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NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION

TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION

19 – 21 October 2021

PROVISIONAL AGENDA

OPENING OF THE SESSION (Item 1)

1. The Twenty-Fifth Session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC) was held virtually from 19 to 21 December 2021, hosted by the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt. The meeting attracted XXX participants for the opening session. The Commission session was attended by XXX representatives from XXX member countries and XXX representatives from global and regional intergovernmental organizations. Annex XXX provides a full list of NEFRC participants. The session was conducted in Arabic and English.

2. The 25th Session strived to fulfil its mandate as a regional platform that seeks to advise on matters related to forest and rangeland policies and practices, facilitating exchanging of information and experiences, advising on suitable practices and actions with regard to technical problems, and to make appropriate recommendations in relation to the ongoing work.

3. Mr Yusuf Serengil, outgoing Chairperson, welcomed participants, and expressed his appreciation for the support he received to carry out his task. Mr Serengil underlined the importance of working in close collaboration with the FAO RNE Office and its Senior Forestry Officer in his capacity as a Chairperson of the NEFRC. He underlined critical challenges imposed by climate change, which is manifested in the severity of fires in Mediterranean countries of the region. He highlighted the need build resilience to disasters, to develop effective management approaches, to enhance collaboration and to build capacities. He listed land cover change as another critical issue that involves the increasing levels of CO₂ emissions, and stressed that adaptation and mitigation of climate change is urgent, and in this regard, the sustainable management of forests and rangelands is crucial.

4. Mr Serge Nakouzi, Deputy Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa expressed, on behalf of the Director-General, FAO's gratitude to the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt. He noted that forest and rangelands in the region are inseparable and they provide a range of goods and services essential to the livelihoods of the people, to biodiversity conservation and to halting desertification and combatting sand and dust storms. The two resources are, however, subject to mounting human demands for natural resources leading to their rapid degradation. He underscored the need to adopt an integrated and inclusive approaches in their

management, a shift in policy and institutional set up and a revision of forest and rangelands educational curricula to build such integration in the minds and heart of the professionals.

5. Mr Naiim Moselhy, Advisor to the Minister presented the speech on behalf of H.E. El-Said El-Qosair, Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, Arab Republic of Egypt and opened the session. He expressed his Government's pleasure in hosting the session. He highlighted that recommendations of the Commission are crucial as they support Members to exchange views and ideas and bring regional issues to a higher level. He recalled that Egypt, due to aridity and water scarcity, has a limited forest area. However, the country has taken an active role in promoting afforestation programmes using treated waste water, and that Egypt has gained wider experience that it can share with countries of the region. He noted that the vision of Egypt for the period 2021-2025 is the improvement of rangelands through restoration of natural lands along the seasonal water streams using rainfall water.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (Item 2)

6. The provisional agenda was adopted (see *Annex XXX*). The documents considered by the Commission are listed in *Annex XXX*.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (Item 3)

7. In accordance with the provisions of Rules II-1 and II-5 of its Rules of Procedure, the Commission elected the Chairperson, two Vice-Chairpersons and one Rapporteur. The composition of the Executive Committee of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission following these elections is as follows:

Chairman:	Mr Alaa Azouz, Egypt
1 st Vice-Chairperson:	Mr Khalid CHERKI Morocco
2 nd Vice-Chairperson:	Mr Mr. Jamel KAILENE, Tunisia
3 rd Vice Chairperson:	Mr Qutaibah Hamood, Saudi Arabia
Rapporteur:	Ms Ayşenur KASIMOĞLU DEMİR, Turkey

8. Mr Abdelhamied Adam Hamid, Senior Forestry Officer, FAO Regional Office for the Near East, served as Secretary of the Commission.

REGIONAL CROSS-SECTORIAL DIALOGUE ON FORESTRY - AGRICULTURE MATTERS – High-Level Panel (Item 4)

9. The Commission welcomed document FO:NEFRC/2021/6 "Regional cross-sectorial dialogue on forestry – agriculture matters".

10. Members took note of the important links between forests, rangelands and the need to transform agri-food systems and of the main challenges to reduce forest and rangeland degradation and deforestation without adversely affecting food security.

11. A High-Level Panel on 'Strengthening the dialogue between Forestry and Agriculture' (see concept note in *annex x*), moderated by Ms Ismahane Elouafi, FAO Chief Scientist, was held to raise awareness on the role of sustainable agri-food systems in the improvement of food security and nutrition and in the protection and restoration of forests and rangelands. The event provided an opportunity to share country experiences and good practices and produced practical recommendations.

