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CONFERENCE

Forty-second Session

2021

Preparations for the XV World Forestry Congress

Executive Summary

The first World Forestry Congress was held in Rome in 1926 and subsequent Congresses have taken place about every six years since then. In 1954, FAO was entrusted with supporting the Congress in close cooperation with the host country and continues to do so today.

The XV World Forestry Congress is scheduled to be held from 2 to 6 May 2022 in Seoul, Republic of Korea. The Congress was originally scheduled for May 2021, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Congress will bring together the global forestry community to review and analyse key challenges facing the sector and ways to address these.

This document serves as a means to inform the Membership of the status of preparations for the XV World Forestry Congress.

Suggested action by the Conference

The Conference is invited to:

- a) provide guidance on how the Congress can best serve as an inclusive and effective platform to cover emerging challenges related to forests and enhance the important role of forests in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and post COVID-19 recovery efforts;
- b) request FAO to report the outcomes of the Congress, through the Committee on Forestry (COFO), to the next Session of the Conference (43rd Session).

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

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1. World Forestry Congresses have been celebrated since 1926, generally once every six years. Since 1954, FAO has been supporting the Congress in close cooperation with the host country. The Congress serves as the largest global forum on forests for governments, academia, civil society and the private sector for sharing experiences and most recent knowledge, and for formulating recommendations to be implemented by various actors and stakeholders. Its outcomes are expected to be brought to the attention of the FAO Conference for possible endorsement as well as to other important international fora.
2. The 155th Session of the FAO Council endorsed the offer of the Republic of Korea to host the XV World Forestry Congress, originally scheduled for 24-28 May 2021, in Seoul, and postponed to 2-6 May 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Consultations with FAO Members started in 2019 within the framework of the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions, and continued through the 25th Session of COFO. These fora identified priority issues that could form the basis of technical sessions at the Congress. The Secretariat is also seeking advice from various stakeholder groups and is supported by the Consultative Group of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and the Congress's own Advisory Committee composed of representatives of all stakeholder groups and regions.
4. The consultations led to selecting *Building a green, healthy and resilient future with forests* as the theme of the Congress, reflecting the integral role that forests play in ensuring the health, well-being and stability of the planet and its people. It also seeks to recognize the contributions of forests to the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to promote nature-based solutions as the most efficient means to achieve progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.
5. The Congress aims to serve as a platform for the global forest sector to review the outcomes of major global conferences as they relate to forests and consider recommendations for appropriate follow-up actions. These global fora include the Conferences of the Parties of the Rio Conventions, the UN Food Systems Summit and the IUCN¹ World Conservation Congress, all with considerable attention to forests and forestry.
6. To achieve its objectives, the programme is built around six sub-themes that cover the most important current issues concerning forests and the products and services they provide. The sub-themes also guide the review of progress in implementing the recommendations of previous congresses, especially the Durban Declaration. The sub-themes are:
 - i) Turning the tide: reversing deforestation and forest degradation;
 - ii) Nature-based solutions for climate-change adaptation and mitigation and biodiversity conservation;
 - iii) The green pathway to growth and sustainability;
 - iv) Forests and human health: revisiting the connections;
 - v) Managing and communicating forest information and knowledge;
 - vi) Forests without boundaries: enhancing management and cooperation.
7. The Congress will encompass high-level dialogues; plenary sessions; technical sessions with thematic sub-theme discussions; special events that focus on specific thematic areas; side and partner events that provide an opportunity for sharing expertise, best practices and innovations; and poster sessions, publicizing research carried out around the world.
8. In addition to broad participation from a wide range of stakeholders, the Congress is also expected to attract the attention of leaders of governments, scientific and business communities, and stakeholder associations. The organizers aim to ensure strong representation of youth and women, and indigenous peoples. Korea is also working on a programme to sensitize middle school-aged youth to forest issues and will provide an opportunity for them to learn about forests through the Congress.

¹ International Union for Conservation of Nature

9. The Congress will include an exhibition featuring products, technologies and services available to the forestry sector and field trips to sites of interest in the Republic of Korea. Time has been built into the programme to ensure that participants will have the opportunity to network and informally share ideas and experiences.

10. The host country is fully prepared to provide the safest conditions for Congress participants under the health regulations in place. The Congress venue has the highest standard sanitary measures in place, and will be adapted to social distancing requirements, as needed for the Congress. It is expected that participants will be able to physically attend the Congress under favourable circumstances brought about by mass COVID-19 vaccinations around the world and the lifting of restrictions on international travel. If the pandemic will hinder in-person participation in the next year, the Secretariat will consider employing virtual elements to allow for good participation in the Congress.

11. The key findings of the Congress's deliberations will form the Congress outcomes that will be formulated through an open and transparent consultative process involving forest-sector stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels. It seeks to contribute to:

- a) renewed commitment to halt deforestation, prevent forest degradation and increase forest area through increased investment in forests and forestry-related activities;
- b) enhance appreciation for the critical role that forests, trees, forest products and services play in a green, healthy and resilient future of the planet;
- c) acknowledge the role of forests and forestry in sustainable development and specifically in the efforts to build back better post-COVID-19.

12. The relevance of the Congress outcomes stems from the commitment of all stakeholders, and it is imperative that key stakeholder groups, such as governments, duly consider these outcomes. FAO could provide an excellent mechanism for doing so through its governing bodies, in particular COFO, the Council and the Conference, and decide on appropriate actions.