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UPDATE ON GLOBAL INITIATIVES AND PROCESSES OF RELEVANCE FOR THE COMMISSION

Executive Summary

This document provides an overview of key global developments of relevance to forests and the forest sector and of interest to the Commission, notably:

- a. The 18th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests;
- b. The 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;
- c. The outcomes of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity;
- d. The 2025 edition of the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessments;
- e. The next edition of *The State of the World's Forests Report (SOFO) 2024*;
- f. The XV World Forestry Congress and the Youth Call for Action;
- g. The 2nd World Forum on Urban Forests.

Suggested Action by the Commission

The Commission is invited to take note of the global processes and initiatives and provide guidance, as deemed appropriate.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Forests are affected by multiple crises and are increasingly seen as key elements of any solution for global developmental and environmental challenges; hence they constitute an integral part of many global agendas.
2. This document provides an overview of key global developments of relevance to forests and the forest sector and of interest to the Commission, notably:
 - a. The 18th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests;
 - b. The 27th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;
 - c. The outcomes of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity;
 - d. The 2025 edition of the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessments;
 - e. The next edition of *The State of the World's Forests* report (SOFO) 2024;
 - f. The XV World Forestry Congress and the Youth Call for Action;
 - g. The 2nd World Forum on Urban Forests.

II. KEY DEVELOPMENTS OF GLOBAL PROCESSES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FORESTRY

A. The 18th Session of The United Nations Forum on Forests

3. The 18th session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) was held 8 - 12 May 2023 in New York, United States of America. This was the first fully in-person meeting of the Forum since 2019 – ending the break in physical meetings caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. The main focuses of the UNFF18 technical session were:
 - a. The implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 (UNSPF);
 - b. The implementation of the UNSPF communication and outreach strategy;
 - c. interlinkages between the Global Forest Goals (GFGs) of the UNSPF and the SDGs as well as The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework;
 - d. Means of implementation;
 - e. Monitoring, assessment, and reporting;
 - f. Midterm review of the International Arrangement on Forests in 2024; and
 - g. Emerging issues on the forests, energy, and livelihood nexus.
5. The session identified topics as crucial for further progress and for further consideration by the 19th session of UNFF in 2024, which, as a policy session, is best placed to make informed decisions. These topics included the thematic priorities in support of the implementation of the UNSPF including concrete steps to accelerate progress towards the GFGs, and the integration of forest-related actions in the nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement and national biodiversity strategies and action plans for the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework; strengthening monitoring, assessment and reporting; preparing another Global Forest Goals report in 2026; strengthening means of implementation by scaling up the activities of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network; and scaling up technical assistance, financing, knowledge management, and information sharing in sustainable forest management, ecosystem restoration, landscape planning and management, sustainable agricultural intensification, biofuels development, ecotourism, and linked policy areas.

6. FAO made important contributions to the technical discussions¹ both as a UN system organization and as a member and chair of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)². As one of the organizations whose work plans are aligned with the UNSPF, FAO plays a key role in several areas of work contributing to the implementation of the UNSPF, in particular in monitoring, assessment and reporting, through the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) and the global cores set of forest-related indicators (GCS). These are essential sources for UNFF to perform its review function for the UNSPF, the potential of FAO's State of the World's Forests was also recognized in this context.

7. FAO delivered a joint statement on behalf of the CPF reporting on key activities of the Partnership that supported the Forum's and its members' work towards the GFGs and informed that the Green Climate Fund (GCF), one of the world's largest providers of forest finance, recently became the 16th member of the CPF. The CPF proposal for the theme of the International Day of Forests 2024 on "Forests and Innovation" was supported by the Forum. A CPF side event was held with the theme "Towards a more efficient and impactful Collaborative Partnership on Forests," which provided an active exchange with Members of the Forum. One of the suggestions for the CPF was to make it more efficient and country/demand-driven and to reflect this in the CPF work plan.

8. While noting the value of CPF's support to UNFF, the Forum also identified several areas for further increasing CPF's effectiveness. These included stronger support by the governing bodies of individual member organizations to the work of the CPF, analysing CPF members' individual work plans relations with the GFGs and associated targets, and finding a balanced approach between being demand-driven and providing thought leadership.

9. This guidance of the Forum further strengthened several of the recommendations of the Organization-led Initiative (OLI)³, which was organized by FAO and the UNFF Secretariat, in collaboration with other CPF members, 22-23 February 2023 in Rome, Italy, with the aim of providing an opportunity for experts from Members of the Forum, CPF member organizations, and regional and subregional partners, to express their views on actions related to the CPF, as outlined in ECOSOC resolution 2022/17.

