

## Bratislava Ministerial Declaration

### “The Future We Want: The Forests We Need”

*Adopted by Expert Level Meeting through a silence procedure on 16 December 2020 for consideration and signature by the ministers at the Eighth FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference*

We, the representatives of the Signatories of FOREST EUROPE, at the Eighth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, held in Bratislava on 14-15 April 2021,

1. STRESSING the vital role of forests and sustainable forest management in Europe for providing multiple benefits for the environment, economic and social development, and livelihoods.
2. NOTING the unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative effects on the European and global economy and societies, and in this regard STRESSING the irreplaceable role that European forests play for human health and well-being.
3. EMPHASIZING that forests and sustainable forest management in Europe play a critical role in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, the Global Forest Goals of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests, and contributing positively to the implementation of the goals and objectives of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, the Katowice Forest Declaration, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as the European Union’s Green Deal.
4. RECALLING the historical background and long-term tradition of sustainable forest management in the European region.
5. REAFFIRMING the definition and principles of sustainable forest management from the H1 Helsinki Resolution<sup>1</sup>, which provides the principal policy framework for balancing the provision of ecological, economic, and social functions of forests in Europe to contribute to these three dimensions of sustainable development.
6. RECALLING the Pan-European Operational Level Guidelines for Sustainable Forest Management<sup>2</sup> that provide guidance for implementing this overall concept.
7. REAFFIRMING the role of FOREST EUROPE, as the voluntary high-level political process for dialogue and cooperation on forests in Europe<sup>3</sup>.
8. REAFFIRMING the mission of FOREST EUROPE to enhance cooperation on forest policies in Europe, under the leadership of ministers, and to secure and promote sustainable forest management with the aim of maintaining the multiple functions of forests crucial to society<sup>4</sup>.
9. RECOGNISING the essential role of forests and sustainable forest management in protecting the environment, including biodiversity, habitats, soil, water sources, climate, and air quality, and REAFFIRMING that the implementation of sustainable forest management provides for the conservation of primary and climax forests.

<sup>1</sup> H1 Helsinki Resolution, the Second Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, Helsinki, Finland, June 1993

<sup>2</sup> L2 Lisbon Resolution, the Third Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, Lisbon, Portugal, June 1998

<sup>3</sup> Taking into account recommendations from the review process conducted in 2017 in response to the Madrid Ministerial Declaration on the future direction of FOREST EUROPE: Final Report of Working Group

<sup>4</sup> Oslo Ministerial Decision “European Forests 2020”, the Sixth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, Oslo, Norway, June 2011

10. BEING HIGHLY CONCERNED about negative impacts of climate change and associated natural hazards on forests in Europe and worldwide, such as the increased frequency and severity of disturbances by storms, fires, droughts, pests, and diseases affecting forests' ability to fulfil their multiple functions.
11. BEING AWARE of other developments affecting forests, such as growing urbanization, depopulation of rural areas, and the need for transformation to a sustainable circular bio-economy, while NOTING the potential growing demand for forest biomass which can cause trade-offs in view of demands and policies in other sectors.
12. BEING CONCERNED about deforestation, forest degradation, and fragmentation worldwide, with their negative impacts on biodiversity and climate, and the role that European societies play in this regard.
13. STRESSING that sustainable forest management is an essential approach for enhancing the role of forests in mitigating the above mentioned negative trends, addressing the challenges and concerns.
14. STRESSING that the full value of forests and the ecosystem services they provide need to be taken into account in policies and programmes which are relevant to forests.
15. ACKNOWLEDGING that forests and the forest-based sector are crucial for making our societies more sustainable and resilient. They represent great potential for sustainable economic and social development, generating green jobs, income and livelihoods, in particular in rural and peri-urban areas. The supply of renewable bio-based materials and products from sustainable sources provides benefits for society as a whole and contributes to climate neutrality, as well as to the development of local wood-based value chains.
16. HIGHLIGHTING the importance and role of a skilled workforce in implementing sustainable forest management.
17. WELCOMING the progress made on sustainable forest management<sup>5</sup>, while RECOGNISING the challenges ahead in implementing sustainable forest management in the European region.
18. WELCOMING the progress made in achieving the Goals for European Forests and the European 2020 Targets<sup>6</sup>, while, on the other hand, RECOGNISING gaps and challenges ahead.
19. REITERATING the Madrid Extraordinary Ministerial Decision of 2015 and Ministerial Decision on Resuming the Negotiations on a Legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe of 2019, and in this regard TAKING NOTE of the lack of consensus<sup>7</sup> as regards the FOREST EUROPE Signatories' invitation to resume negotiations on a possible legally binding agreement on forests in Europe.
20. BUILDING ON the vision for forests in Europe from the Oslo Ministerial Decision "European Forests 2020", and HIGHLIGHTING the need to update this vision to reflect recent international developments.

