

Brussels, 24 April 2015

## **CEPF statement**

### **on the todays and future relevance of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)**

*11th Session of the UN Forum on Forests, 4-15 May 2015, UN Headquarter, New York*

Since 2001, European private forest owners are actively participating and contributing to the policy deliberations at UN level.

In 2006, the four global objectives on forests<sup>1</sup> reiterated in a condensed form the importance of the forest principles agreed upon at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Thereafter the UNFF succeeded to integrate the significance of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) for overall sustainable development in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) in the outcome of the 2012 Rio+20 Earth Summit.

Approaching UNFF 11, the Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) would like to reflect on some of the achievements as well as deficiencies of the UN forest policy dialogue and offer recommendations for its future.

#### **I. Major Groups: the bridge from policy to practice**

During the early sessions of the global forest policy dialogue, small-scale private forest ownership or community ownership was hardly recognised. The continuous privatisation and/or restitution of former state forests particular in Eastern Europe has led to a significant shift in the recognition of private and community forests, not only at European level but also globally.

Anchoring Major Groups, including small forest landowners, in the UNFF structure has advanced the level of trust amongst stakeholders and between stakeholders and governments significantly. The resulting dialogue even outside the official dialogue is possibly one of the most valuable achievements of UNFF over the past 15 years. Based on their experience on the ground the majority of Major Groups repeatedly highlighted the need for a coherent approach on SFM as a dynamic but strong concept. To those who rely on forests for their livelihood and income it is clear that SFM is not viable without being embedded in a larger sustainable development policy.

Within the UN hierarchy the UNFF is not yet at eye level with other policy processes such as UNCBD or UNFCCC. A holistic approach is vital for the development and implementation of SFM, which as a management concept is constantly undermined and questioned by the interests of single issue driven policies. This requires the future UNFF to become the centre of forest-related dialogue which expertise is utilised in other policy processes when dealing with forest-related issues.

In a world of continuously increasing interactions of people and policies the only way forward is participation. Functional and effective forest policy cannot be made without those who are mostly affected by these policies. SFM can only be implemented by practical support, a favourable legal framework and advice to those who work and live in the forests.

#### **II. Secured property and land tenure rights: a prerequisite for long-term responsible and sustainable action on the ground**

From its initial participation in the UNFF process, CEPF as part of the small forest landowners Major group has repeatedly pointed out to the important link between secured property rights and land tenure in combination with independent producer organisations to achieve SFM.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/about.html>



Sustainability requires, by definition, a long-term perspective and commitment as SFM can be achieved only by a long-term approach. Clear ownership structures are a vital part of ensuring that commitment. In Europe with 60% of its forest owned by individual smallholders, those prerequisites resulted in a steady increase of European Forests since the Second World War. Furthermore, Europe has increased its level of self-sufficiency and has become an exporting continent of processed forest products. Since 1990, the forested area in the EU grew by 19 M hectares.<sup>2</sup>

A key factor in SFM is secure, stable and long-term property rights or tenure rights. It is only those factors that can guarantee personal and generation bridging commitment and stewardship, which is also pivotal to stability in rural areas and local communities. The way towards SFM in all types of forests is to support the people who live near to and in the forests.

### **III. Reliable legal framework conditions: the cornerstone for SFM implementation**

After 300 years of experience with SFM European forest owners have learnt that a reliable legal framework is crucial for the implementation of SFM.

Family forest owners depend on a fair operating environment within which they are able to optimise the sustainable management of wood and non-wood products. Policy and decision makers are asked to concentrate their efforts on establishing conditions for a long-term reliable legal framework in which socially beneficial and economically viable investments can be made.

Besides regulatory means to secure SFM, forest governance needs to provide room and flexibility to forest owners for voluntary action. For example, within the EU the voluntary PEFC certified area increased by 58% from 47,9 M hectares in 2006 to 75,9 M hectares in 2014.

Today, significant societal and political changes have influenced the way society looks at forests and forestry, leading to an increasing number of initiatives and policy developments touching on several forestry-related issues. Other sectorial policies, e.g. the energy, climate, environment, agriculture, economy and trade sector, contribute to but also influence forest policy and management at national and ground level. This creates an environment of uncertainty and risks to private forest owners, as well as all other players of the forest sector, as a holistic binding framework and strong reference at international level is still missing.