12. H.E. Mr Eltahir Ismail Harbi, Minister of Agriculture, Sudan shared the perspective from his country. He highlighted the importance of agricultural crop production, animal production and forestry. He stressed the increasing problems related to climate change and over-use of natural resources. He informed about tree planting campaigns and actions undertaken to reduce deforestation and damage to field crops, through opening and demarcation of livestock routes. He pointed out that Sudan is active in implementing landscape restoration programmes under the Africa Union Great Green Wall Initiative and mentioned new policies towards alternative energy, addressing the food - energy - environment nexus.

13. Dr ElDukeri, Director, Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) stressed three types of interventions needed: i) technological packages to enhance agricultural productivity to promote intensification rather than expansion; ii) policies and legislations that are required to foster more sustainable practices; and iii) community based organizations and civil society organizations as key force for leading the change.

14. In the follow-up discussion, Saudi Arabia mentioned two initiatives: the Green Saudi Arabia initiative and the Green Middle East initiative which both aim at combating deforestation and reducing land degradation, and requested FAO to extend its work on rangelands.

15. Morocco highlighted that forests are key elements of terrestrial ecosystems. To support the agriculture and forestry nexus, food waste should be reduced and a change in societal food habits through the promotion of better consumption schemes should be implemented. He pointed out that solutions exist for more sustainable, climate smart practices, and reminded delegates that there are many synergies between solutions to address the climate, biodiversity and desertification agenda. He stressed that synergies are not an option, but "a must".

16. Turkey highlighted that their forestry sector strategy was recently developed. Combatting climate change and rehabilitating degraded land are primary points of the country's forestry policies. Turkey is committed to plant 300 thousand hectares of forests in the framework of the Bonn Challenge, but there is also a need to plant forests for other protection services as a means of reducing the occurrences of avalanches and landslides.

17. Tunisia highlighted the need for integration of forests and rangelands in rural development programmes and mentioned the country's experience in promoting collaborative forest management with community groups. The national strategy is based on three main axes: 1) strengthening the institutional legal framework; 2) strengthening the social economic aspects; 3) sustaining the vegetative cover in the country.

18. The panel underlined that moving from purely sectoral approaches to cross-sectorial can help identifying innovative solutions.

19. The Commission stressed the need for:

- acknowledging the importance of interactions between agriculture and forestry for sustainable development.
- farmers, in particular smallholders, to be provided with the knowledge, tools and incentives or options to adopt more sustainable practices.
- policies to reflect these interactions, and associated legislations that focus much more on sustainable practices.
- greener investments, from public and private sources and to ensure that all stakeholder groups are involved and listened to in the transformation towards more sustainable agri-food systems.

20. The Commission stressed the need to send a message to the Near East Regional Conference on this item, emphasising the need to consider food security, agriculture, rangeland, forestry and other aspects of rural development in an integrated manner.

21. The Commission requested FAO to:

- strengthen action on halting desertification, land degradation and deforestation while greening agri-food systems, taking into consideration regionally-specific land degradation dynamics and drivers within the context of Programme Priority Area Better Life 5 (PPA BL5) on Resilient Agri-food Systems
- further strengthen its cross-sectoral work through activities aimed at halting land degradation and deforestation, and promoting sustainable agriculture, rangeland, and forest management in ways that lead to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems.

25. The Commission recommended its Members to:

- strengthen efforts to reduce forest and rangeland degradation and deforestation;
- strengthen the institutional mechanisms for silvopastoral and agroforestry approaches in integrating livestock management in forest- and tree-based production systems to maximise synergies in terms of food and fibre provision, biomass circulation, carbon storage, wildfire prevention, restoration capacity, biodiversity conservation, soil fertility and water management;
- address critical data gaps in the status of the region's forests and rangelands to demonstrate and promote diversification of cropping systems and soil-crop-water-livestock-nutrient-pasture-tree management of rangeland and agrosilvopastoral systems in the region;
- promote efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems that contribute to sustainable forest and land management, including through agricultural capacity building programmes and improved access to technologies and markets, especially for women and youth; and
- mainstream the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus approach in ongoing and future programmes and projects that integrate conflict sensitivity and context specific analysis to avoid exacerbating further degradation.

FAO AND COUNTRY ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION AND FOLLOW-UP ON REQUESTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 24TH SESSION OF THE NEFRC (Item 5)

22. The Secretariat introduced document FO:NEFRC/2021/2, presenting the activities carried out both by the NEFRC Members and FAO's forestry and rangelands unit in follow-up to the recommendations of the 24th session of the Commission.

