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COUNCIL

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Outcome of the XIV World Forestry Congress (Durban, South Africa, 7-11 September 2015)

Executive Summary

The XIV World Forestry Congress was held on 7–11 September 2015 in Durban, South Africa, with nearly 4,000 participants and stakeholders from all over the world. The outcome of the Congress comprises:

- 1) Durban Declaration - 2050 vision for forests and forestry;
- 2) Message from the XIV World Forestry Congress to the United Nations General Assembly Summit for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and
- 3) Message from the XIV World Forestry Congress on Climate Change to the 21st Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015 was launched at the Congress, releasing the most recent United Nations global report on the status of the world forest resources and their sustainable management. The world's forest cover continues to decrease as forest land continues to be converted to agriculture and other uses, however, over the past 25 years the rate of net global deforestation has slowed down by more than 50 percent.

Suggested action by the Council

The Council is invited to:

- a) welcome the outcome documents of the XIV World Forestry Congress;
- b) provide any guidance, as necessary, for further dissemination of the outcome of the Congress and for effective implementation of the recommendations included in the outcome documents.

*This document can be accessed using the Quick Response Code on this page;
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Other documents can be consulted at www.fao.org*



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Queries on the substantive content of document may be addressed to:

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1. Nearly 4,000 delegates from 142 countries attended the XIV World Forestry Congress on 7-11 September 2015 in Durban, South Africa.
2. The Congress produced three outcome documents, available on the Congress website¹:
 - 1) Durban Declaration - 2050 vision for forests and forestry;
 - 2) Message from the XIV World Forestry Congress to the United Nations General Assembly Summit for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and
 - 3) Message from the XIV World Forestry Congress on Climate Change to the 21st Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
3. The FAO Durban Declaration calls for new partnerships in the forestry, agriculture, finance, energy, water and other sectors, and engagement with indigenous peoples and local communities. Gender equality is fundamental, with women participating fully. It further calls for enhanced investment in forest education, communication, capacity building, research, and the creation of jobs, especially for young people.
4. In summary, the new vision for forests and forestry is a milestone in contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and a sustainable future to 2050 and beyond. The vision emphasises that:
 - a) Forests are fundamental for food security and improved livelihoods. They will increase the resilience of communities by providing food, wood energy, shelter, fodder and fibre; generating income and employment to allow communities and societies to prosper; harbouring biodiversity; and supporting sustainable agriculture and human wellbeing by stabilizing soils and climate and regulating water flows.
 - b) Integrated approaches to land use provide a way forward for improving policies and practices to: address the drivers of deforestation; conflicts over land use; capitalize on the full range of economic, social and environmental benefits from integrating forests with agriculture; and maintain multiple forest services in the landscape context.
 - c) Forests are an essential solution to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Sustainably managed forests will increase the resilience of ecosystems and societies and optimize the role of forests and trees in absorbing and storing carbon while also providing other environmental services.
5. The message on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stresses that the need to sustainably manage forests is clearly stated in SDG 5, and in the SDG 6 target on protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems. Moreover, due to their multi-functionality, forests have a role to play in achieving several of the other SDGs, including those related to ending poverty, achieving food security, promoting sustainable agriculture, ensuring access to sustainable energy for all, and combatting

¹ <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/world-forestry-congress/outcome>

climate change. To successfully implement the SDGs, forests and forestry need to be mainstreamed into strategies for sustainable development at international and national levels.

6. FAO will actively support strengthening the contributions of forests to the SDGs by making available data and information, providing technical support and promoting best practices and dialogue.

7. The message on climate change emphasises that policies and responses to climate change present opportunities for forests, such as new and additional sources of financing and increased political support for forest governance and stakeholder engagement; and that forests can significantly contribute to climate change mitigation through Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+).

8. Acknowledging the urgency of addressing climate change threats, the XIV World Forestry Congress recommended to: increase understanding in governments and other stakeholders of climate change, with particular attention to forest-dependent communities and indigenous peoples, and to address climate change in the wider context of sustainable development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals; promote partnerships and south-south exchanges; continue increasing the availability and quality of information in order to meet multiple objectives of climate change adaptation and mitigation; encourage the assessment and communication of progress in climate change mitigation and adaptation, including by the more coordinated and effective mobilization of diverse financial resources.

9. The XIV World Forestry Congress marked the launch of The Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015.² According to the assessment, the world's forests continue to shrink as populations increase and forest land is converted to agriculture and other uses, but over the past 25 years the rate of net global deforestation has slowed down by more than 50 percent. Some 129 million hectares of forest - an area almost equivalent in size to South Africa - have been lost since 1990. However, increasing amount of forest areas have come under protection while more countries are improving forest management. This is often done through legislation and includes the measuring and monitoring of forest resources and a greater involvement of local communities in planning and in developing policies. The FAO study covers 234 countries and territories and is the official source of comprehensive forest information within the United Nations system.

10. The week of rich technical discussions in Durban has inspired a reflection on the forest definition. FAO will be setting up a process to determine how "forest" could be better described including its various functions.

11. World Forestry Congresses serve as *fora* for the exchange of views and experiences and for high-level debate on key aspects of forests and forestry, leading to recommendations applicable at all levels, from local to global, as appropriate.

12. As recorded in the Durban Declaration, participants of the XIV World Forestry Congress gratefully acknowledged the hospitality of the Government and people of the Republic of South Africa, and the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The Republic of South Africa should indeed be thanked for graciously hosting the Congress.

13. The next World Forestry Congress is planned for 2021. The official process to bid for hosting the next Congress will be launched by the end of 2015 and confirmation on the decision on the host country would be made by the FAO Council at its 2016 Autumn session.

14. More information on the XIV World Forestry Congress and its rich and inclusive programme with various sessions, events, media coverage and outcomes can be found at www.fao.org/forestry/wfc and www.wfc2015.org.za.

² <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4793e.pdf>