



REPORT

of the

THIRTEENTH SESSION

of the

NEAR EAST FORESTRY COMMISSION

**Damascus, Syria
6-9 December 1998**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
Regional Office for the Near East,
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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Commission recommended that FAO organize a Workshop for the interested member countries to study the technical, ecological and socio-economic aspects of the use of waste water for irrigating plantations.
2. The Commission recommended that FAO assist countries of the region in furthering cooperation in the field of conservation and exchange of forest genetic resources.
3. The Commission recommended FAO to support the initiative by the Islamic Republic of Iran during the Second Session of the IFF to organize, in cooperation with other countries and international organizations, a meeting during 1999 on the Special Needs and Requirements of Countries with Low Forest Cover.
4. The Commission recommended that FAO assist in a review of national forest programmes in the region in order to ascertain their harmonization with the principles guiding nfps.
5. The Commission further recommended that FAO assist in the exchange of information on the nfps by organizing a Workshop on the elaboration and implementation of nfps in 1999. Potential donors should also be involved in this information exchange.
6. The Commission recommended that FAO continue to give strong emphasis to watershed management, the role of forestry in combating desertification, agroforestry systems in the drylands, non-wood forest products and forestry plantations with particular emphasis on indigenous species.
7. The Commission recommended that FAO consider strengthening the decentralized Forestry Unit in the Regional Office for the Near East in Cairo.
8. The Commission recommended that the following items be brought to the attention of the Committee on Forestry at its next session:
 - i) recognizing the importance of NEFC sessions for forestry development in the region, member countries are encouraged to find ways and means to ensure appropriate high-level participation in the sessions;
 - ii) that the FAO Forestry Department should further support the exchange of information between countries in the region both on technical and forest-related policy issues at the national, regional and international levels;
 - iii) in recognizing FAO's leading role as a neutral forum in world forestry issues and welcoming its initiative to develop its proposed strategic plan, recommended the allocation of appropriate resources to facilitate its implementation and recommended to member countries that they support the process;
 - iv) in recognizing FAO Forestry Department's contribution to institutional strengthening, it recommended that special efforts be directed to the region in particular by support to forestry research, education and training.

INTRODUCTION

1. The thirteenth session of the FAO Near East Forestry Commission was held in Damascus, Syria, at the kind invitation of the Government of the Arab Republic of Syria. The session was attended by representatives from fourteen member countries and five UN agencies. Observers from three international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations also attended. A full list of participants is given in *Annex B*.

2. The opening session was chaired by Mr M. Riad, Chairman of the Commission, who welcomed participants. Mr. M. Hosny El-Lakany, Assistant Director-General of the Forestry Department, addressed the session on behalf of the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization, Mr. Jacques Diouf. In his opening address Mr. El-Lakany thanked the Government of Syria for hosting the session, recalled the purpose and objectives of the FAO regional forestry commissions, highlighted issues and challenges in the region and FAO's global response to them.

3. H.E. Assad Mustafa, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform of Syria, welcomed participants on behalf of his Government. In his inaugural address, the Minister highlighted the ongoing and developing partnerships between his country and UN agencies, in particular FAO. He mentioned the main problems affecting sustainable forest management in the region and the need to address not only the issues directly concerning the forestry sector, but also those indirectly linked to this sector, amongst which climate change, biodiversity, desertification control and water resources. The Minister also highlighted the advantages and benefits of regional cooperation and the need to further this type of collaboration. He expressed appreciation for the role FAO is playing in the development of the forestry sector in Syria.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (Item 1)

4. The Provisional Agenda, as set out in document FO:NEFC/98/1 (*Annex A*) was adopted. The list of documents presented to the session is given in *Annex C*.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (Item 2)

5. In accordance with its Rules of Procedure, the Commission elected a Chairman. The Commission unanimously agreed to the proposal of nominating all Heads of Delegations Vice-Chairmen. Two Rapporteurs were also elected. Following is the composition of the Executive Committee:

Chairman:	Mohamed Walid Al-Tawil (Syria)
Vice-Chairmen:	All Heads of Delegations (see <i>Annex B</i> for names)
Rapporteurs:	M. Basil (Lebanon) Fahed Hammadeh (Syria)

Mr A. Alfares, FAO Regional Forestry Officer, served as Secretary.