10. In line with the above resolution and in response to these recommendations, the CPF is exploring opportunities for further enhancing its support for the implementation of the UNSPF and increasing efficiency further. One step in this regard was the CPF Strategic Retreat, 22 - 23 June 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya. The results of this work, together with the outcomes of the OLI, will be presented to the Open-ended intergovernmental Ad hoc Expert Group (AHEG) on the preparations for the Midterm Review, which will be held from 10 to 13 October 2023 in Vienna, Austria, and through it, to the 19th Session of UNFF.

B. The 27th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

11. The 27th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 27) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) took place 6-18 November 2022 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. It was attended by 49 704 participants, representing 199 Parties, and delegates from observer organizations and media, making it the largest COP in history.

12. The momentum for forests, gained at COP 26 in 2021 continued at COP27. During a high-level summit on 7 November 2022, world leaders launched the Forest and Climate Leaders' Partnership (FCLP). The FCLP is a voluntary partnership of 26 countries and the European Union committed to delivery, accountability, and innovation in support of the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration. The FCLP,

¹ www.fao.org/new-york/news/news-detail/fao-at-unff18--towards-a-nexus-approach-for-sustainable-forest-management

² www.fao.org/collaborative-partnership-on-forests

³ www.fao.org/collaborative-partnership-on-forests/meetings/organization-led-initiative

currently co-chaired by the United States of America and Ghana, focuses on six action areas: 1) international collaboration on the sustainable land use economy and supply chains; 2) mobilizing public and donor finance to support implementation; 3) shifting the private finance system; 4) supporting initiatives led by Indigenous Peoples and local communities; 5) strengthening and scaling carbon markets for forests; and 6) building international partnerships and incentives to preserve high-integrity forests.

13. A section on forests was included in the final Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, which reinforced REDD+ as outlined in Article 5 of the Paris Agreement and highlighted the importance of nature-based solutions or ecosystem-based approaches to promote both mitigation and adaptation benefits. The focus on adaptation and loss and damage during COP 27 creates important opportunities to elevate the key role of forests and trees in countries' efforts to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change.

14. FAO's work on forests and climate change⁴ is embedded in the FAO Strategic Framework (2022-31) Better Environment Programme Priority Area on 'Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems', along with the FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031.

15. Through strengthening the role of forests in global climate policy, developing countries' capacities for forest-based climate action, and scaling up action on the ground, FAO plays an important role in supporting Members in their efforts to advance forest solutions for the climate crisis.

C. The Outcomes of the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

16. The first part of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (UN Biodiversity Conference, CBD COP 15) convened virtually 11 - 15 October 2021, with a limited number of delegates physically present in Kunming, China, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting resulted in the adoption of the Kunming Declaration.

17. The second part of the CBD COP 15 convened 7 - 19 December 2022 in Montreal, Canada, under the presidency of China, and was attended by approximately 16 000 participants, representing 188 governments, UN and international organizations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), non-governmental organizations, academia, and the private sector.

18. Key milestone of the COP 15 was the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), as a successor of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, to guide biodiversity policy through four overarching goals to be achieved by 2050 and a set of 23 action-oriented Targets to be reached by 2030. The Commission may wish to consider this when discussing agenda item 5, document APFC/2023/4.

19. Over half GBF Targets are closely related to agrifood sectors, including sustainable forest and wildlife management, as part of the solutions to biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and the climate crisis.

20. Forestry, even though not always explicitly mentioned, is very relevant for several GBF Targets, including - but not limited to – ecosystem restoration (Target 2), protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM) (Target 3), impacts of climate change on biodiversity (Target 8), sustainable forest management (Target 10), and benefits from green spaces by mainstreaming the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity (Target 12).

21. Sustainable use, harvest, and trade in wild species – and their contribution to meeting people's needs and providing benefits – are included in Targets 5 (safe and legal use, harvesting and trade of

⁴ www.fao.org/events/detail/fao-at-cop-26

wild species) and 9 (benefits from the sustainable use of biodiversity)). Target 4 focuses on management actions to stop human-induced species extinction and restore genetic diversity, including minimizing human-wildlife conflicts.

22. A critical step towards closing the nature finance gap was the announcement of the creation of a new Global Biodiversity Framework Fund that will be established under the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The fund will complement existing support and further scale up financing for implementation, with the aim of mobilizing at least USD 200 billion per year by 2030 from all sources (GBF Target 19).

