

**21<sup>st</sup> Session of COFO and 3<sup>rd</sup> WFW 2012**

**Keynote Speech by**

**H.E. Dr. Mohammed Hassan Mahmood, M.P.**

**Hon'ble Minister for Environment and Forests of Bangladesh**

**Plenary Hall, FAO HQ, Rome, 24 September 2012**

***Role of Forests to Boost Social and Economic Development***

**Mr Chairman, Director-General Mr Graziano da Silva,**

**Excellencies**

**Distinguished participants**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

**Good Morning to you all.**

It is a privilege for me to speak at this 21<sup>st</sup> Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) and to be part of the celebrations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Forest Week (WFW). These events could not be more significant, because they show that we are all partners globally, and that we are joining hands to renew the focus on forestry and its role in boosting sustainable social and economic development.

Nor can the theme for this year's WFW and COFO, "*Forestry: a Green Pathway for Human Development*", be more significant, given that we are seeking to build on the consensus we achieved at the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process is promoting a new level of commitment for green development, that we are joining hands to build an Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and that we are striving to coordinate and align similar fora and initiatives. We are looking to forestry and COFO to help us secure the future for the next generation and for generations to come.

**Mr Director General,**

Let me express my sincere thanks to you and to the Forestry Department of FAO for inviting me, and for the generous hospitality accorded to me and my delegation. My presence here coincides with the concerted response we received from the FAO Country Office, Regional Office and headquarters to our call to renew and enhance our

collaboration in the forest sector. We are in a new phase of collaboration to develop the forest sector with the aim of boosting the social and economic development of Bangladesh.

**Mr Chairman,**

Bangladesh, the largest and the most densely populated deltaic flood plain in the world, virtually grew out of water, not long ago on a geological time scale. But it, or at least a significant part of it, is under threat of inundation by the same water from which it grew. The process of growing up was the natural creation of God; the other way round is, we can say, largely called upon by His most intelligent Creation – us.

Bangladesh was born green – our forests rose from the blue waters and through the grey silts carried from the Himalaya by the three major river systems, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna. The forests still stand as a thin line of defense between development and disaster.

**Mr Chairman,**

Forests have a major role to play in poverty reduction and employment creation in developing countries. According to FAO, around ten million people are engaged in the forest sector worldwide and another ten million new “green jobs” can be created by investing in sustainable forest management.

Many local communities have a symbiotic relationship with forests. They depend on forests for their survival, harvesting a very wide range of wood and non-wood forest products to meet their daily needs. Other rural and semi-urban people living below poverty line also depend on forests for many of their basic requirements. In most countries, forests contribute at least 3%-6% of GDP.

Forests are also important in soil, water and biodiversity conservation, especially in arid zones, deltas and watersheds. Bangladesh’s Sundarbans mangrove forest, a world heritage site, is a vivid example of this. Forests can help us mitigate and adapt to climate change.

**Mr Chairman,**

A key challenge faced by our land, forest and water managers is to maximize the wide range of forest benefits without diminishing their ecological functions, particularly in the face of climate change. To reverse the trend of forest degradation, to conserve forests better, to increase the benefits provided by forest resources, and to maintain a sustainable balance of forest cover, we require “man-made” interventions.

**Mr Chairman,**

The effective development and implementation of forest policy depends on the institutional capacity of national and sub-national forest agencies. The synchronization of policies, strategies and action plans with international conventions and agreements is also crucial for sustainable forest management and for achieving the objectives of social and economic development.

Bangladesh is one of the world’s most climate-vulnerable countries. The Bangladesh Government, therefore, has committed to take measures to protect the country from the adverse impacts of climate change and ensure that our upward economic growth path continues . Accordingly, we have prepared the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), and the National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA).

To face climatic and other emerging challenges and to respond to the paradigm shift that is taking place in forestry, the Forest Department of Bangladesh, under Vision 2021, has fixed a target to create 20 percent forest cover in the country by 2021.

Afforestation in general, and coastal afforestation in particular, is one of the mainstays of this initiative. Bangladesh is proud to have won the Earth Care Award 2012 for spearheading the Least Developed Countries Fund project “Community Based Adaptation to Climate Change through Coastal Afforestation in Bangladesh”.

Most existing natural forest has been brought placed in the Protected Area Network. The management of these protected areas is being undertaken to address the entire range of environment and development issues and opportunities, including the right of indigenous and local communities to sustainable socio-economic development.

The co-management concept has been introduced to 19 of the 34 Protected Areas to enable peoples’ participation in conservation and management. The participants in the social forestry programme in these areas are benefiting economically from it. I believe

that this programme is a 'milestone' in our national effort to reduce poverty in Bangladesh.

Earlier this year, the United Nations awarded 'The Equator Prize' to the co-management council of our Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary, a welcome acknowledgement of the success of the co-management effort. But undoubtedly the biggest prize in perpetuity is the inherent resilience and adaptive capacity of our people in general, and of those of the coastal zones in particular, one of which I am proud to have been born in.

**Mr Chairman,**

I gratefully acknowledge the support of FAO this year in assessing the organizational and operational capacity of my Ministry and its agencies. We worked together to produce a Situation Analysis and Capacity Need Assessment Report that will provide a framework for a comprehensive capacity development programme.

Bangladesh's strategic preparedness in food security was helped by a flagship FAO project funded by USAID, EU and DFID. We hope to develop similar synergy in the forest, environment and climate change sectors as well.

Bangladesh is looking to access carbon markets and to get leverage from the Clean Development Mechanism and REDD+. We are working to present the Sundarbans World Heritage forest for carbon funding under REDD+ and voluntary carbon markets.

Bangladesh joined the UN-REDD Programme as a member country in August, 2010. We quickly developed the Bangladesh REDD+ Roadmap through an inclusive process with support from UNDP and FAO. In particular I would like to recognize the dedication and support of the FAO Forestry Department in developing the Bangladesh National MRV Action Plan in an exceptionally short time.

**Mr Chairman,**

Bangladesh has taken a leading and proactive position in global fora to combat climate change and encourage sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation, under the direct guidance of our Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina.

FAO's efforts to enhance national and international action on forestry and climate

change and to strengthen intersectoral links towards a green economy are very encouraging for developing countries, particularly those that are most vulnerable to climate change, like Bangladesh.

FAO can help bridge the gaps in the enabling conditions related to knowledge, institutional setting and culture, all of which are barriers to an effective response to climate change and its impacts.

Emphasis needs to be placed on research and development, access to new technology and innovation, and a commitment to the continuous improvement of forests.

Developed countries should come forward to make available financing and expand opportunities for the transfer of environmentally sound technologies and for capacity building programmes.

In this context, we see this 21st COFO Session and the 3rd WFW as an opportunity to establish a green pathway, through forests, towards green development that provides economic growth, social development and environmental protection in all countries and globally. Mr Director General, I reaffirm our commitment to work with you on all fronts.

**Mr Chairman,**

I thank you.