

Fourth UN Forum on Forests (UNFF 4): 3 – 14 May 2004 in Geneva

Global Platform for International Forest Policy

There are several institutions and processes that deal with the forest at international level:

- United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC)
- United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)
- FAO World Forestry Congress

There is no definitive central forest body or forest convention.

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) is currently the central platform for debate on global forest policy. However, the UNFF is a limited process and its five-year mandate ends in 2005. The final UNFF conference will take place next year at UN headquarters in New York.

The aims of the UNFF are:

- To support the implementation of the recommendations for action for sustainable forest management developed since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. One of these recommendations to the participating states involves, for example, the establishment of a national forest programme.
- To seek solutions to the problems that arise during the implementation of the recommendations for action.
- To exchange experience and information on best practice.
- To establish whether a legally binding international forest regime (e.g. in the form of a forest convention) will be required on completion of the UNFF mandate.

The UNFF 4 in Geneva

This year's fourth meeting of the UNFF will take place at the United Nations Office in Geneva, as did last year's. The agenda for the meeting from 3 to 14 May 2004 shall include the following topics:

- Social and cultural aspects of forests and traditional forest-related knowledge;
- Monitoring and reporting, and criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management.

The future of the global forest process will also be discussed informally.

Switzerland's main focus of interest

- Switzerland shall do everything in its power to ensure that sufficient time is devoted to the critical and active discussion of the above-mentioned topics at UNFF 4. The discussion should enable the countries to benefit from each other's concrete experience and to identify areas that still require action. The insights gained at the Interlaken Workshop on Decentralization in Forestry shall be incorporated into the debate on the social aspects of forests.
- Switzerland would like the criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management to be harmonized, and the states to agree on a uniform definition of forest-relevant concepts. The long-term aim of this harmonization is to make it easier to identify progress and problems in the area of forests and to simplify the reporting processes associated with the UNFF, the Biodiversity Convention, the Climate Convention and the FAO's forest-specific processes.
- Switzerland shall support the creation of a strong and uniform global forest regime (e.g. in the form of a forest convention) in the post-UNFF period.

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Further information about UNFF 4 can be found on the following website:

<http://www.un.org/esa/forests/session.html>