Mr. Christopher Prins, Chief of the UNECE/FAO Timber Section, explains:

- “Forest and wood make a major contribution to climate change, but this is not well understood and imperfectly reflected in the current climate change regime.
- Wood is, by far, the most important renewable energy in the UNECE region, and this will grow, to meet the ambitious targets set by policymakers. Sustainable levels are still not clear and there will be tradeoffs with forest industries and biodiversity.
- Forests safeguard water quality and quantity. This role may become more crucial in the face of climate change. Schemes for payment for ecosystem services should be developed.

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Addressing these issues, along with many others, the European Forest Week presents an unprecedented opportunity to engage other sectors in a participatory dialogue on forest related issues, and to increase the visibility of the forest sector's contribution to sustainable development and climate change mitigation. UNECE is working with many partners, during and after the European Forest Week, notably the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, the European Union and many international, civil society and private sector organizations. The programme for the events in Rome brings together partners from all over the region. Additional details relating to the European Forest Week are available at www.europeanforestweek.org.”

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Annex
to Press Release on European Forest Week

Background information on Forests, Wood and Climate Change

Carbon flows relevant to forest and wood

- Growing vegetation, including forests, takes carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere through photosynthesis and transform it into biomass, mostly wood, and release oxygen, which is necessary for all animal and human life
- As forests are long lived, slow developing ecosystems, over a tree's lifetime they accumulate very large stocks of carbon, partly in the form of woody biomass, as well as in forest soils.
- When deforestation occurs, or trees are harvested, the carbon stocked in the wood starts a process towards release into the atmosphere, through combustion or decay.
- In a sustainably managed forest, the volume of carbon released from the ecosystem is equal to or smaller than the volume taken from the atmosphere, making the system "carbon-neutral" or a "carbon sink".
- Almost all UNECE region forests are sustainably managed from the carbon point of view.
- In the UNECE region, very little of the wood harvested is wasted in processing: residues are used as raw material for composite products or pulp, or for energy.
- Recovered wood products, which have already served their first purpose, are increasingly being used as a source of energy or raw material.
- Carbon stock in harvested wood products (HWP) has been increasing significantly in many countries over the last years and is likely to increase further in some countries, although in a long term perspective, HWP stocks will eventually reach a steady state.

Forests and wood are significant for climate change mitigation

The total carbon content of forest ecosystems for the year 2005 is 638 Gt of carbon, which is more than the amount of carbon in the entire atmosphere. Roughly half of total carbon is found in forest biomass and dead wood combined, and half in soils and litter combined. Deforestation is one of the main anthropogenic emissions of carbon to the atmosphere, accounting for nearly a fifth of the total. According to the IPCC, greenhouse gas emissions from "forestry" (in fact mainly deforestation) account for 17.4 per cent of the global total, second only to the energy supply sector (25.9 per cent).

Using wood from sustainably managed forests contributes to mitigating climate change

Wood supplied by forests stores carbon, and can be used as a substitute for fossil fuels and for non-renewable construction materials like plastics, steel or concrete. In most cases, utilizing wood from a sustainably managed forest instead of these materials (or fossil fuels) reduces overall greenhouse gas emissions, since carbon released when burning wood has already been recovered from the atmosphere while the tree was growing.

Forests and wood are only partly integrated into the emerging climate change regime

Forestry is recognized along with other human-induced land use change activities in the Kyoto Protocol, namely afforestation, reforestation, and/or deforestation since 1990.

Avoided deforestation has, however, not been recognized, which implies that the significant mitigation potential of reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation can at present not be accounted for under Kyoto protocol mechanisms.

UNECE region forests and forest management must adapt to climate change

Climate change will lead to an increased incidence, duration or severity of abiotic extremes like fire, wind storms and drought, and of insect and disease outbreaks, all well known events, thus also affecting forests which must adapt.

Challenges for policymakers

Policymakers for the forest sector and for climate change face a number of challenges:

1. Define the best and most sustainable combination of carbon capture and storage by forests, substitution of material and energy, and when to apply it, using the available economic signals;
2. When drawing up national responses to climate change through the forest sector, different strategies including carbon sequestration by forests, storage in wood products, and substitution of fossil fuels and energy-intensive materials could be considered and combined.
3. In particular, they should encourage the “cascade” use of forest products, which is not favoured when high energy prices coincide with low product prices, as in summer 2008.
4. Reconcile the strategies which are desirable from the carbon point of view with the other dimensions of sustainable forest management, notably biodiversity conservation, provision of recreation and economic viability of the sector.
5. Ensure that the emerging climate change regime takes full account of the realities and characteristics of the forest sector, chiefly by encouraging consensus forming between the forest and climate change “communities”.
6. Many climate change measures assume a small number of economic actors, with considerable capacity for technical innovation and investment: however this is not the case for the many millions of small scale private forest owners in most European countries
7. Identify the risks for forests in their country and develop strategies of risk reduction and risk management.