

# The United Nations Forum on Forests 5

Ein Bericht von Jerylee Wilkes

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) held its fifth session last May 2005 (16th to 27th) in the headquarters of the United Nations in New York, USA. Different governments assisted to discuss about the future IAF (International Agreement on Forest), review the effectiveness of its work, consider the future actions on forests and present voluntarily reports on their effort to implement IPF/IFF.

## **Brief History of UNFF**

In the late 1980's and early 1990's there was a growing concern around the world about the state of the forests and the alarming rates of deforestation in some countries. In 1992 heads of the State met at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. At this earth summit they hoped for a legally binding instrument on forests similar to conventions on climate change. Nonetheless a Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests along with the Agenda 21, which included a chapter commonly referred to as Chapter 11 on combating deforestation, was adopted by more than 178 governments. The objective of these principles is to contribute to the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests and to provide for their multiple and complementary functions and uses.

After Rio the United Nations established the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and its successor, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), to implement the forest principles of Chapter 11 of the Agenda 21. The IPF/IFF processes resulted in a comprehensive set of 270 proposals for action concerning the promotion of management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. Afterwards it became evident that the international dialogue on forests needed a more permanent home. Governments were looking for a forum that would address all issues related to forests in a coherent and comprehensive manner and a forum that would facilitate the exchange of experiences in the implementation of sustainable forest management practices by governments and stakeholders. In the year 2000 the United Nations Economic and Social Council established the United Nations Forum on Forests. At the same time the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF, composed of 14 international organizations) was formed to cooperate on forest issues and support the work of the UNFF.

## **Work of UNFF**

UNFF meets annually for two weeks with the participation of all Member States of the United Nations and States that are members of specialized agencies. At each session countries can voluntarily report on their efforts to implement the IPF/IFF proposals for action. Also in the intervals between annual sessions, UNFF organizes intercessional ad hoc expert group meetings. These meetings deliberate and provide advice on scientific and technical issues related to forests as well as developing the objectives of the next UNFF.

## **Results of the UNFF 5**

After two weeks of intensive discussion member countries decided that the International Arrangement on Forest should first enhance the contribution of forests to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. Secondly it should help to maintain global forest resources and forest quality for the long term, to maintain social and environmental wellbeing for the population and in particular for those that depend directly on forests, including local and indigenous communities. They also agreed to a set of global goals on forests to be achieved by 2015: to double the area of forest under sustainable management; to reduce by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty among those whose livelihoods depend on forests; and to reduce by half the global rate of deforestation and degradation of forests.

In spite of the outcomes of UNFF 5, member countries were not able to reach consensus on a legally binding instrument on all types of forests that could strengthen the IAF and achieve the global goals, mostly because of the different point of view and the distinct necessities of developing and industrialised countries.

### **Members of IFSA**

Forestry students all over the world have the opportunity to become members of IFSA (International Forestry Student Association), a non profit organisation, organized by students for students. The main goal of IFSA is the enrichment of forestry student's formal education, especially in terms of a wider, more global perspective through extracurricular activities and the exchange of information and experience.

Because of the youth and children participation according to the Agenda 21 at the UNFF, thirty IFSA members of different continents had the opportunity to participate in its fifth session, strengthen their knowledge about policy making processes and afterwards discuss about the results. This allows them to contribute in their home universities and communities for a better understanding of current problems, concerns and improvement in the sustainable development of forests, and at least represent the world forestry youth in real political processes.

As a young Bolivian forestry student, I think that in political processes, in which different continents, cultures, scientists and social groups have the possibility to come together, it is a big challenge to find the best solution, where everyone can be more or less satisfied with the results.

In the case of the UNFF, I think that more time will have to pass until a legally binding instrument to promote sustainable forest management is reached. First of all, developing countries want to have the same socio-economic status like industrialized countries. By signing a legally binding agreement they will have to follow the standards of the agreement, which won't allow them to go forward with their previous goal. For me a legally binding agreement is the best way to promote SFM, but we have to be conscious that for achieving this, other necessities like basic services for the population have to be fulfilled first. And for preparing not only developing countries, but rather the upcoming generation, I also think that education is the key for improving SFM in local, regional and international level and it is the most plausible way to reach step by step a legally binding agreement in the future. We, as the upcoming generation of decision-makers and the most vulnerable group of society have to be educated and have to be considered as an important part of society that helps eradicate poverty and promote SFM. We have to learn how to use resources in a sustainable way, because " in the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught!" (Beba Dioum).

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