

Group of 'scientific community'

Bioversity International European Forest Institute (EFI)

International Union of Forest Research Organisations (IUFRO)

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Dear Chair, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

European forests have always been exposed to natural disturbances. These play a key role in the dynamics of forest ecosystems. However, Europe is warming more rapidly than the global average. More frequent heat waves, droughts and fires are reducing the health and productivity of forests. Urban sprawl, pollution and the expansion of transport, commercial and industrial infrastructure is compounding the increasing climatic threats. The adaptive capacity of forests is also challenged by a growing number of invasions by non-native insects, pathogens, plants and other organisms, which alter forest ecosystem properties and can have massive economic impacts on forest resources.

Observations across Europe show that forest disturbance regimes have intensified in the past few decades, and forests and society have become more vulnerable to such events. Furthermore, disturbances are offsetting the gains from planting programmes and the reforestation of abandoned agricultural land, which have boosted Europe's woodland area by 9 % since 1990. Even though climate change is the main driving force behind this intensification, factors such as changes in the extent, structure and composition of forests associated with forest and land-use policies and practices also have a strong influence on the vulnerability of forests to disturbances.

Against this background, science has recognized the need to move towards adaptive forest management in order to systematically address forest disturbance risks and forest resilience as integral parts of sustainable forest management.

Consequently, there is a need to integrate risks more strongly into forest policies and strategies.

Since risks cannot be eliminated, it is important for forest related policies to establish strategies and identify trade-offs that make it possible to maintain these risks at "acceptable" levels. This would particularly emerge through making forests more resilient in economic, ecological and social terms.

Research emphasizes the crucial role of biodiversity as a key factor underlying the resilience of forests and their ability to provide ecosystem services in the future. Hence, management interventions should be aimed at maintaining and enhancing genetic, species and ecosystem diversity of forests across landscapes. Given the essential role of genetic diversity for maintaining the evolutionary potential of species, it is necessary to ensure adequate levels of such in breeding and deployment of populations. In addition to managing our forests sustainably and maintaining them in a healthy and diverse state, forest restoration and the rehabilitation of degraded forests represents a major opportunity to increase the resilience of our rural and urban communities. Therefore, we welcome the commitment by the ministers responsible for forests in Europe to exchange experiences on restoration and rehabilitation and acknowledge the potential contribution of this pan-European activity to global restoration efforts.

The growing frequency and intensity of pests, wind and wildfires are offsetting management strategies that aim to increase forest carbon storage. Therefore, it is important to recognize that forest adaptation and mitigation are actually two sides of the same coin. Without strengthening the adaptability of forest ecosystems to changing climatic conditions, forests will fail to provide net mitigation effects. Forest protection is a transnational and global issue requiring efficient communication and a strongly co-ordinated science-policy-practice dialogue across borders in order to maximise the impact of the scientific and expert knowledge available.

Numerous scientific studies and political decisions have called for more effective transfer of scientific knowledge into practice. We believe that there is a potential for the establishment of more direct

science-policy interactions. This is especially with a view to identifying emerging policy questions and more systematically assessing their policy implications. These could then be addressed by the scientific organizations represented in the FOREST EUROPE process. EFI, IUFRO and Bioversity International are committed to increasing cooperation and coordination among scientists from different disciplines working on different forms of disturbance. Our joint actions would aim to identify, assess and present, in an organized way, scientific

knowledge related to questions emerging in policy and practice. With the aim to enhance the science-policy-practice dialogue in the future, we are committed to working with FOREST EUROPE in order to leverage the full potential of existing science-policy initiatives, including EFI's Think Forest, IUFRO's Global Forest Expert Panels (GFEP), and Bioversity International's European Forests Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN).

Thank you for your attention.