STATE OF FORESTRY IN THE REGION (Item 3)

6. The Commission reviewed developments in the forestry sector which had taken place in the region since the last session in 1996, on the basis of Secretariat Note FO:NEFC/96/2, a number of national reports and statements by delegations.
7. The Commission noted that the depletion of forest cover and resources due to overgrazing, urbanization, land degradation, conversion of forest lands to agriculture and the over exploitation of local woodlands in most countries remains the major forestry problem in the region.
8. The Commission noted that all of the countries in the region are engaged in reforestation and afforestation programmes as a central component of their forest policies and activities. It also noted that growing national concern over the future of forest resources and their linkage with environmental protection had led many countries of the region to initiate adjustments to their forestry legislation.
9. Action taken by countries to limit forest depletion and to protect the environment were various, amongst which the establishment of nurseries for adapted species, afforestation, improving forest fire prevention and control, involvement of local communities in forest planning and management, strengthening national forest research programmes and new forest legislation.
10. The shortage of fresh water in many member countries encouraged the use of treated waste water for irrigating forest tree plantations and also as a safe method of disposing of such water. As this issue was one of critical importance to the region, the Commission recommended that FAO organize a Workshop for the interested member countries to study the technical, ecological and socio-economic aspects of the use of waste water for irrigating plantations.
11. The Commission was also concerned by the recent increase in the number and scale of forest fires. It was informed by the Secretariat of the Meeting on Public Policies affecting Forest Fires that had been held in Rome from 28 to 30 October 1998. The report of the meeting, including its recommendations would be distributed shortly.
12. In particular, in the field of regional cooperation, the Commission recommended that FAO assist countries of the region in furthering cooperation in the field of conservation and exchange of forest genetic resources.

FOLLOW-UP TO UNCED IN FORESTRY: INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON FORESTS (IPF) PROPOSALS FOR ACTION AND THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON FORESTS (IFF) PROCESS (Item 4)

13. The Secretariat introduced document FO:NEFC/98/3 on the *Follow-up to UNCED in forestry: CSD/IPF/IFF process*.
14. The Commission was informed that at its Third Session in April 1995, the Committee on Sustainable Development (CSD) had established the IPF, which has formulated coordinated proposals for action. When the IPF ceased its activities in February 1997, it had generated a better understanding of sustainable forest management of all types of forests, but left pending a few key questions of high political relevance.
15. The Commission took note that the results of the IPF process were discussed at the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly in June 1997 and that it had been decided to establish the IFF, which would report to the CSD at its Eighth Session in 2000. The Forum will work towards consensus for international arrangements and mechanisms on all types of forests. In this context, the question of whether these arrangements and mechanisms should

have a legally binding character is very important. FAO, in its role as a neutral forum should facilitate the discussion of advantages and disadvantages of both options if requested by Member Countries.

16. The Commission was further informed that, in order to facilitate the work of the IPF, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests (ITFF) was established as an informal working alliance incorporating many international organizations working in forestry development. It has proved to be a useful informal arrangement to coordinate the activities of its member organizations. The ITFF agreed to establish lead agency responsibility for each of the 12 programme elements of the Programme of Work of the IPF, covering the whole range of forestry related issues.

17. The Commission recognized the importance of international cooperation in the forestry sector and also highlighted the value of multilateral, bilateral and regional cooperation.

18. The Commission endorsed the initiative by the Islamic Republic of Iran during the Second Session of the IFF to organize, in cooperation with other countries and international organizations, a meeting during 1999 on the Special Needs and Requirements of Countries with Low Forest Cover. It recommended to FAO to support this initiative.

19. The Commission took note of FAO's proposal to hold a Workshop to increase the knowledge base for an international instrument on forest in collaboration with the Costa-Rica-Canada Initiative on Category III.

FAO FORESTRY STRATEGY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK AND BUDGET (Item 5)

20. On the basis of Secretariat Note FO:NEFC/98/4 the Commission considered the draft FAO Strategic Plan for Forestry which would orient the forestry programme over the next decade by defining the mission, goals and implementation strategies in light of the continuing global issues and emerging trends cited in the note. Forestry aspects would be integrated into the overall FAO Strategic Framework. Both the Plan and the FAO Strategic Framework would be presented at the March 1999 COFO Session.

21. The Commission, in recognizing FAO's leading role as a neutral forum in world forestry issues, welcomed the initiative to develop the proposed strategic plan and recognized that its implementation would require an increase in financial and human resources. It further encouraged the FAO Forestry Department to forge stronger working partnerships with member countries, international and regional organizations, for the implementation of its strategies.

