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**Regional Office for Asia and the
Pacific**

Maliwan Mansion
39 Phra Atit Road
Bangkok 10200, Thailand
Tel: (66 2) 697-4000
Facsimile: (66 2) 697-4445
E-Mail: FAO-RAP@fao.org

**Post-tsunami:
Demands for vast supplies of wood
could adversely affect the remaining forests irrevocably**

Bangkok, 07 March 2005 – In the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami, the surge for infrastructure and housing reconstruction requires vast supplies of wood. If not managed appropriately, this demand could adversely affect the remaining forests irrevocably, an FAO statement warned today.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) today called for attention to forests in the tsunami-affected countries which “are at risk of over-exploitation to meet immediate needs and reconstruction work”.

Much of the infrastructure destroyed by the tsunami was made of wood, including piers, bridges, boats, houses and other buildings, and many of the affected coastal communities rely on fuelwood for heating and cooking.

The reconstruction efforts are likely to put pressure on forests. “Meeting the immediate needs for wood, restoring livelihoods and rehabilitating damaged forests are among some of the priority actions needed, followed by longer term strategies,” stressed He Changchui, FAO’s regional chief for Asia and the Pacific.

FAO is calling for a careful assessment of the immediate needs for harvesting of wood and non-wood products – including timber, poles, fuelwood and thatch for houses – and the role mangroves and other coastal forests played in mitigating the impact of the tsunamis.

Measures should be taken by governments to help avoid over-harvesting and illegal felling of trees resulting from the massive reconstruction needs, and an evaluation of potential sources for supplying the required wood should undertaken.

Good opportunities exist in many areas to reuse wood salvaged from damaged buildings or timber from trees downed by the tsunami.

Proposals for the importation of wood by tsunami-affected countries should be carefully considered taking into account the suitability of the imported timber for use under tropical conditions as well as its cultural appropriateness.

Another key issue concerns needs to rehabilitate mangroves and other coastal forests and trees damaged by the tsunami – the full extent of which is still unknown.

As affected countries are now moving from the emergency phase into medium and long term rehabilitation, there is an urgent need for technical assistance to conduct detailed ecosystem assessments, according to a statement made by FAO today during the opening ceremony of a regional coordination workshop on rehabilitation of tsunami-affected forest ecosystems.

Among the post-tsunami rehabilitation requirements, the natural environment has been given high priority.

“Unless efforts are undertaken appropriately, with sound scientific understanding and suitable technologies, such interventions can be wasteful, misguided and discouraging,” noted Patrick Durst, FAO’s senior forestry officer.

More in-depth assessments of these aspects are needed. The goal is to assist countries to meet their immediate needs and to prepare and implement strategies for restoring livelihoods and meeting longer-term forestry-related needs within an integrated coastal management programme.

Numerous national and regional organizations are actively planning forestry-related rehabilitation efforts. While these efforts should be commended, the risk of duplication and misdirection of resources is something that all organizations should be concerned about, FAO emphasized.

The objective of the FAO workshop is to exchange information and knowledge related to sound and effective rehabilitation of forest ecosystems in tsunami-affected areas, and to develop a related regional strategic framework.

The meeting brings together some 50 participants representing the governments of tsunami-affected countries, NGOs, international and regional agencies, and bilateral donors to formulate a framework for regional forestry rehabilitation initiatives.

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More information on tsunami and forestry:

<http://www.fao.org/forestry/foris/webview/tsunami/index.jsp?siteId=6752&sitetreed=27219&langId=1&geoId=0>

Diderik de Vleeschauwer, Information Officer,
FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Diderik.deVleeschauwer@fao.org or telephone +66-2-697.4126