23. COP 15 also adopted the monitoring framework for the GBF that contains 26 headline indicators to be used in national reports for measuring progress. Of all headline indicators, four are under FAO custodianship, including areas under restoration, and progress towards sustainable forest management (SDG indicator 15.2.1). Twenty of the component and complementary indicators, which are included in the decision but were not negotiated, are also under FAO custodianship.

24. To further operationalize the GBF monitoring framework, COP-15 established an *ad hoc* technical expert group (AHTEG) that will be composed of 30 technical experts nominated by Parties and 15 observer organizations, including FAO, with a time-bound mandate until COP 16.

25. FAO's work on forests and biodiversity is embedded in several *Better Environment Programme* Priority Areas of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, along with the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors. FAO's work directly supports the development of the monitoring methodology for GBF Target 2 on ecosystem restoration. FAO Forestry is leading the Task Force on Monitoring in support of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessments (FRA) provide essential information for understanding the extent of forest resources, their development, condition, management and uses. Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) Programme provides a solid opportunity to contribute to the implementation of the COP-15 decision on sustainable wildlife management. The Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW) is working on designing the development of the monitoring methodology for the GBF Target 4 on measuring human-wildlife conflicts and Target 5 on sustainable use of wildlife species.

26. FAO is in the process of developing a comprehensive Global Programme on Biodiversity Mainstreaming in Forestry to enhance the role of sustainably managed forests and trees outside forests in biodiversity conservation, management, and sustainable use. The Programme builds on the recommendations of the FAO-CIFOR global review of biodiversity mainstreaming in forestry⁵.

D. Update on the 2025 Edition of the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessments

27. FAO has been monitoring the world's forest resources through periodic assessments conducted at the request of its member countries since 1946. The information provided by the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) presents a comprehensive view of the world's forests and the ways in which the resource is changing. Such a clear global picture supports the development of sound policies, practices and investments affecting forests and forestry.

28. Since 2005, the backbone of FRA has been the country reporting process where the best available and most up-to-date information from all countries and territories is compiled and analysed. FAO requests all countries to nominate an FRA National Correspondent who coordinates the preparation of the FRA report following standardized definitions, format and methodology. Since FRA 2020, the reports are prepared and submitted to FAO through a dedicated online platform.

⁵ www.fao.org/documents/card/fr/c/cc2229en

29. As part of the country reporting process to FRA 2025, FAO is conducting a series of regional and sub-regional workshops. The workshops focus on providing technical assistance and guidance to the national correspondents on the compilation and finalization of the FRA 2025 country reports while providing a forum for the national correspondents to share their experiences with colleagues from other countries. These workshops are also key to increasing FAO's support for capacity building in forest resources assessment and reporting.

30. Two FRA 2025 subregional workshops were held in the Asia-Pacific region: one for Asian countries⁶, which gathered 19 countries 4-7 April 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand, and one for the Pacific⁷, held 8-10 May 2023, in Nadi, Fiji, with 12 participating countries. An FRA 2025 workshop for Asia is planned for 30 October – 2 November 2023, in Tokyo, Japan.

31. The FRA 2025 data collection for all 236 countries and territories of the world is foreseen to be completed in 2023.

E. The Next Edition of *The State of The World's Forests* Report SOFO 2024

32. FAO's flagship publication "*The State of the World's Forests*" (SOFO) presents data and analysis on the interaction between forests and people every two years, with a focus on a specific pertinent topic. SOFO complements the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA), issued every five years, as well as other forest-related publications.

33. In line with the new FAO Strategy on Science and Innovation, the next version of SOFO will highlight forest-related innovations that can support the implementation of the three interrelated pathways involving forests and trees presented in SOFO 2022⁸ to enhance their benefits for societies, communities, foresters and farmers. These pathways are: sustainably using forests and building green value chains; halting deforestation and maintaining forests; and restoring degraded lands and expanding agroforestry.

34. Forest-related innovations covered in the next SOFO report will focus on cutting-edge processes, tools and technologies that support policy and management decisions along the three pathways, including more up-to-date and detailed information on forests and innovations in how forests are monitored, and information is shared. SOFO will also delve more deeply into the sustainable use pathway by highlighting how innovations in processing and the development of new forest products can increase productivity, help generate local profit, improve livelihoods and replace fossil-based materials. In addition, SOFO will recognise the important role that a robust innovative culture that promotes collaboration and workplace diversity has in successfully supporting and implementing all types of innovation.

