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COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

EIGHTEENTH SESSION

Rome, Italy, 13-16 March 2007

**PROGRESSING TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FOREST
MANAGEMENT
IN-SESSION SEMINAR: REGIONAL ACTION ON SUSTAINABLE
FOREST MANAGEMENT
Wednesday, 14 March 2007, from 14.30 to 16.30**

Introduction – Objective of the Seminar

1. The main objective of the seminar is to highlight and strengthen the role of regional processes, including the Regional Forestry Commissions, in boosting action on sustainable forest management.
2. Delegates are invited to discuss ways in which regional processes:
 - provide a link between national and international dialogue;
 - promote actions and practices by all partners;
 - facilitate cooperation among different processes operating in each region; and
 - contribute to the Committee on Forestry (COFO) and other global fora, including the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF).

Regional Forestry Commissions

3. Over the past few years, countries have made significant efforts to strengthen the Regional Forestry Commissions. The record participation by 600 people in the 2006 sessions, including the heads of the national forestry agencies from more than 100 countries; the focus on action; and increased inter-session activities, provide evidence that the Commissions are becoming increasingly effective. Innovative changes in working methods and the involvement of partners have occurred in the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission, Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission, Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission and the Near East Forestry Commission. The North American Forest Commission carried out an independent evaluation to highlight areas for improvement. The European Forestry Commission is leading the way to

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partner with other processes to develop joint approaches to address the most pressing issues in the region.

4. In 2006, the commissions confirmed their vital role in strengthening linkages between regional and global dialogues. They reinforced the call to strengthen country capacities to implement international agreements and the need for further assistance to develop and implement national forest programmes; for effective monitoring, assessment and reporting; to control illegal logging; to enhance local participation and private sector involvement in forestry; to address invasive species problems; and to mobilize resources. (www.fao.org/forestry/site/30135/en).

5. The outcomes of the 2006 *Special Sessions on Implementing Sustainable Forest Management*, summarized in Part I of the *State of the World's Forests 2007*, have confirmed many positive trends. Perhaps the most important global trend is the increased political commitment to sustainable forest management that is evidenced by more than 100 countries, including countries in every region of the world, having initiated national forest programmes and enacted new forest policies or legislation in the 15 years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Progress is a result of re-orientation of policies, decentralization and devolution of forest management, application of best management practices, expansion of protected areas and conservation of biological diversity, acceleration of plantation development and rehabilitation of degraded areas.

6. However, major efforts are still required to maintain a vital forest sector and to secure adequate linkages to other sectors. More should be done to ensure forestry's contribution to sustainable development and poverty reduction; to improve the assessment of basic information about forests and forestry institutions in most countries; to reinforce the connection between relevant information and effective policy development; to enforce laws more effectively; to continue to promote the full participation of all stakeholders in forestry processes and decision-making, including improvements in forest tenure; and to overcome insufficient budgetary resources and weak institutional capacities.

Working Method of the Seminar

7. The in-session seminar is an official part of the COFO agenda but provides a venue for more informal dialogue among the panellists and other COFO participants.

8. The in-session seminar will have a panel of partners including the Chairs of the six Regional Forestry Commissions and representatives of other regional processes to highlight progress made in implementing sustainable forest management; capacity building through stakeholder involvement, and monitoring progress.

9. After the presentations, delegates will be invited to provide feedback on the issues presented and to discuss ways of strengthening regional, action-oriented cooperation on forestry, as outlined in the first section.

10. More details will be posted on the COFO website in due course:
www.fao.org/forestry/site/cofo/en.