
What we would like to see at UNFF

The United Nations Forum on Forests will be holding its first meeting in June in New York. The mandate of this body is to ensure the follow up of the process initiated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) in 1995, which was continued under the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) from 1997 to 2000.

We believe that the previous processes --particularly the IPF and its proposals for action-- have produced more than sufficient analysis on the causes of deforestation and forest degradation and have come up with a large number of ideas to address the problem. What is now needed is political will resulting in concrete action.

Although there are no clear signs for being optimistic (see "To UNFF or not to UNFF" in WRM bulletin 41), we must at least give this new body the benefit of the doubt and hope that it will make a difference. Ideally, at this first meeting of the UNFF we would like to see major changes such as:

- delegates with a clear mandate from their governments to implement measures to halt forest destruction in North and South
- Northern government delegates --where relevant-- acknowledging responsibility in current forest degradation in their own countries and committing themselves to implement all the necessary measures to address the problem
- Northern government delegates acknowledging their responsibility in forest degradation in the South and committing themselves to support Southern governments in their efforts to curb deforestation
- Southern government delegates acknowledging responsibility in forest degradation in their own countries --and where relevant in other countries-- and committing themselves to implement all the necessary and possible measures to address the problem
- Multilateral institutions' delegates acknowledging their responsibility in forest degradation in the South and committing themselves to support Southern governments in their efforts to curb deforestation
- Delegates focusing on the crucial role that forest and forest dependent peoples must play in forest conservation and on how to ensure their active participation and benefit-sharing in all measures aimed at forest conservation
- Delegates acknowledging that tree plantations can never be a substitute for forests and that they should be treated as a separate issue from the UNFF's main mandate, which is forest conservation
- Delegates emphasizing that consumption of products from forest areas --wood, oil, mineral resources, large scale agricultural crops and cattle raising, shrimp farming, etc.-- is already unsustainable and that it must be drastically scaled down to allow forests to be conserved and

rehabilitated.

Those are some of the major changes we would ideally wish to see. But even if that's too much to ask, we would at least like to see a different attitude from the one that prevailed particularly during the IFF process, where delegates appeared to be lost in a negotiation that didn't seem to be going anywhere. The attitude we would like to see is one of enthusiasm and cooperation to make things change for the better. We sincerely hope that this will happen.