Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

Discussion paper contributed by the non-governmental organizations major group**

Summary

The global forest crisis continues unabated despite 10 years of global forest policy dialogue in the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (from 1995 to 1997), in the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (from 1997 to 2000) and, finally, in the United Nations Forum on Forests (from 2000 onward). Much of the forest policy dialogue in these forums has been dominated either by a discussion of the need for an international, legally binding instrument — like a forest convention — or by preparations to discuss the need for such an agreement, to the detriment of concise and committed government action to halt the crisis.

The year 2005 is again dominated by process discussions as intergovernmental forest-policy makers once more prepare to discuss the need or otherwise for a legally binding instrument.

A number of agreements already exist, which provide sufficient guidance on the steps required to halt the crisis, among others: the expanded work programme on forest biological diversity of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals

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** Prepared by the Global Forest Coalition (GFC).
for action, which Governments pledged to implement several years ago; the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests; and chapter 11 of Agenda 21.

Non-governmental organizations believe that it is necessary to ensure that immediate actions are taken to halt the alarming destruction of forests worldwide and that those actions:

• Are consonant with international human rights.
• Recognize, respect and support implementation of customary rights of indigenous peoples and communities that live in and depend on forests.
• Address underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, including the need for the readjustment of financial flows and the reduction of consumption.
• Promote genuine community-based forest management that empowers forest peoples.

Over the past 10 years of the international forest policy dialogue process, the debate on a global forest convention has prevented progress on the issues listed above and on others. It is unacceptable that this fruitless dialogue, currently regarding the merits or otherwise of a legally binding instrument without further specification of the nature of such an instrument, should continue to divert attention from actions and activities that could tackle the root causes and effects of deforestation and forest degradation.

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Introduction

1. The present position paper has been prepared by a coalition of non-governmental organizations working together in the Global Forest Coalition (GFC). The Coalition (formerly known as the NGO Forest Working Group) was established in 1995 to bring the views of non-governmental organizations and indigenous peoples’ organizations to the various international forest policy forums and negotiations. The coalition also facilitates the informed participation of non-governmental organizations and indigenous peoples’ organizations in these processes, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, the United Nations Forum on Forests, the Convention on Biological Diversity,1 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change2 and other relevant forest policy processes.

2. The global forest crisis continues unabated despite more than 10 years of global forest policy dialogue in the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (from 1995 to 1997), in the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (from 1997 to 2000) and, finally, in the United Nations Forum on Forests (from 2000 onward). Much of the forest policy dialogue in these forums has been dominated either by a discussion of the need for an international, legally binding instrument — like a forest convention — or by preparations to discuss the need for such an agreement, to the detriment of precise and committed government action to halt the crisis.

3. Governments are no closer to implementing precise means to address the crisis than they were 10 years ago; and it remains unclear — the United Nations Forum on Forests and its predecessors having failed to reverse the devastating trend — how such an agreement, the contents of which remain undefined, would be successful in addressing the issues that need to be tackled.

I. Brief assessment of the implementation of relevant Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action

4. There are numerous Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action relevant to environmental non-governmental organizations involved in international forest policy negotiations, such as the ones dealing with underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, traditional forest-related knowledge, indigenous peoples’ and local communities’ rights, criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, monitoring, assessment and reporting on implementation of policies and laws related to sustainable forest management and trade in forest goods and services, to name but a few of the more important issues.

5. Environmental and social non-governmental organizations were actively involved in implementing some of these proposals for action. For example, during 1997 and 1998, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), several Governments and local communities organized seven regional workshops on the problematie of underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation. In January 1999, two global workshops on this issue were organized, one exclusively devoted to indigenous peoples’ views in Ecuador, and a global workshop involving all interested stakeholders in San José, Costa Rica. This process was set up to
implement Intergovernmental Panel on Forests proposal for action 27 (c). As a follow-up to these regional and global events, 14 national workshops, to address the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, were organized in all continents.

6. Further, environmental non-governmental organizations contributed with a series of independent monitoring exercises, assessing the level of implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests proposals for action. The results of this exercise were condensed in the 1998 report entitled “Keeping the Promise”.

