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COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

Twenty-sixth Session

3-7 October 2022

Outcomes of the XV World Forestry Congress

Executive Summary

This document presents key features and main outcomes of the XV World Forestry Congress, held in a hybrid format, in Seoul, Republic of Korea, from 2-6 May 2022. It also outlines possible follow-up work to help operationalize these outcomes by FAO and its Members as well as by other international forest-related instruments, organizations and processes.

Suggested actions by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- welcome the outcomes of the XV World Forestry Congress and recommend the FAO Council and Conference to consider these recommendations for inclusion in the Strategic Framework 2022-31, the Medium-Term Plan 2022-2025 and the Programme of Work and Budget of the Organization for the coming biennia;
- encourage Members to implement the Congress recommendations as appropriate;
- recommend FAO, and invite members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, to support FAO Members in their efforts to implement Congress recommendations;
- invite FAO Technical Committees and the Regional Forestry Commissions to consider appropriate actions at the regional level;
- commend the Republic of Korea for the excellent hosting of the Congress and call for continued efforts to present the Congress outcomes to major global fora with FAO support;
- invite Members and FAO to strengthen collaboration with and support to youth;
- recommend FAO to report back on implementation of Congress recommendations at forthcoming sessions of the Committee.

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I. Introduction

1. The World Forestry Congress (WFC), first held in Italy in 1926, is organized once every six years with FAO support since 1954. The 155th Session of the FAO Council in 2016 endorsed the offer of the Republic of Korea to host the XV World Forestry Congress. The Republic of Korea originally suggested to hold the event on 24–28 May 2021, in Seoul, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Congress was re-scheduled to 2–6 May 2022 and conducted in hybrid format.
2. Based on the request by the Committee on Forestry (COFO) at its 25th Session and as endorsed, respectively, by the Council at its 165th Session and the Conference at its 42nd Session, FAO should “present the outcomes of the Congress to the Regional Forestry Commissions and the 26th Session of the Committee on Forestry, and through it to the FAO Council and Conference, with a view to considering as appropriate these outcomes in the planning of policies and programmes of the Organization and monitoring progress in implementation”¹. It was further requested that the outcomes be presented to relevant intergovernmental processes and instruments.
3. This document seeks to inform the Committee on the main outcomes of the Congress and to receive guidance on further actions.

II. Key features of the XV World Forestry Congress

4. In spite of the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic globally, the Congress was the best attended ever, attracting over 15 000 participants from 160 countries –almost 5 000 of which attended virtually. High-level participants included ministers, vice ministers or equivalents, several heads of UN and non-UN international organizations, the FAO Regional Goodwill Ambassador for the Near East and North Africa, the President of the Republic of Korea and the FAO Director-General.
5. The Congress witnessed 5 pre-congress events, 53 main sessions including a high-level dialogue and two ministerial forums, 116 side-events, 95 poster and 59 speakers’ corner presentations. All main sessions and 91 side events were held in hybrid mode. With a maximum of seven sessions running in parallel, it has been the largest hybrid event ever held in forestry. The main sessions were addressed by more than 390 speakers, and the Congress attracted over 2 000 voluntary contributions (papers, posters, videos), of which 1 064 were published. Speakers and voluntary contributions represented a good regional balance for most regions. The Regional Goodwill Ambassador for the Near East and North Africa lent her influential voice to highlighting important regional issues in the Congress. Youth, including young professionals, formed an active part of the Congress, contributing to several side- and main events and issuing a Youth Call for Action.
6. A flagship global mentorship programme was launched by the WFC Secretariat and Project Learning Tree Canada (PLTC) in the six months leading up to the Congress, which matched a total of 102 people from 37 different countries, and provided capacity development and guidance culminating with a meeting of some participants in person at the Congress.
7. The Republic of Korea provided excellent conditions for the Congress. FAO was responsible for the programme and outcomes of the Congress, and enjoyed strong support from the Korea Forest Service. FAO was also supported by an informal Consultative Group formed by members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), and a 24-member Advisory Committee where all regions and stakeholder groups were represented.

¹ COFO/2020/REP paragraph 50. b.

8. As a result of a thorough consultation process, the Congress considered the most relevant forest-related questions clustered into six sub-themes under the overarching theme of “Building a green, healthy and resilient future with forests”:

- 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; and
- vi. forests without boundaries: enhancing management and cooperation.

9. In addition to these thematic clusters, particular attention was paid to the multiple dimensions of investments in and finance for forests, as well as to forest fires, the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery, and the special concerns, opportunities and challenges of youth and young professionals.

III. XV World Forestry Congress outcomes

10. After five days of intense deliberations, the Congress generated robust outcomes consisting of the following components: Seoul Forest Declaration², XV World Forestry Congress Action Points³, Ministerial Call on Sustainable Wood⁴, Work with Us - Youth Call for Action⁵.