35. The SOFO 2024 will be launched at the 27th Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO 27) to be held 22 - 26 July 2024, in Rome, Italy.

F. The XV World Forestry Congress and the Youth Call for Action

36. The XV World Forestry Congress (WFC) was held 2 - 6 May 2022, in Seoul, Republic of Korea, attended by about 15 000 participants, almost 5 000 of them joining the congress online. The WFC outcomes include the Seoul Declaration on Forests and the associated Action Points, the Ministerial Call on Sustainable Wood and the Youth Call for Action. The results of the Congress were summarized in a special brief titled "Building a green, healthy and resilient future with forests"⁹.

⁶ www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/fra-2025-reporting-started-in-asia

⁷ www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/fao-regional-workshop-for-the-pacific

⁸ www.fao.org/3/cb9360en/online/cb9360en.html

⁹ www.fao.org/documents/card/fr/c/cc2090en

37. The close alignment of the Congress outcomes and the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 provides an opportunity for creating clear linkages between the recommendations for FAO's work in Forestry, the Strategic Framework and the Congress outcomes. This would largely facilitate the often-requested follow-up and monitoring of the impact of the Congress(es). The Commission may wish to consider this when discussing agenda item 10, documents APFC/2023/9.1 and APFC/2023/9.2, particular attention could be paid to the two "Calls" presented here, which intended to initiate concrete, collaborative actions.

38. The Ministerial Call on Sustainable Wood invited FAO¹⁰, directly and as a member of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, to support the aspirations expressed in the Call. In doing so FAO developed an informal roadmap that included the 26th session of the Committee on Forestry, support to high-level fora such as G7 Ministerial Meetings in Japan, and the Regional Forestry Commissions for generating political support and encouraging involvement. Furthermore, with voluntary support from interested partners a series of regional/global policy and technical dialogues are being facilitated which are also linked with the Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World Initiative.

39. Youth had been involved in the preparations for the Congress from the early stages and played a crucial role in helping to shape its outcomes, in particular through the *Work with Us – Youth Call for Action* document, which was a result of a six-month long consultation process involving all regions. The Youth Call for Action invited for support and offered collaboration on four main areas: forest education and training; decent work and career development; gender equality and empowering women; and political participation and representation.

40. While many of the recommendations contained in the Youth Call for Action can best be implemented at the national or stakeholder level, regional bodies, such as the Regional Forestry Commission could play an important role in providing advice for their members in this regard, and equally or more importantly, considering how to strengthen Youth involvement in the work, including intersessional work of the Commission, and in the international dialogue on forest and sustainable development issues in general.

G. The 2nd World Forum on Urban Forests

41. Urban Forestry is one of the pillars of the FAO Green Cities Initiative, which promotes the integration of urban forestry, urban agriculture and urban food systems into urban planning, as key elements of sustainable urban development. Several pilot activities have been carried out or are ongoing in different parts of the world.

42. FAO actively promotes the role of urban forestry through knowledge exchange and networking activities. The Third Asia Pacific Urban Forestry Meeting was held virtually in 25-29 October 2021. A fourth edition is planned for late 2024 or early 2025.

43. The 2nd World Forum on Urban Forest¹¹, which is co-organized by FAO, the Forest Service of the US Department of Agriculture, and several other partners from the United States of America and European will be held in Washington D.C., 16 - 20 October 2023. The aim of the Forum is to support the implementation of Agenda 2030, in particular, SDG 11, and the New Urban Agenda and optimize actions related to urban ecosystems and green spaces. It will also provide a venue where stakeholders can showcase successful initiatives to maximize the contribution of urban forests to the health and well-being of urban dwellers, also bringing on board actor sectors that are not traditionally involved, by demonstrating the importance of urban forests and trees to the generation of social and economic benefits. It also aims to create links between ecosystem restoration opportunities and initiatives with businesses interested in building a solid portfolio of sustainable production and impact investment.

¹⁰ See also document APFC/2023/2

¹¹ www.worldforumonurbanforests.org

44. The last two years have also seen a significant expansion of the Tree Cities of the World Programme, a joint programme of FAO and Arbor Day Foundation, which celebrates cities that have been particularly active in developing and nurturing their trees. In 2022, 170 cities from 20 countries were recognized. These include 9 cities in Australia, 3 in New Zealand and 2 in India. A special Tree Cities of the World event will take place during the 2nd World Forum on Urban Forest.