

Statement
of the European Union and its 27 Member States

26th session of the FAO Committee on Forestry
Rome, 3-7 October 2022

Agenda item 1: Opening statement

Mr Chair,

1. I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States at this session, which commemorates the 50th anniversary of the first COFO session in 1972.
2. Let me first express the full solidarity of the EU and its Member States with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. The EU condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's unprovoked and unjustified act of aggression against Ukraine, which is a flagrant violation of international law and the UN Charter, and with dramatic human, economic, social as well as environmental consequences in this region. We recall in this regard the decision adopted by the FAO Council at its 169th session, where the Council 'affirmed that the aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation, with the involvement of Belarus, is in violation of the objectives and purposes of the Organization as set out in the Preamble of the Constitution and of the obligations accepted by the Russian Federation and Belarus as Members of the Organization'. We firmly reject and strongly condemn the illegal attempted annexation by Russia of Ukraine's four regions. These actions, based on sham "referenda" carried out by the Russian-installed officials in temporarily seized Ukrainian territories, are a further blatant violation of Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and of international law. The EU demands that Russia immediately cease its military actions, withdraw all its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine and fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders and abide by the UN General Assembly resolution titled "Aggression against Ukraine" supported by 141 states at the 11th emergency special session.
3. We gathered here after several tough years with the Covid-19 pandemics, and we appreciate that we have, at least partly, overcome its challenges and that this session is organised in a hybrid format, including the 8th World Forest Week.
4. In this regard, I want to express our thanks to the Steering Committee and the Secretariat for their work in preparing this session under continuing Covid-19 conditions. We appreciate that the background documents were available well before the official deadline.
5. In general, we welcome that the agenda is well balanced and addresses economic, social and environmental issues of sustainable forest management. We appreciate that the

report of the State of World's Forests 2022, while focusing primarily on economic aspects of sustainable forest management, also provides an excellent background for key agenda items 5, 6 and 7.

6. However, we find the agenda for this session very ambitious, and the time for discussion allocated to each agenda item limited, which may affect the quality of discussion.
7. Forests have a considerable role in many current policy issues, such as climate, food security and biodiversity. We are especially pleased to see the item of Agriculture and forestry linkages on the agenda. We fully support the approach to discussing the issue at both COAG and COFO from different perspectives. We encourage the FAO to further strengthen the role of forests and forestry in the FAO strategic documents, including the new strategies on climate change, and science and innovation.
8. We hope to follow this example in other areas because closer integration between the agriculture and forestry sectors would address global challenges, including ending hunger, halting deforestation, and combatting climate change, land degradation and desertification, and biodiversity loss.
9. Here we would like to reiterate that halting deforestation and forest degradation as well as the promotion of reforestation and forest restoration are of utmost priority for the EU.
10. The COFO sessions always remind us of the importance of international cooperation and of the need for coherence between various initiatives with similar goals. We find the role of the FAO in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests irreplaceable, yet we still see a possibility of its strengthening.
11. As for the FAO itself, we invite the Secretariat to appoint a new Director for the forestry division as soon as possible, which would help strengthen the role of forests.
12. We are looking forward to fruitful discussions during the upcoming week.

Thank you, Mr Chair.