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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject: Eleventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF11)
- Adoption of Council conclusions

1. The United Nations Forum on Forests will hold its eleventh session from 4 to 15 May 2015 at the UN headquarters in New York. The session will also include a two-day high level ministerial segment, which will be concluded with the adoption of a ministerial declaration.
2. With a view to the EU participation in UNFF-11, the Presidency prepared draft Council conclusions, which were discussed several times by the Working Party on Forestry. At its meeting on 7-8 April 2015, the Working Party finalised the draft Council conclusions.
3. In view of the above, it is suggested that the Permanent Representatives Committee endorse the consensus reached by the Working Party and recommend that the Council adopt, at its forthcoming session on 20 April, the conclusions set out in the Annex to this note.

An effective post-2015 international arrangement on forests

Council conclusions on the position to be taken by the EU and its Member States at
the 11th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

RECALLING:

- The establishment of the international arrangement on forests (IAF) by ECOSOC resolution 2000/35 and the adoption of the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on all types of forests (Forest Instrument) by the UNGA Resolution 62/98 as well as the ECOSOC Resolution E/2009/118-E/CN.18/SS/2009/2 on the Facilitative Process and resolutions adopted by the UNFF in line with its multi-year programme of work (2007-2015);
- The UNFF Resolution 10/2, which outlines the process for the review of the effectiveness of the IAF, as well as the mandate for UNFF to consider options for the future arrangement at the 11th session in May 2015 (UNFF 11), and TAKING NOTE OF the outcome of the inter-sessional work on the review of the effectiveness of the IAF;
- That the IAF is an integral part of global governance on sustainable development, with close linkages to the post-2015 development agenda, the Rio Conventions and other forest related instruments and organizations; these and former Council conclusions are therefore complementary to those reflecting the wider context, including on: addressing the challenges of deforestation and forest degradation to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss¹; a new EU Forest Strategy²; a transformative post-2015 agenda³.

¹ Council Conclusions on addressing the challenges of deforestation and forest degradation to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss. 2912th Environment Council meeting Brussels, 4 December 2008.

² Council Conclusions (9944/14) "A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and forest-based sector" Brussels, 19 May 2014.

³ Council conclusions on a transformative post-2015 agenda. General Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 16 December 2014.

WHEREAS:

- There is continued concern about the increasing degree of fragmentation of forest-related matters and policies across different fora, and 2015 offers excellent opportunities for the international community to promote synergies and stronger coherence in global forest policy and to link forests and sustainable forest management (SFM) to the overall sustainable development agenda;

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. REAFFIRMS its strong commitment to forests and the SFM of all types of forest, STRESSES the importance of the multifunctionality of forests and their sustainable management to facilitate transformative change and address major challenges, such as climate change, conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and their services, desertification, deforestation and forest degradation, biodiversity loss, water quality and scarcity, soil erosion and degradation, disaster risk reduction, food security, supply of forest products, fuel and shelter, securing land tenure rights, gender equality, issues related to forest-dependent indigenous peoples and local communities, job creation and decent work and EMPHASISES the important contribution forests and their sustainable management can make to a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication;
2. WELCOMES the importance given to forests in the "Future We Want" outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) "Rio+20"; as well as the integration of forests in the proposal of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

3. REITERATES the commitments made at COP10 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on the Strategic Plan for biodiversity 2011-2020 including the Aichi targets and forest related decisions at COP11 and COP12⁴; WELCOMES the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding between the secretariats of the UNFF and the CBD, as well as the forest related decisions adopted by the 19th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and STRESSES the need for further cooperation between the UNFF and the UNFCCC, inter alia on the implementation of financing mechanisms and the application of safeguards for policy approaches on REDD+;
4. NOTES with great concern that, despite some achievements, deforestation and forest degradation in the world continue at an alarming rate; and that forests are under pressure due to a range of complex reasons, including agricultural expansion, unsustainable forest management practices, illegal harvesting and associated trade of forest products as well as trade of commodities associated with deforestation;
5. EMPHASISES that the EU and its Member States have supported the overarching objectives of the IAF over the past 15 years, namely to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and to strengthen long term political commitment to this end but notes that the current IAF has been unable to fully deliver on all of these objectives;
6. UNDERSCORES the need for the post-2015 IAF to give particular attention to the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, including through measures such as strengthening forest governance at all levels, including secure land tenure rights, promoting sustainable consumption and production and pursuing cross-sectoral policy approaches as significant drivers of deforestation lie outside the forest sector;
7. RECOGNISES recent developments and future challenges in forest-related matters, as well as global efforts to streamline international governance;