11. The Seoul Forest Declaration asserts that forests, forestry and forest stakeholders offer major nature-based solutions to climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, hunger and poverty, but action is needed now – there is no time to lose. It conveys six urgent messages to help achieve a sustainable future:

- since forests transcend political, social and environmental boundaries and are vital for biodiversity and the carbon, water and energy cycles, responsibility over forests should be shared and integrated across institutions, sectors and stakeholders;
- investment in forest and landscape restoration should be tripled globally by 2030 to implement global commitments and meet internationally agreed goals and targets;
- production and consumption need to be sustainable and policies should foster innovative green financing mechanisms to upscale investment in forest conservation, restoration and sustainable use;
- the full potential of legal, sustainably produced wood must be used to transform the building sector, provide renewable energy and innovative new materials, and move towards a circular bioeconomy and climate neutrality;
- healthy, productive forests must be maintained to reduce the risk of, and improve responsiveness to, future pandemics and provide other essential benefits for human physical and mental health and well-being;
- innovative technologies and mechanisms must be applied widely to enable evidence-based forest and landscape decision-making and effective forest communication.

² <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0160en/cc0160en.pdf>

³ <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0248en/cc0248en.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0249en/cc0249en.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0247en/cc0247en.pdf>

12. The Declaration recognizes that forest-based solutions must be inclusive of and empower all stakeholders, and that greater investment and capacity building in forest communication and education and more research are needed to strengthen understanding and awareness of the benefits of sustainably managed forests and trees. It also calls for close cooperation among nations to address challenges that transcend political boundaries.

13. The Declaration is strongly supported by the Ministerial Call on Sustainable Wood, a voluntary process initiated and sponsored by six countries⁶, aiming to scale up sustainable wood-based pathways to a carbon-neutral future by raising awareness, enhancing policy dialogues, promoting technical exchange and knowledge sharing and increasing the share of wood-based solutions in Nationally Determined Contributions. The Call, which is open to all countries to join, also invites FAO and members of the CPF to support these activities.

14. The Youth Call for Action is a novel initiative developed through five regional consultations prior to the Congress, with the involvement of over 600 youth representatives to strengthen inter-generational collaboration, the involvement of youth in education, career development, employment, gender mainstreaming and participation in setting policies in the forest and related sectors. The Call invites strong and supportive responses from all actors, especially governments and intergovernmental organizations such as FAO and its relevant governing bodies.

15. Driven by the recognition of urgency, the Congress had a strong focus on impact on the ground and produced a rich set of actionable recommendations. The Action Points contain about 150 concrete proposals for possible follow-up actions by various stakeholders, and can be used as a starting point for strengthening existing activities or launching new ones to enhance progress on the forest pathways. As a result of deliberate efforts, the Congress recommendations are well coordinated with the recommendations contained in *The State of the World's Forests 2022*, giving further momentum to action-oriented approaches.

16. The Congress also served as a launching pad for several important products and activities. These included *The State of the World's Forests 2022*; FRA Remote Sensing Survey; Assuring the Future of Forests through Integrated Risk Management (AFFIRM) Mechanism; Sustaining an Abundance of Forest Ecosystems initiative (SAFE); Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring (FERM); as well as the Global Network of Forestry Young Professionals.

IV. Follow-up and next steps

17. The Congress enjoyed close attention and media coverage with over 1 100 articles published in newspapers, including many top-tier ones. FAO produced the following major media products during the Congress: two editorials (FAO Director-General and WFC Secretary-General/Associate Secretary-General), seven press releases, seven news stories, four TV interviews and 11 videos. The Earth Negotiations Bulletin provided full coverage of the Congress, reaching around 125 000 readers daily.

18. The web and social media were used extensively and produced remarkable results with indicators comparable or even surpassing similar global events. The Congress website attracted 700 000 visitors with 15.5 million hits between September 2020 and May 2022. Regarding social media, analytics show that in the period from 1 April 2022 to 7 June 2022, over 17 000 messages were seen by 68.4 million people generating about 342 000 interactions (likes, comments, shares etc.). In addition, the over 270 multilingual posts on FAO's corporate social media accounts are estimated to have reached 23 million accounts.

19. It is equally important, however, that Congress outcomes are brought to the attention of governments, other stakeholders and relevant global and regional processes. These include, *inter alia*, the Conferences of the Parties of the Rio Conventions, the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF),

⁶ Austria, Cameroon, Gabon, Japan, Korea, Peru

and other governing bodies of member organizations of the CPF, as well as the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). In line with the request of the 25th Session of the Committee, the Republic of Korea, as a party to the major global processes, may play a lead role in promoting the Congress outcomes and FAO could support these efforts.

20. The Committee may wish to explore how it could respond to the Youth Call for Action and invite the Regional Forestry Commissions to do the same, while recommending FAO to consider the proposals in the Call for inclusion in its strategies and operational plans, including also in the context of the World Food Forum.

21. The Committee may also wish to consider the outcomes of the Congress when discussing in particular Agenda item 9.1 *FAO's work in Forestry under the new FAO Strategic Framework 2022-30*.