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**UNECE/FAO IN A CHANGING INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: BRIEFING AND
DISCUSSION OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

(Item 3 of the provisional agenda)

Note by the secretariat

This document provides a brief overview of the most relevant developments over the past year and invites the Committee to consider whether the programme is still in harmony with the wider international environment, or whether the arrangements in place need modification. The strategic review of the programme completed in 2004 considered this aspect and took it into account; but in view of continuous changes, it is necessary to keep this matter under constant review. This short paper concentrates on a few points and does not attempt to report on all the activities which could be considered relevant, or to provide full information on all the activities mentioned.

INTRODUCTION

1. The international activities and discussions on forest/timber issues take place in many different fora and with varying regional coverage. Clearly it is important that the UNECE/FAO integrated programme be well coordinated with other relevant activities, producing synergies and partnerships, rather than duplication and competition. For this reason, over the last few years, a regular agenda item has called on the Committee to review relevant activities and consider its own activities in the light of the changing international environment. In particular, the programme should:

- provide input to global activities and respond to global level initiatives;
- be very well coordinated with regional activities.

2. The present document provides a very brief overview of the most relevant developments over the past year and invites the Committee to consider whether the programme is still in harmony with the wider international environment, or whether the arrangements in place need modification. The strategic review of the programme completed in 2004 considered this aspect and took into account, but in view of continuous changes, it is necessary to keep this matter under constant review. This short paper concentrates on a few points and does not attempt to report on all the activities which could be considered relevant, or to provide full information on all the activities mentioned. The Committee will be briefed orally on these developments as appropriate. In addition, delegates are referred to the appropriate websites, many of which provide links to further relevant activities (see for instance the links on the FAO Forestry homepage at <http://www.fao.org/forestry/index.jsp>). A Discussion Paper is under preparation, emerging from EFSOS preparatory work, which will provide more detailed information on activities of many organisations, including those mentioned below.

FAO, NOTABLY THE COMMITTEE ON FORESTS (COFO)

3. The Committee on Forests met in March 2005, preceded by a ministerial meeting which approved a declaration. A continuing theme of COFO in recent years has been the importance of strengthening the role of regional forestry commissions, such as the Timber Committee's sister body, the European Forestry Commission, in implementing sustainable forest management. Under item 5 of its agenda, COFO "agreed that the Regional Forestry Commissions are a vital component of FAO's work and provide effective mechanisms to enhance regional and sub-regional cooperation and to support member countries' efforts to implement sustainable forest management. They facilitate the exchange of experiences and lessons learned, build capacity, support networks on issues of regional importance, strengthen countries' capacity to participate effectively in international forest-related policy fora, and enhance linkages among national, regional and global processes."

4. Further, the Ministerial Statement calls on FAO to "enhance its work with other international partners to strengthen coordination and communication between the global and regional levels, and to contribute to facilitating regional cooperation on sustainable forest management."

5. Delegations may wish to endorse COFO's determination to strengthen the FAO regional forestry commissions and reaffirm the UNECE Timber Committee's commitment to its partnership with the FAO European Forestry Commission and to the UNECE/FAO integrated work programme on forests and timber.

UN FORUM ON FORESTS (UNFF)

6. UNFF held its fifth session in May 2005, but failed to reach agreement on all the points under consideration. A sixth session is scheduled for February 2006. Among the points suggested at UNFF5 was the holding of regional sessions of UNFF. The relevant section of the draft ECOSOC resolution as posted on the UNFF website (<http://www.un.org/esa/forests/index.html>) is attached as an annex.

7. Delegations are invited to discuss the role of the Committee, and of the UNECE/FAO integrated programme, in contributing to global activities.

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE PROTECTION OF FORESTS IN EUROPE (MCPFE)

8. For more than a decade, UNECE/FAO has cooperated closely with MCPFE, to mutual advantage. Many items in the MCPFE programme of work are implemented, by UNECE/FAO, typically in partnership with other stakeholders. Over the past year, the following areas of cooperation are worthy of note:

- Forest resource assessment and indicators of sustainable forest management, notably preparation of report for next Ministerial Conference
- Workshop on implications for policy of EFSOS, Budapest, June 2005
- Cross-sectoral aspects, notably the workshop in Latvia as follow up to EFOS, October 2005
- Seminar on forests and our cultural heritage, Sunne, Sweden, June 2005
- First international conference of forest training centres, Bastide des Jourdans, France, February 2005

9. Delegations may wish to endorse the continuing close cooperation between MCPFE and UNECE/FAO.

EUROPEAN UNION

10. The EU has no specific forest policy but has many forest/timber related activities (see brochure on Sustainable Forestry and the European Union, published by the European Commission in 2003). In addition, the European Council agreed in May 2005 to prepare an EU Forestry Action Plan, based on the EU Forestry Strategy. The European Parliament is also considering follow up to the Forestry Strategy.

11. There are many areas of cooperation between EU bodies and programmes and UNECE/FAO, including the following:

- Cooperation with Eurostat on the Joint FAO/ECE/ITTO/Eurostat Forest Sector Questionnaire
- Cooperation on monitoring forest resources, in the context of Forest Resource assessment with a wide range of European institutions (Forest Focus, Joint Research Centre, EEA, Eurostat etc.)
- Cooperation with various EU linked or funded research projects, such as EFFE, NEFIS, COST E43, Forest Based Industries Technology Platform etc.

12. In addition, the European forest sector outlook study (EFSOS) will be used as input for the preparation of the EU Forestry Action Plan, and was presented to a meeting of the EU standing Forestry Committee in May 2005.

13. Delegations are invited to review cooperation of the Timber Committee and the UNECE/FAO integrated programme with EU institutions and activities, and provide guidance on future activities.

Annex 1

Extract from advance unedited text of Draft Chairman's text from the fifth session of UNFF (under "working modalities") to be considered at the sixth session

ECOSOC ...

10. Agrees that the Forum shall hold regional sessions every alternate year to address issues identified in the MYPOW, including through assessing implementation and progress at the [[global/] regional level] and providing guidance for further action;

11. Decides that these sessions be organised in cooperation with the UN Regional Commissions as well as existing regional processes, including those within the CPF and others [such as the UN Regional Economic and Social Commissions and the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions,] to ensure complementarity and [non-] avoid duplication and that the outcomes of the regional sessions be reported to the global meetings of the UNFF and, as appropriate, to the ECOSOC;

11alt. Requests UNFF to organize, with the support of the five UN Regional Economic and Social Commissions, [to host] / [organize] within the policy framework and over-all coordination of the UNFF, in consultation with the UNFF Secretariat, regional meetings of the UNFF every two years and invites FAO, through its Regional Forestry Commissions, and relevant regional and subregional organizations and processes to actively participate in, support, and, where feasible, co-host these meetings. These regional meetings should:

- a. address issues identified in the MYPOW, particularly through the exchange of information and experiences;
- b. report to UNFF meetings at the global level and to ECOSOC, as appropriate;
- c. open to CPF members and Major Groups;
- d. involve other relevant sub-regional, regional and international organizations and processes;
- e. supported by the UNFF Secretariat;
- f. financed through the UN regular budget by the reallocation of funds saved by reducing the frequency and duration of UNFF global meetings;
- g. complimentary to and avoid duplication of existing processes;

These regional meetings should take advantage of existing regional meetings and processes to avoid duplication and fragmentation;