⁴ Decision XI/6, Decision XI/19, Decision XII/6, Decision XII/20.

Principal objectives and functions of a post-2015 IAF

8. STRESSES that the post-2015 IAF be more effective, fit-for-purpose, outcome-focused, cost-effective, and engaged in cross-sector collaboration. AFFIRMS that a significant clarification of the mandate and improvement of the functions of a post-2015 IAF is needed, particularly with a view to adding value and coherence to existing forest-related processes, and to deliver on the following objectives:
 - Build long-term high level political commitment to forests;
 - Strengthen a common international understanding of the concept of SFM and champion an integrated, coherent and holistic approach for its enhanced implementation;
 - Enhance policy coherence on forests and foster synergies in global forest related processes to address overlaps and fragmentation of international forest policy;
 - Ensure transparent and efficient working methods;
 - Foster links between the global forest agenda and the post-2015 development agenda;
 - Galvanize the interest and support of the forest based private sector and the full spectrum of other stakeholders (major groups) in the global forest agenda.
9. EMPHASISES that any post-2015 IAF needs to be designed in a manner that will facilitate achieving these objectives and performing assigned functions effectively, whilst also addressing gaps and duplications between existing forest-related processes, organizations and agreements; CONSIDERS that significant strengthening of the efficiency and effectiveness of the IAF is needed by taking action on the following building blocks:

Forest Instrument

10. AGREES that the Forest Instrument should continue to serve as one important element of the post-2015 IAF;
11. SUPPORTS examining ways to update it and mainstream its implementation with emerging policy priorities and recent developments in other fora (SDGs, REDD+, Aichi Targets, etc.) without reopening negotiations on its content;

12. STRESSES that good governance is key for sustainable development and AGREES that the EU and its Member States remain open to discuss the full range of legally and non-legally binding options with a view to ensure a coherent global approach to SFM;

Post-2015 UNFF

13. STRESSES the importance of a continued and more cost effective UN based and comprehensive global policy dialogue on forest issues, preferably also with other forest-related sectors, in the context of the post-2015 IAF;
14. AFFIRMS that the post-2015 UNFF should have universal membership and a focused and clear mandate, objectives and functions, and a more effective way of interacting with others, fostering a common understanding on forest related matters, sharing of experience, and contributing to the coordination of forest-related policies in order to avoid duplications and achieve stronger coherence among international agreements, organizations and initiatives linked to forests, while also stimulating implementation of SFM and the transformation of the sector in line with the post-2015 sustainable development agenda;
15. WELCOMES the proposal to establish more effective intersessional working modalities to advance the work of the post-2015 UNFF;

Post-2015 Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)

16. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of the principal functions of supporting the work of UNFF and enhancing policy and programme coordination, cooperation and synergies across different organizations, agreements and bodies dealing with various thematic or sectoral aspects of international forest policy;

17. AFFIRMS that a revised partnership of relevant forest-related organizations should be one of the key elements of any post-2015 IAF, and that in order to achieve coherence its modus operandi should be improved, and ways for formalisation of the partnership be encouraged, for example through the use of multilateral or bilateral MoUs amongst its members. Guidance by and interaction with the post-2015 UNFF should be enhanced and governing bodies of CPF members should be encouraged to address relevant post-2015 IAF and post-2015 UNFF matters within their work;

Major Groups

18. STRESSES that the active, open and transparent participation of all relevant stakeholders, particularly civil society and the private sector at all levels needs to be enhanced in the post-2015 IAF and that further efforts should be made to attract the interest of stakeholder groups to engage not only in policy work of the future Forum but in all future activities of the post-2015 IAF;
19. RECALLS in this regard the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

