

*COFO28 - Italian declaration on Item 5*

*Madam / Mr. Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates and representatives,*

*Italy strongly supports the statement presented by Ireland, on behalf of the EU and its 27 Member States.*

*Forests and food security are closely interconnected, particularly in the Mediterranean region.*

*Sustainable forest management supports agriculture by protecting soils, regulating water resources, conserving biodiversity and maintaining essential ecosystem services.*

*Italy highlights the importance of non-wood forest products (NWFPs), such as mushrooms, truffles, honey, nuts, aromatic and medicinal herbs. These products contribute significantly to food security, support rural livelihoods, strengthen local value chains and foster the valorisation of local cultural heritage as well as the Mediterranean gastronomic heritage. Furthermore, they create income opportunities, help prevent rural depopulation and provide valuable ecosystem services linked to tourism and recreational activities.*

*In this context, Italy reaffirms the importance of promoting and strengthening actions that enhance the contribution of forests and NWFPs to food security, sustainable development and rural prosperity.*

*Finally, in my function as Vice-Chair of the Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions (Silva Mediterranea), I would like to inform you that the role of Mediterranean forests in food security will also be addressed during the 9th Mediterranean Forest Week, “Mediterranean Forests for People, Nature and Resilient Agrifood Systems”, which will be held in Italy at FAO headquarters in April 2027.*

*Thank you, Madam / Mr. Chair.*