

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE DR PIETER MULDER, DEPUTY MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 21ST SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND THE 3RD WORLD FORESTS WEEK

Monday, 24 September 2012, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy

Chairperson,

Mr Jose Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization

Honourable Ms Isabelle Texeira, Minister for Environment of Brazil

Honourable Dr Hasan Mahmud, Minister for Environment and Forest of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Mr Luc Gnacadja, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD,

Mr Sven Alkalaj, Executive Secretary of UNECE,

Excellencies

Representatives from the UN Agencies and Programmes

Members of Civil Society

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

It is an honour for me to address the 21st Session of the Committee on Forestry on behalf of the Government of South Africa. We wish to congratulate the Food and Agriculture Organization and its collaborative partners for hosting the 3rd World Forest Week during this 21st Session of the Committee on Forestry.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and guests, I believe that at the heart of every nation is the quest to develop and enhance its economic, social and environmental capacity. The theme for the 21st Session of the COFO - ***"Forests: a green pathway for human development"*** is then relevant given the current environmental and economic challenges we are all facing, albeit at different levels especially the uncertainty posed by climate change.

The United Nations Environmental Programme, UNEP provided like other organizations a synthesis of the role of forests in a green economy. The UNEP synthesis as summarised by Achim Steiner confirms that:

'Biologically-rich forest ecosystems provide shelter, food, jobs, water, medicine and security to more than 1 billion people, as well as regulate our global climate.'

The essence of the contribution of forests to human development is encapsulated in this statement. There ought to be consensus that collectively we can not afford to have continuing deforestation. Therefore the current estimation of a possible annual destruction of 13 million

hectares world wide is of great concern; unregulated, deforestation will in the future undoubtedly pose social and economic cost to humanity.

We all owe it to ourselves and to future generations to ensure that sustainable forest management becomes the norm. ; member states, the forestry sector, forest dwellers, rural communities, the private sector and civil society can work together to implement policies that promote investment in forests, and trees outside forests to promote reforestation and afforestation in line with the green economy principles for the benefit of mankind and our common habitat. A low carbon and efficient resource utilization is a future that we must embrace.

We should note that an estimated *11 million people are employed in the formal forest sector, and about 2-3 times more in the informal sector, according to World Bank sources. On average, households in forest communities derive 24 percent of their income from forests, a figure that may not be captured in national accounts.* This is significant.

Distinguished delegates, forests not only deliver timber and timber products; we also derive from forests, non-wood forest products which improve our socio-economic standings. Trees and forests also contribute towards food security. The importance of environmental services we derive for/from forests cannot be over-emphasised. These include biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, protection against desertification and land degradation, watershed services and tourism.

The 2012 State of the World's Forests report to be released during this session makes a case for sustainable use of forest resources to meet many of the core global challenges, including poverty and hunger, climate change and more sustainable sources of bio-products and bio-energy for human use – a truly green pathway for human development.

Excellencies, we should strengthen the area of forest research and development. Research has shown that trees and forests have the potential to mitigate the effects of climate change. The international community and all of us have a role of encouraging the people of the world to plant as many trees as possible, particularly trees of native species. Continuous research and development on timber quality, tree breeding, hydrology, fire management including pests and diseases should be prioritized and funded.

Distinguished delegates, the Non-Legally Binding Instrument, the NLBI is a good intervention for ensuring sustainable forest management, and by implication sustainable development. While some countries might have forged ahead with the implementation of this instrument, some countries may require support to do so. South Africa's humble call in this regard is that perhaps it is time for the international forestry community to do an assessment on the status of the NLBI implementation by the member countries. The assessment must help strengthen those areas that require intervention, including assisting countries which require external resources to realise full implementation of the NLBI. It is an instrument that can contribute to the green pathway for human development.

Rio 20+ hosted by the Government of Brazil, provides resolutions that are a step in the right direction. On behalf of my Government, I challenge all that are gathered here to make the resolutions a reality. We need to create synergies on issues raised and discussed in the United Nations and other platforms to ensure integration and optimum utilization of natural resources.

Excellencies, following on the success of the XIII (the thirteenth) World Forestry Congress in 2009, held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, you have granted the Republic of South Africa, the rights of hosting the XIV (the fourteenth) World Forestry Congress in 2015. We thank you for your support

and the trust that the forestry world community has put unto South Africa, the Southern African Development Community and indeed the continent of Africa. This is particularly exciting and invigorating because it is for the first time that the World Forestry Congress will be hosted on African soil.

By 2015 we expect that the Congress will present an opportunity for the global forestry community to raise awareness and analysis of key issues that will face the sector then. We will be pleased if the outcomes will include new ways to address technical, scientific and policy actions within the forestry sector.

For the Africa region the value of the Congress will lie in the opportunity for the region to have participants' exposure and follow-on tourism benefits. African participants will contribute to the international exchange and will help map out the future of world forestry.

Distinguished delegates, like many countries around the world, we heed the call by the United Nations General Assembly and celebrated in style, the International Year of Forests: 2011. Our Ministry published a book titled *Green Heritage-Trees, forests and woodlands of South Africa* which gives a brief overview of forestry and forest management in South Africa. The book was launched at the 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention Climate Change held in Durban, South Africa in December 2011. I wish to take this opportunity to thank all of you who attended Forest Day 5 during COP 17.

Other activities we undertook as a country in celebrating the year included hosting of the 5th Natural Forest and Woodland Symposium in April 2011; the 5th International Wildland Fire Conference in May 2011; and the 4th Forest Engineering Conference, also including the annual Arbor Week. The activities celebrated confirm that forests contribute to economic development.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, as we begin with the discussions of strengthening the role played by forests in socio-economic and environmental dimensions, I urge you to engage in robust debates.

Noting the intimate link between forests and wildlife; I wish to conclude by quoting an African Statesman, President Julius Nyerere, who in 1961 on the occasion of the signing of the Arusha Declaration on Wildlife Protection said some wise words. The quotation sums up what is expected of us. He said:

"The survival of our wildlife is a matter of grave concern to all of us in Africa. These wild creatures amid the wild places they inhabit are not only important as a source of wonder and inspiration but are an integral part of our natural resources and of our future livelihood and well-being.

In accepting the trusteeship of our wildlife we solemnly declare that we will do everything in our power to make sure that our children's grandchildren will be able to enjoy this rich and precious inheritance.

The conservation of wildlife and wild places call for specialist knowledge, trained manpower and money, and we look to other nations to co-operate in this important task – the success or failure of which not only affects the continent of Africa but the rest of the world."

I wish you fruitful deliberations,

I thank you.

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