Secretariat and support measures of the post-2015 IAF

20. HIGHLIGHTS that the secretariat arrangements should remain UN-based and be revised in order to match its form with its function, based on adequate resources coming from the UN regular budget and capitalising on synergies with other agencies and organizations;
21. AGREES that the post-2015 IAF, including each of its constitutive components, should be supported by adequate, predictable and sustainable human and financial resources, through a more efficient and effective use of existing contributions from the UN regular budget, which are commensurate with the specific mandate and functions envisaged for the post-2015 IAF;

22. WELCOMES voluntary contributions to the post-2015 IAF and SUPPORTS the use of the voluntary UNFF Trust Fund as a strategic tool to support the activities of the Facilitative Process or its successor and other strategic work of the post-2015 IAF, while ensuring transparency and accountability;

Financing the Means of Implementation for SFM

23. HIGHLIGHTS the need to make a clear distinction between the issue of the financing of the post-2015 IAF itself, and the much broader issue of financing for forests and SFM;
24. WELCOMES the progress made in increasing the forest-related international development financing in recent years and UNDERLINES that it should remain voluntary in nature;
25. REITERATES that financing for SFM should continue to come from a range of complementary sources; public and private, domestic and foreign, bilateral and multilateral, recognizing in particular the important role of good governance and forest law enforcement as a precondition for mobilizing resources, including through investment in SFM and trade in forest products as well as for valuation and payments for ecosystem services in forests, as well as the fight against illicit financial flows;
26. HIGHLIGHTS that the financing landscape for forests has evolved considerably since the creation of the UNFF with the emergence of new programmes and financing opportunities at all levels and therefore CONSIDERS the portfolio of existing sources of finance an appropriate basis for future financing;
27. STRESSES the need to reinforce coherence and to avoid a duplication of efforts through an integrated approach to the various Means of Implementation aspects of Rio+20, the post-2015 development agenda and other relevant processes, taking into consideration the ongoing Financing for Development discussions ahead of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the work of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing agreed at Rio+20;

28. WELCOMES the progress in implementation of the Facilitative Process (FP), while recognising that further efforts are needed to build capacity for strategic forest finance planning and for effective resource mobilization at the national level and CONSIDERS that any future financing arrangement should continue to facilitate and improve access to and use of various existing and emerging financial instruments, building on the experience and practice of the Facilitative Process and the collaborative work of the CPF;

Regional dimension

29. WELCOMES the enhanced involvement of appropriate existing regional bodies and processes in the post-2015 IAF with a view to ensuring that the regional level can play an effective role as an interface between the global and national level;

Strategic Planning

30. WELCOMES the proposal to improve planning and implementation of the post-2015 IAF through a strategic plan or similar approach, STRESSES that it should have a long term time horizon while ensuring continuous modifications and flexible adjustments, integrate core components of the post-2015 IAF, prioritize actions, identify the roles of different actors and related resources, ensure an accountability framework by monitoring, reporting and assessment, and could include measurable time bound targets, aligned with forest relevant goals/targets/objectives;

Road Map

31. STRESSES the need for UNFF 11 to agree a clear road map for the operationalisation and further development of the detailed specifications of a more effective IAF as soon as possible, taking into account the emerging decisions on the post-2015 development agenda and the future global climate change agreement amongst others;

High Level Segment

32. NOTES the potential for High Level Segments to play an important role in the post-2015 IAF;

33. CONSIDERS that Ministers and high level representatives should agree at UNFF 11 on a Ministerial Declaration, aimed at providing a new vision for global forest governance and highlighting:

- Forests and SFM for transformative action;
- A shared commitment to a more effective and result oriented post-2015 IAF;
- The contribution of forests and SFM to the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and future global climate change agreement.

Next steps

The EU and its Member States will continue to play an active and constructive role in framing global forest policy and to work with all partners and stakeholders in this regards. We commit to play our full part in all aspects of the post-2015 IAF, and will also expect other partners to contribute equally.
