

Opening Statement of Switzerland - FAO Committee on Forestry COFO25

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Switzerland wishes to express its gratitude to the FAO Forestry Department and COFO Secretariat for organizing COFO25 despite difficult circumstances, demonstrating the potential of remote communication. We also highly commend the leadership of FAO and its Assistant Director General of the Forestry Department, Mr. Hiroto Mitsugi for being swift in reflecting on the causality of the Covid pandemic due to destruction and incursion into forests by kicking off a series of webinars in June 2020.

With our statement, we wish to encourage FAO and its Forestry Department to continue its efforts leveraging the most effective political response to the Covid crisis and highlight the following priorities:

- Analyses from a vast diversity of perspectives say the same thing: the Covid pandemic is directly related to the destruction of forests. Most forest destruction, as well as potential biological sources of pandemics originate in the tropics. Therefore, the actions to be taken to protect humanity from new pandemics should start in forests, particularly focusing on biodiversity and deforestation hotspots.
- The lesson to be learned from the source of the crisis is obvious: forests need to be better protected, sustainably managed and restored. This is nothing new for governments, institutions, and stakeholders who have agreed on this historically with the UNFF Strategic Plan 2017-2030 as well as currently in forest-related policies heading toward 2030.
- Forest-based solutions do not have to reinvent the wheel, rather move to scale. If recovery finance is to be effective, it could start today by capitalizing on and expanding the existing programs and business practices that are currently demonstrating some degree of success. Part of the social and economic recovery packages must be directed and invested where the most direct effect can be leveraged.
- Poverty and loss of livelihoods will increase both for forest inhabitants and for economies linked to forests. Increasing deforestation, degradation and plundering forests is occurring during the crisis. These actions must be brought back under control through effective governance and law enforcement, and social and economic recovery packages can benefit immediately the most vulnerable groups. Longer-term sustainable management and stable supply chains, particularly as the private sector resumes activities, should be in focus.
- To prevent a recurrence of this crisis, we need to look into the dependency of the global economy on biodiversity, and the devastating impacts on us all when our relationship with nature is unsustainable. COVID-19 is nature's \$10 trillion dollar bite back, and this is just the beginning.
- Biodiversity and the process of developing the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: Politically, biodiversity remains the missing link. Species and ecosystems are being lost, in fact IPBES reports that one million species of plants and animals are at risk of extinction in the coming decade. Despite our attempts to address that loss, through the Convention on Biological Diversity, through the Aichi Targets, and through many, many vehicles, statements, commitments and declarations – we are still losing the race. The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework is currently being drafted. Switzerland supports an ambitious approach to mainstreaming of sustainable use of natural resources and biodiversity conservation, highlighting nature's contributions to people. To guarantee the sustainable use of natural resources, from a forest perspective, essentially this means conserving their multifunctionality. At the policy level, this means enhancing cooperation and synergies with all relevant agreements, instruments and processes. The post-2020 framework needs to **strengthen the reporting and review mechanism**. It should include a reporting mechanism that empowers interoperability among the different existing online reporting tools and knowledge platforms (namely the Data Reporting Tool - DaRT).. We see FAO's role in further cooperating with the relevant member states and institutions on further developing the Post 2020 GBF and in delivering the relevant information on forest biodiversity.

Switzerland looks forward to engaging with all of you to build back better. Thank you.