OVERVIEW AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL FOREST PROGRAMMES IN THE REGION (Item 6)

22. The Commission discussed this item on the basis of document FO:NEFC/98/5. Although FAO had launched through *Silva Mediterranea* the Mediterranean Forest Action Programme in 1994 (MEDFAP), the Commission noted that the number of national forest programmes (nfps) and the financial support to these programmes were lower in the Near East region than in other regions.

23. A number of member countries pointed out that they had their own national forest programmes, even though they were not always known by this name. The Commission recommended that FAO assist in a review of national forest programmes in the region in order to ascertain their harmonization with the principles guiding nfps.

24. The Commission recognized that the nfp process had necessarily to be country-driven, but that the lack of resources was a major obstacle in the implementation of these programmes. Funding should be more accessible within the framework of MEDFAP.

25. The Commission was informed that a few countries in the region had initiated the nfp process (formulation or implementation). It considered that the exchange of information on this subject would be very useful to those countries which were in the early stages of planning or designing their nfps and recommended that FAO assist in this exchange of information by organizing a Workshop on the elaboration and implementation of nfps in 1999. Potential donors should also be involved in this information exchange.

ROLE OF THE NEAR EAST FORESTRY COMMISSION AND FUTURE INTER-SESSION ACTIVITIES (Item 7)

26. The Commission discussed this item on the basis of document FO:NEFC/98/6 which proposed a number of activities and initiatives to define the role of the NEFC.

27. The Commission noted with appreciation the role NEFC played in supporting the forestry sector of the region and reiterated the important needs of the region, which included information on the state and value of forests, capacity building, especially as related to sustainable forest management, forestry sector planning and the partnership among all stakeholders.

ACTIVITIES OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL, INTERGOVERNMENTAL/NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE REGION (Item 8)

28. The representative of the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD) in presenting the activities of this organization, stated that ACSAD aims principally at carrying out scientific and applied research and studies providing data to help decision makers and project designers in developing agriculture. The Center also addresses social aspects of food security in Arab countries. Among other activities, ACSAD has a programme on arid land forestry and carries out research on multi-purpose trees and shrubs and nitrogen fixing species, fruit trees of forest origin, afforestation in arid and semi-arid environment and multiplication of drought tolerant species.

29. The representative of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) presented the activities of this organization, highlighting the long-standing forestry programme and activities undertaken by AOAD. AOAD supports and supervises the Arab Institute for Forestry in Lattakia, Syria, which, in addition to academic education, organizes training courses for Arab technicians in the field of forestry and related matters such as forest fires. Approximately 45 students graduate annually from this institute. AOAD has working relationships with many international and regional organizations.

30. The representative of the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agricultural Studies (CIHEAM) presented an overview of the activities of the Center, which develops activities in the area of natural renewable resource management and conservation through post-graduate studies and training for professional, scientific and academic staff of the region. It also supports regional research networks. Specific mention was made of activities developed in the framework of *Silva Mediterranea* networks, which are actively supported by CIHEAM, especially those related to forest fires database development and utilization.

31. The representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Syria, in presenting activities of this organization in the region, stated that the current UNDP

Regional Cooperation Framework for the Arab States aims to enhance the environment for Sustainable Human Development (SHD), especially in the area of poverty eradication. UNDP is one of the implementing agencies of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and as such, assists in the design, formulation and implementation of several GEF-supported projects. Many such projects address biodiversity and climate change and although UNDP interventions do not directly address forestry issues, they all have an indirect positive effect on the forestry sector.

32. The representative of the United Nations Population Fund, in summarizing the activities of this organization, stated that the UNFPA is fully committed to working in partnership with governments, UN agencies, development banks, bilateral aid agencies, non-governmental organizations and civil society. Consistent with Agenda 21, UNFPA strives to ensure that population, environment and poverty eradication factors are integrated in sustainable development policies, plans and programmes. It also strives to reduce both unsustainable consumption and production patterns as negative impacts of demographic factors on the environment. UNFPA translates these objectives into operational activities through studies and research.

33. The representative of the World Food Programme (WFP), in presenting the activities of this organization, stated that WFP projects involving forestry issues in general are designed so as to ensure that the allocation and sharing of benefits are agreed upon among community members through a participatory approach. WFP has provided assistance to forestry and to control of soil erosion and desertification projects in many countries of the Near East region. A number of WFP projects in the region were also presented in detail.

FOLLOW-UP TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO FAO BY THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION (Item 9)

34. The Commission appreciated the follow-up action taken by FAO to the recommendations and requests addressed to it by its last session.

