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COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

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STRENGTHENING FAO'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL ARRANGEMENT ON FORESTS

I. Introduction

1. At its 11th session in May 2015, the United Nations Forum on Forest (UNFF) agreed on a Ministerial declaration entitled "The forests we want: beyond 2015". It also agreed on a draft resolution, adopted in July 2015 by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)¹, on the "International arrangement on forests beyond 2015". The Ministerial declaration and the ECOSOC resolution set the scene for the international forest policy dialogue in the post-2015 period. They extend the UNFF until 2030 and define new objectives for the International Arrangement on Forests (IAF) and its components, enhancing their work towards sustainable management of the world's forests and strengthening their contribution to sustainable development. Since the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) is one of the components of the IAF, the outcome documents also provide indirect guidance for FAO, as Chair of the CPF, inviting the Partnership and its members to step up their efforts and engagement in a wide array of activities in support of the work of the Forum and its member States.

II. UNFF invitations for action

2. The resolution and the declaration strongly call for fostering international cooperation and governance with regard to sustainable forest management at all levels, in particular within the framework of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests ("UN Forest Instrument"). Such a cooperation should be cross-sectoral, involving governments, international organizations, including, in particular, those of the UN System, the private sector, major groups, as well as other relevant stakeholders. A policy dialogue along this model would enable the international community to create new synergies, resulting in a more holistic approach, greater policy coherence and consistency. In addition, it could help further increase a common global understanding and operationalization of the concept of sustainable forest management and maximize the impact and relevance of the policy work.

¹ ECOSOC E/RES/2015/33

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3. The ECOSOC Resolution envisages an important role for member organizations of the CPF in the future IAF. Key areas of CPF's contributions are foreseen to be, *inter alia*:

- Strengthened contribution to exchange of experiences and lessons learned²;
- Assessment of progress in enhancing policy coherence, dialogue and cooperation on forests³;
- High-level and multi-stakeholder dialogues⁴;
- Streamlining and harmonization of international forest-related reporting⁵;
- Provision of technical advice on a broad range of issues related to sustainable forest management⁶;
- Enhanced support to implementing the functions of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (i.e. the strengthened facilitative process)⁷.

4. The resolution devotes an entire section to providing guidance for CPF⁸, specifying its core functions, reaffirming certain operational principles and seeking enhanced support for CPF activities by governing bodies of member organizations and Member States as members of those governing bodies. The resolution also encourages CPF to consider several measures for strengthening the Partnership and its support to UNFF and members states⁹.

III. FAO contributions

5. CPF has been actively engaged in developing a response for the invitations contained in paragraph 22 of the resolution by considering appropriate measures for: formalizing working modalities and developing procedures for its effective functioning and operation; identifying ways to stimulate participation of existing members; assessing current and potential future membership; identifying ways to involve major groups and other stakeholders; further development and expansion of thematic joint initiatives; and securing appropriate funding for its activities. At the time of the 23rd Session of COFO, CPF will have had two working meetings to address these issues and a CPF Retreat with a focus on key tasks of the CPF and operationalizing the UNFF guidance including considering its workplan also in the context of the broader Strategic Plan of the IAF and its quadrennial programmes of work¹⁰.

6. Regarding potential contributions from FAO, it is worthwhile to note that several of the recommended activities are already included in its programme of work in forestry under the renewed Strategic Framework, which aims at enhanced coordination across sectors both at the policy dialogue and implementation levels. The consideration of land use challenges and opportunities in the Committee on Forestry (COFO); the discussion of appropriate strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement by the various technical committees; as well as the consideration of the forest and food security nexus by the Committee on World Food Security are recent examples of how FAO could contribute to the global dialogue by bringing a cross-sectoral perspective from key natural resource management areas such as forest, land, water, fisheries, agriculture and nutrition.

² E/RES/2015/33, paragraphs 6.(b), 6.(g) (ii);

³ Ibid., paragraph 6.(f) (ii)

⁴ Ibid., paragraph 6.(d)

⁵ Ibid., paragraph 16.(a), 16.(c)

⁶ Ibid., paragraph 6.(g) (i)

⁷ Ibid., paragraph 13.(g), 14.(a)

⁸ Ibid., Section VII, paragraphs 20-24

⁹ Ibid., paragraph 22

¹⁰ Members of the Committee will be briefed by the secretariat on the outcome of these meetings during the presentation of this agenda item.

7. At the operational level, FAO is committed to serve as the major source of global forest information and analyses including those contained in the successive issues of the Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) and the State of the World's Forests (SOFO). Collaboration with partners in this area has resulted in common tools such as the Joint Forest Resources Questionnaire and has helped align reporting procedures for multiple international processes, including the SDGs. In addition to developing voluntary guidelines and other knowledge products and providing support on the ground, FAO has been developing, in collaboration with a broad range of partners, a major online knowledge management tool on sustainable forest management, the SFM Toolbox¹¹.

8. These are just examples of major activities with direct relevance to the calls and invitations in the ECOSOC resolution. COFO has a unique opportunity for increasing coherence and strengthening synergies by developing its guidance for FAO to contribute further to the International Arrangement on Forests, in particular when discussing items 4, 5 and 6 of the agenda of the 23rd Session.

9. In addition to the invitations to international organizations and CPF, the resolution contains, as a new element, a strengthened focus on regional-global interaction and regional/sub-regional involvement, which would also merit COFO's particular attention. Through the global network of the regional forestry commissions, FAO is best positioned to play a major role in strengthening regional involvement. The Commissions regularly review the outcomes of the UNFF sessions and consider appropriate actions both for Members and for FAO. As recommended during the recent Commission sessions, the regional focus of UNFF work could be strengthened through greater interaction with regional forestry commissions, and appropriate arrangements should be pursued.

10. Similar meeting frequencies and planning cycles of the Commissions offer further opportunities for stronger harmonization of agendas of regional deliberations on forests and for enhanced coordination in the implementation of their outcomes. Commissions could provide a platform for both stronger coordination of, and collaboration in, regional actions aimed at the implementation of the UN Forest Instrument, as well as for a regional dialogue within the IAF.

IV. Points for consideration

11. Since CPF plays a central role in strengthening the International Arrangement on Forests, FAO - as Chair of the CPF and an agency with a regional network and relevant country presence - has a particular opportunity and responsibility in ensuring an appropriate response to the ECOSOC resolution and supporting the UNFF as well as member states in its implementation.

12. The Committee may wish to invite UNFF to:

- consider SOFO, FRA and other major knowledge and analytical products of FAO and those of the CPF as major inputs for its review sessions;
- consider the potential offered by the FAO regional forestry commissions for enhancing regional/sub-regional involvement, including through using the commissions for regional dialogues related to UNFF.

13. The Committee may wish to request FAO to:

- continue to support the implementation of the UNFF decisions and related ECOSOC resolutions and provide support to Members in this regard;
- continue its leadership in the CPF, including through playing an active role in implementing the provisions for strengthening the Partnership;
- include in its Medium Term Plan and Programme of Work and Budget activities related to CPF and allocate adequate resources to this end.

¹¹ <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-forest-management/toolbox/sfm-home/en/> and Annex IV of COFO/2016/7.5