In order to secure effective dialogue and negotiations with other sectorial policies, a further strengthened UNFF process with an enhanced regional approach is needed.

Based on the freedom of decision and responsibility of family forest owners, sound and forward looking investments in SFM can be made only if a long-term holistic policy approach and framework is secured.

### **IV. Strengthened regional approaches: the key for better addressing regional characteristics and build commitment**

The UNFF should help to strengthen regional level approaches for sound forest dialogue, such as Forest Europe, which proved to be elementary in facilitating a better understanding, in sharing and building a common vision and developing the concrete tools needed to implement and further develop SFM by taking into account the specific characteristics and stakeholder needs within that region.

CEPF fully supports and acknowledges the tremendous achievements the Forest Europe process made over the past two decades. The common definition of SFM, the pan-European Operational Level Guidelines as well as the set of pan-European Criteria and Indicators for SFM monitoring and reporting are certainly the milestones of this long-term valuable process.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.foresteurope.org/documentos/State\\_of\\_Europes\\_Forests\\_2011\\_Report\\_Revised\\_November\\_2011.pdf](http://www.foresteurope.org/documentos/State_of_Europes_Forests_2011_Report_Revised_November_2011.pdf)

In addition to these concrete instruments, a trustful dialog has been developed between governmental and stakeholder representatives, combining governance and practical know-how and experience in a powerful forum. This direct and open dialog should be the guiding principle for a strengthened regional approach as well as for the UNFF as the global leading forest policy forum.

The Forest Europe decision in 2011, to go ahead with the negotiations towards a Legally Binding Agreement (LBA) on Forests in Europe represented a major step towards creating the necessary structure for a coherent approach at pan-European level. Having an LBA in the future would greatly support the European forest and forest-based sector to enhance its political integrity and consistency, which is the way forward to ensure SFM, the multifunctionality of forests as well as competitiveness of the forest and forest-based sector. CEPF welcomes the draft resolution for the Madrid Ministerial Conference in 2015, underlining that the signatories of Forest Europe will explore possible ways to find common ground on the LBA at latest by 2020.

In the context of UNFF, CEPF therefore calls for further commitment and engagement from all governments to further strengthen regional approaches in order to secure good dialogue and commitment as well as wide stakeholder engagement towards SFM at regional and global level.

## V. Conclusions and recommendations

- The future international arrangement on forests needs to strive for higher recognition within the UN hierarchy to ensure that other sector policies do not thwart the potential of forest and forestry to contribute to the solution of global challenges as defined in the Four Global objectives on forests and the SDG's, in particular goal 15.
- The cooperation between governments and Major Groups has developed over the past 15 years. Yet there is a lot of room for improvement. In a true partnership, and whenever SFM issues are addressed at global, regional or national level, forest owners must be able to participate to ensure that their views and practical knowledge are taken into account.
- Secured property and land tenure rights embedded in a reliable legal framework are at the heart of SFM. Ownership and collaboration in producer organisations create values and a sound commitment to use and manage those values responsibly to the benefit of the immediate and wider social environment in medium and long term.
- Global and regional forest processes, such as UNFF or Forest Europe, have to secure that the economic viability and the need for a strong competitive forest sector are promoted and politically well recognised, not only for the benefits of forest owners, but to fulfil other policy commitments and address today's global challenges by solutions from an innovative sector.
- To better facilitate dialogue and commitment towards SFM and consider the specific and diverse characteristics of the world regions, regional approaches, such as Forest Europe, need to be further strengthened, ideally with a more binding commitment and wider stakeholder involvement.

The Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) is the umbrella association of national forest owner organisations in Europe. Representing family forestry in Europe, CEPF promotes the values of sustainable forest management, private property ownership and the economic viability of the forest sector. Based in Brussels, CEPF is a non-profit organisation, representing nearly 16 million forest owners. These are private individuals, families and cooperatives, which take care of approximately 60% of the European forest area.

For further information please visit: <http://www.cepf-eu.org/>