7. Additionally, environmental non-governmental organizations executed a similar independent monitoring process, focused on the implementation of the forest-related clauses of the Convention on Biological Diversity and presented at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2002. Currently, the group is preparing a similar exercise to address the implementation of forest-related obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, scheduled for presentation at the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in November-December 2005.

8. Non-governmental organizations believe that the involvement of non-governmental organizations and indigenous peoples’ organizations in the implementation of some Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action was constructive and encouraging, as these proposals for action undertaken with involvement of non-governmental organizations and indigenous peoples’ organizations were the only ones so far fully implemented at the global level. Non-governmental organizations profess to remain engaged in forums that offer participation opportunities and effective representation of civil society’s views. However, there are serious constraints that hinder the desired modalities and ability of groups to participate and contribute substantially to these processes: inadequate financial provisions and restraining participation and accreditation rules within the realm of the Economic and Social Council, to name but a few such constraints, discourage many interested non-governmental organizations. Multi-stakeholder dialogues organized on the basis of modalities proposed by the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests have been seen by non-governmental organizations and other major groups as a way to segregate the input provided by those stakeholders. The proposals emanating from the non-governmental organization perspective encompassed a more dynamic set-up for dialogue which included at its core an attempt to report and debate on issues related to implementation rather than the endless monologues in which the Forum had engaged owing to lack of reporting commitments. Besides, the results of these dialogues were never included in the Secretary-General’s reports. Most non-governmental organizations involved in the international forest policy debate think that multi-stakeholder dialogues are inappropriate vehicles through which to channel civil society’s views. Unless there are radical changes to ensure the effective consideration of the proposals and views of major groups, the organization of these events should be discouraged.
II. Priority areas for action

9. The main constraints blocking effective action are undoubtedly the overwhelming superiority of vested interests controlling forest resources and the equally grave lack of political will manifest in governmental attitudes towards forest conservation and sustainable use. Without providing adequate and universally acceptable solutions to this situation, any proposal contemplating a new legally binding instrument on forests is unnecessary. The solution to the forest crisis should start with the implementation of existing commitments and the generation of the additional funds required to halt forest loss. In the past, non-governmental organizations had expressed their fears that the negotiation of a forest convention could easily mean another lost decade without decisive action to stop and reverse forest loss. Worse, if such a convention failed to consider the underlying causes of forest loss — lack of recognition of indigenous peoples’ rights, unsustainable consumption and production patterns and unsustainable financial and timber trade flows — it could entrench, rather than alleviate the impact of, the factors that are the driving forces of deforestation and forest degradation.

10. Non-governmental organizations are also deeply concerned about the lack of action taken by key actors, including Governments, intergovernmental organizations, and the private sector, among others, to curb the deforestation and forest degradation currently occurring at an alarming rate. In addition, there should be emphasis on another key area of concern for the sector, besides deforestation and forest degradation, namely, the lack of recognition of indigenous peoples and communities that live in and depend on forests.

11. Without the full recognition of these rights and the implementation of corrective measures at all levels, any attempt to achieve sustainable forest management would be futile.

12. Thus, the only proposals for action that would receive any support from most major groups are those directly devised to resolve these issues.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

13. If the United Nations Forum on Forests is to continue, it needs to be drastically reformed, in line with different demands repeatedly put forward by non-governmental organizations and other major groups. They may include, inter alia, reform and improvement of the participatory processes and modes of major group engagement and a focus on monitoring and reporting on the implementation of Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action.

14. Over the past 10 years of the international forest policy dialogue process, the debate on a global forest convention has prevented progress on the issues mentioned above and on others. It is unacceptable that this fruitless dialogue, currently regarding the merits or otherwise of a legally binding instrument without further specification of the nature of such an instrument, should continue to divert attention from actions and activities that could tackle the root causes and effects of deforestation and forest degradation.
IV. Recommendations regarding achievable goals and targets

15. Non-governmental organizations believe that it is necessary to ensure that immediate actions to solve the alarming destruction of forests worldwide are taken and that those actions:

- Are consonant with international human rights.
- Recognize, respect and support implementation of customary rights of indigenous peoples and communities that live in and depend on forests.
- Address underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, including the need for the readjustment of financial flows and the reduction of consumption.
- Promote genuine community-based forest management that empowers forest peoples.

Notes

2 Ibid., vol. 1771, No. 30822.