



CONFERENCE

Thirty-fourth Session

Rome, 17-24 November 2007

FORESTS AND ENERGY – Address by Director-General

President Pedro Verona Rodriguez Pires
Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to welcome to FAO the President of the Republic of Cape Verde, His Excellency Pedro Verona Rodrigues Pires. It is also my pleasure to welcome to FAO the Minister of Forestry of the Republic of Congo, His Excellency Henri Djombo and the Minister for Agriculture of the Republic of Latvia, His Excellency Martins Roze, who have kindly agreed to co-chair this Special Event on Forests and Energy.

We all share the growing concern about climate change. A major cause of global warming is the use of fossil fuels for energy generation. However, fossil fuels are becoming less available and more costly, and many countries are looking for ways to reduce their dependence on imported oil, coal and gas.

New energy and environmental policies enacted in the last decade are contributing to the diversification of national energy mixes in many countries, especially in the

developed countries. Bioenergy is expected to play a key role in achieving the main energy and environmental targets.

Forests are significant in the debate about energy. In many developing countries, fuelwood and charcoal remain the main sources of energy for the rural and urban poor.

In fact, more than two billion people still depend on woodfuels for their daily energy needs, and every second tree harvested worldwide is burnt for energy generation, i.e. about 1.5 billion cubic meters per year. Fuelwood will continue to be a prime energy source for many countries in the years to come.

Moreover, wood fuels are rapidly gaining importance in industrialized countries. For example, in Finland, biofuels cover 19 percent of the total primary energy supply. In an increasing number of countries, biofuels have become an important part of the energy mix. In some cases, increased demand for woodfuels has triggered competition between the energy and wood industries.

Studies in developing countries have shown that up to 50 percent of the forest biomass is left behind during harvesting and another 20-50 percent during timber processing. Improved use of these residues for energy generation would offer employment and income opportunities. Development of techniques to transform waste into energy, e.g. in combined heat and power systems, would certainly strengthen the wood industry sector at the level of both sawmills and pulp and paper mills.

An unsustainable use of trees and forests for wood fuel production could also cause forest degradation or deforestation and thus loss of biodiversity, not to mention increasing greenhouse gas emissions. It is anticipated that the growing interest in biofuels, in particular liquid biofuels, will have a considerable impact on land-use patterns, affecting the agriculture and forestry sectors.

Increased use of forests and wood for energy should be integrated into sustainable land and water management approaches. Additionally, the rights and livelihood

needs of local rural populations, indigenous people and communities should be considered.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The increased use of forests for energy purposes provides both opportunities and challenges, in industrialized as well as in developing countries. I am looking forward to learning how you plan to use the opportunities and tackle the challenges.

I thank you all for your kind attention.