23. The Commission acknowledged the activities carried out and encouraged Member Nations to:

- take advantage of the opportunities provided by the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and other related global initiatives to mobilize resources for large-scale restoration programmes that aim at reversing ecosystem degradation, halting deforestation and land degradation and enhancing ecosystem health;
- better utilize available FAO technical resources to enhance capacities in areas related to forest and rangelands development, including landscape restoration, sustainable forest and rangeland

management, biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation and provide FAO with feedback on their usability and the gaps to be filled in these available resources;

17. The Commission requested FAO to:

continue to support Members with the formulation of development projects that integrate forest and rangelands within the broader food system, conserve biodiversity, adapt to climate change and combat land degradation and contribute to achieving multiple SDGs.

NEAR EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (NENA) FORESTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE (Item 6)

24. The Commission appreciated FAO support in the region related to climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation, including the activities related to risk prevention and response to forest/rangelands and fires, pest and diseases and dust and sand storms. It also identified major capacity challenges, especially related to MRV of GHGs emissions and fire management systems, and recognized the need for enhanced cooperation and coordination both within the countries and inter-regionally, among the relevant institutions.

25. The Commission encouraged its Members to:

- further implement the activities of the NENA Regional Forest Wildland Fire Network (NENFIRE) and Near East Network on Forest Health and Invasive Species (NENFHIS), and to strengthen regional collaboration on forest/rangeland protection;
- further include Agriculture Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU) targets and activities in the context of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement, and to seek partnerships to harness international climate finance to this end;
- bring their forest and rangeland related climate concerns to the attention of the 36th session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East and request that it recognise the role of forests and rangelands in policies and programmes that combat climate change.

26. The Commission requested that FAO :

- continue supporting the implementation of NENFIRE and NENFHIS activities, upon request by Members, especially the Review and Analysis and Risk Reduction for forest fires related to forests and rangelands and community based fire management, as well as phytosanitary measures in forestry; and share **information on the outcomes of such activities and initiatives to be translated into national and regional programmes;**
- Continue providing technical assistance, upon request by Members, to improve institutional capacity to combat biotic and abiotic factors affecting health and vitality of forests and rangelands, including fires, pests and diseases, in support of the development of resilient forests and rangelands in the context of climate change;
- Continue providing technical assistance, upon request by Members, to bolster national forest monitoring and climate risk and vulnerability assessments to evaluate future scenarios, achieve mitigation and adaptation targets, including through leveraging innovative monitoring tools and platforms, including Open Foris and the Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring (FERM).
- **help Members, upon their request, to enhance coordination and collaboration on climate change activities, both within the countries, and inter-regionally, with relevant and recognized institutions and international organizations at the national level and in the region respectively.**

LINKING THE WORK OF FAO FOREST-RELATED STATUTORY BODIES WITH RELEVANT POLICY AREAS (Item 7)

27. The Commission took note of document FO:NEFRC/2021/7, presented in support of the NEFRC discussion on ways to help facilitate policy dialogues and technical exchanges.
28. In response to the request for inputs on possible options for further linking the work of the forest-related FAO Statutory Bodies to the work of the Forestry Division and other policy areas with relevance for forestry to increase their relevance and efficiency and to create synergies and enhance participation, the Commission made the following recommendations.
29. The Commission highlighted the need to:
 - synchronize the calendar of future NEFRC meetings with the timetable of FAO Regional Conference for Near East (NERC) meetings, in order to provide inputs from the Commission to the NERC in a more timely manner;
 - strengthen the cross-sectorial work of the NEFRC, especially on forestry and agrifood systems matters, by providing relevant and useful inputs to their Members, to FAO (including through the NERC) and to other international processes on forest related issues.
30. The Commission requested FAO to:
 - invite the NEFRC Chairperson to attend the Regional Conference, and enhance intersessional activities by improving interactions between NEFRC and NERC Members, including Rome-based delegations, with a view to strengthening cross-sectorial policy dialogue and to ensure that important regional forestry matters are integrated in the themes of the Regional Conferences;
 - consider undertaking a detailed review of NEFRC with the aim of further enhancing its relevance, including the focus on Agenda 2030 and the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-30, and its efficiency and effectiveness;
 - communicate the results of the discussion on this item to the next session of COFO for its consideration.