FAO FORESTRY ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION, REVIEW OF FAO REGULAR AND FIELD PROGRAMMES (Item 10)

35. The Secretariat presented FAO forestry activities in the region over the past two years on the basis of document FO:NEFC/98/7.

36. The Commission noted with concern the dwindling number of projects in the region and called upon FAO in partnership with international and regional funding institutions to allocate sufficient financial resources for the development of the forestry sector.

37. The Commission recommended that FAO continue to give strong emphasis to watershed management, the role of forestry in combating desertification, agroforestry systems in the drylands, non-wood forest products and forestry plantations with particular emphasis on indigenous species.

38. In view of the intrinsic harsh conditions in most countries of the region and the challenges ahead, the Commission recommended that FAO consider strengthening the decentralized Forestry Unit in the Regional Office for the Near East in Cairo.

39. The Commission encouraged sub-regional groups of countries with common forest tracts or problems to cooperate in studies and seek solutions. Such subgroupings may include, for example, countries bordering the Red Sea, countries in the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean countries, members of the Commission.

MATTERS TO BE REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY (Item 11)

40. The Commission recommended that the following items be brought to the attention of the Committee on Forestry at its next session:

- v) recognizing the importance of NEFC sessions for forestry development in the region, member countries are encouraged to find ways and means to ensure appropriate high-level participation in the sessions;
- vi) that the FAO Forestry Department should further support the exchange of information between countries in the region both on technical and forest-related policy issues at the national, regional and international levels;
- vii) in recognizing FAO's leading role as a neutral forum in world forestry issues and welcoming its initiative to develop its proposed strategic plan, recommended the allocation of appropriate resources to facilitate its implementation and recommended to member countries that they support the process;
- viii) in recognizing FAO Forestry Department's contribution to institutional strengthening, it recommended that special efforts be directed to the region in particular by support to forestry research, education and training.

OTHER BUSINESS (Item 12)

41. The Commission supported the invitation to FAO to report on the status and progress of nfps at the next session of IFF in 1999 and each member country agreed to provide FAO with information in this regard through the relevant questionnaire.

42. The Commission was informed of the Meeting on Criteria and Indicators held in Damascus, prior to the 13th session of the NEFC. It endorsed the recommendations of the meeting, in particular those related to:

- call on FAO and other international, regional and national institutions to support the process of adopting and implementing criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management in the Near East countries;
- prioritization of criteria and indicators in the light of national, social, economic, environmental, ecological and political conditions;
- incorporation of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management in national forest programmes;
- training in adoption and implementation of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management;
- exchange and sharing of relevant experiences among the countries of the region;
- call on FAO to further support national efforts to deal with natural disasters especially forest fires.

DATE AND PLACE OF NEXT SESSION (Item 13)

43. The Commission noted with appreciation the offers of the delegations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Jordan to host its fourteenth session in 2000.

44. Proposals for agenda items for the next session will be communicated to the Secretariat by member countries in due course.

Appendix A.**AGENDA**

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Election of officers
3. State of forestry in the region
4. Follow-up to UNCED in forestry: IPF proposals for action and the IFF process
5. FAO forestry strategy and implications for future Programme of Work and Budget
6. Overview and opportunities for implementation of National Forest Programmes in the Region
7. Role of the Near East Forestry Commission and future inter-session activities
8. Activities of other International, Intergovernmental/Non-governmental Organizations in the Region
9. Follow-up to the recommendations addressed to FAO by the twelfth session of the Commission
10. FAO forestry activities in the Region, review of FAO Regular and Field Programmes
11. Matters to be referred to the Committee on Forestry
12. Other business
13. Date and place of next session
14. Adoption of Report

Appendix B

Near East Forestry Commission
13th session
Damascus 6-9 December 1998

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Appendix C**LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

Agenda Item	Code	Title
1	NEFC/98/1	Agenda
3	NEFC/98/2	State of forestry in the Region
4	NEFC/98/3	Follow-up to UNCED in forestry: IPF proposals for action and the IFF process
5	NEFC/98/4	FAO Forestry Strategy and implications for future Programme of Work and Budget
6	NEFC/98/5	Overview and opportunities for the implementation of national forest programmes in the Near East
7	NEFC/98/6	The role of the Near East Forestry Commission and future inter-session activities
8	NEFC/98/7	Review of FAO Regular and Field Programmes, including follow-up to the requests and recommendations of the Twelfth Session of the Commission
	NEFC/98/INF.1	Information Note
	NEFC/98/INF.2	Provisional timetable
	NEFC/98/INF.3	List of documents