
[After IFF: deeds, not words!](#)

During the last meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), NGOs and IPOs made a statement expressing their disappointment and frustration regarding the lack of implementation of measures agreed upon in the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests' (IPF) "proposals for action." The statement said that "for whatever reasons, governments seem either unwilling or unable to take substantive action to solve the world's most pressing forest problems."

The situation regarding forests is truly unbelievable. All governments agree that the future of humanity depends on the conservation of the remaining forests. Governments have signed a number of agreements committing themselves to forest conservation. There is ample research on the direct and underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation. Millions of dollars have been used -or wasted?- to discuss possible solutions. But almost nothing is being done at the ground level to address the problem and forest destruction continues unabated.

This Titanic-like scenario -where the band plays while the ship sinks- is where we are standing now. The music played by the intergovernmental processes (IFF, CBD, CCC, etc.) is good in some cases and bad in others, but the fact is that the ship continues sinking, while local people and supporting organizations try to save their lives and forests from the agents of destruction represented or supported in most cases by those same governments that play in the Titanic's band.

Stop the music please! What's needed is action and participatory monitoring of implementation of agreed commitments. The IFF will be meeting in New York from January 30- February 11. Among other things, the meeting will have to decide on the continuation of the forest-related intergovernmental process, given that this will be its fourth and final session. There are certainly several possible institutional mechanisms which will be put forward during the meeting, but what matters most is not the mechanism itself but what it will be supposed to do. As the NGO/IPO statement expressed: "Before we can decide whether to support any future new mechanism or mechanisms, we would like to make our expectations very clear. At a minimum, such mechanisms must:

- 1- Be truly innovative and significantly different than the IPF/IFF process;
- 2- Focus on implementation of the IPF proposals for action at both national and international levels;
- 3- Create an effective international monitoring and reporting mechanism for such implementation;
- 4- Create enhanced means of participation for civil society and major groups in the intergovernmental process itself and in implementation processes at both national and international levels;
- 5- Address the real underlying causes and non-forest-sector sources of forest mismanagement, degradation and loss; and
- 6- Create a new form of synergy and cooperation among existing international forest-related agreements and institutions, clarifying their relationship with the WTO, ILO, and other non-forest-sector institutions and agreements, and including a revision of the existing ITFF structure and process to ensure transparency and strengthen participation by major groups."

The above is not much asking ... if governments are truly committed to forest conservation. The time

has come to demand governments to change words into deeds and to compare commitments with compliance. The future of forests and forest peoples, as well as that of humanity is at stake. Can we allow the band to continue playing?