NENA REGIONAL FOREST RESOURCES ASSESSMENT (2020) IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT (Item 8)

31. In the context of the Global Forest Resources Assessment Programme (FRA), the Secretariat presented document FO:NEFRC/2021/3, summarizing the key findings of the regional report *Near East and North Africa Forest Resources Assessment 2020 – Extent, Change and Trends*.
32. The Commission welcomed the background document, took note of the key findings, the main data gaps and challenges and the proposed means to consolidate the country reporting process going forward.
33. The Commission stressed the need for Members to designate National FRA Correspondents for future assessments, when requested, with the aim to ensure complete national submissions to future FRA's from all countries of the region.
34. The Commission invited Members to
 - increase knowledge of forests by updating national land cover maps and conducting National Forest Inventories (NFIs) in countries where forest-related data are outdated or lacking.
 - Raise awareness of the importance of reversing forest cover loss as well as degradation of forests and other lands in the region, and the function of FRA reporting in monitoring progress towards agreed international goals and targets.
35. The Commission requested that FAO:

- continue building national capacity for harmonized FRA reporting, improve reporting on forest characteristics and to continue developing the FRA data platform.
- continue and further strengthen support for national forest inventory and mapping in the region.
- explore ways of improving forest data through regional collaboration on thematic mapping and monitoring and through possible linkages to other data-sources.
- provide further analyses and outlooks on the status and use of the forest resources in the region, building on the FRA and other relevant data, to support related decision-making.

EFFECT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS VALUE CHAINS (Item 9)

36. Under this item, the Commission welcomed the presentation of the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the non-wood forest products (NWFPs) supply and value chain activities in the NENA region.
37. The Commission encouraged countries to:
 - seek FAO support to undertake similar studies for their key NWFPs in order to strengthen the resilience of their NWFPs in the face of any similar shocks and stresses in the future and to build back better.
 - mobilize public, private and international development finance to support the valorization of the NWFPs in their countries and develop robust national research programmes to unveil the health benefit potentials of major NWFPs that already have well-established traditional medicinal uses.
38. The Commission may recommend that FAO, upon request from countries:
 - establish protocols and/or guidelines for sustainable NWFP harvest, resource management and international trade; and
 - provide support for conversion of NWFP raw materials into finished products with value added in a way that enables NWFP producers/collectors to earn higher prices for their products.

INPUT TO FAO GOVERNANCE: RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE 26TH SESSION OF COFO AND THE 36TH SESSION OF THE NEAR EAST REGIONAL CONFERENCE (Item 10)

39. The Commission took note of the need to further strengthen the interaction and collaboration of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC) with the other FAO forestry-related statutory bodies.
40. The Commission requested that its recommendations for the Near East Regional Conference (NERC), COFO and the forestry programme priorities be shared with other Regional Forestry Commissions as well as with the secretariats of the Regional Conference and COFO.
41. The Commission invited the Secretariat of the Regional Conference to give adequate attention to the recommendations of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission when developing the agenda of the Conference.

UPDATE ON GLOBAL PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES OF RELEVANCE FOR THE REGIONAL FORESTRY COMMISSIONS (Item 11)

42. The Commission thanked the Secretariat for providing an overview of key global developments of relevance to forests and the forest sector and of interest to the Commission, - as well as of preparations for the XV World Forestry Congress.

43. NEFRC Members welcomed:
- the topical focus of FAO's flagship publication "The State of the World's Forests" 2022, titled "Forestry and Green Recovery, Building Inclusive and Sustainable Green Economies";
 - FAO's efforts in mainstreaming forest-related issues into the preparations of the UN Food Systems Summit and its Pre-Summit and the proposed follow up actions;
 - the developments under the UN Secretary-General's Initiative on Turning the Tide on Deforestation;
 - the themes of the International Day of Forests 2022 and 2023 and consider them in the preparations of celebration events in the region.
44. The Commission invited countries to support the XV World Forestry Congress by encouraging and facilitating good attendance, and encourage countries in a position to do so to provide financial support to the Congress to enable balanced participation.
45. The Commission requested FAO to:
- promote SOFO 2022 within and outside of the forestry sector;
 - take an active part in advancing the UN Secretary-General's Initiative on Turning the Tide on Deforestation and related activities;
 - continue to take an active role as the Chair of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and through this enhance advocacy on forests through relevant global processes and initiatives.
 - organise a regional preparatory meeting prior to the World Forestry Congress to allow the countries in the region to be well prepared for this event.