<sup>5</sup> As reflected in the State of Europe's Forests 2020 report.

<sup>6</sup> As reflected in the report Implementation of the FOREST EUROPE Commitments, 2016-2020

<sup>7</sup> Decision ECE/EX/2020/L.3 relating to the possible Legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe adopted by the Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

We, the representatives of the Signatories of FOREST EUROPE commit ourselves:

#### Vision for European forests 2030

21. To share the vision that European forests are sustainably managed to be resilient, healthy, productive, and multifunctional, and contribute to sustainable development by providing economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefits for present and future generations. At the same time, the role and importance of trees outside forests in rural and urban areas is recognised.
22. To recognise the key role of public and private forest owners and managers in achieving this vision.
23. To acknowledge the importance of stakeholder involvement in realizing this vision.
24. To support forest research and to communicate evidence-based knowledge on forests and sustainable forest management in the light of society's needs and concerns in order to ensure broad public support for this vision.

#### Goals for European Forests and the 2030 European Targets

25. To continue to implement sustainable forest management because its holistic and iterative approach facilitates continuous adaptation to changing environmental conditions and societal demands on forests.
26. To affirm and to retain the existing Goals for European Forests<sup>8</sup> and decide to update the European Targets<sup>9</sup> to be achieved by 2030 exemplifying the shared vision and sustainable forest management:
  - I. Signatories are developing and implementing national forest programmes, or their equivalents, in line with the shared vision and goals and the pan-European approach to national forest programmes<sup>10</sup>.
  - II. In addressing emerging issues, forest knowledge is improved through research, education, innovation, information sharing, and communication.
  - III. In response to political objectives on climate and circular bio-economy, signatories are promoting carbon sequestration and storage in forests, as well as the sustainable supply of wood with due regard to storage of carbon in forest products and substitution of non-renewable materials and energy sources.

<sup>8</sup> Oslo Ministerial Decision "European Forests 2020", the Sixth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, Oslo, Norway, June 2011

<sup>9</sup> Meeting the targets refers to the level of signatories, not individual forest stands or spatial units lower than whole signatory countries.

<sup>10</sup> The pan-European approach to national forest programmes endorsed at the Fourth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, Vienna, Austria, April 2003

- IV. The value of forest ecosystem services across Europe is being estimated with a view to using standard valuation approaches<sup>11</sup>, and that values are increasingly reflected in relevant national policies and market-based instruments, such as payments for ecosystem services.
- V. Signatories implement strategies for forests and climate change adaptation through national forest programmes or equivalents and other relevant instruments, including, as appropriate, making use of relevant financial mechanisms.
- VI. The rate of loss of forest biodiversity at habitat level is brought close to zero, and where possible, halted, and measures are taken to significantly reduce forest fragmentation and degradation and to restore degraded forests.
- VII. The role of forests and their sustainable management in combating land degradation and desertification is fully recognised and forests are also managed to that end.
- VIII. Signatories have policies and measures which ensure a significant increase in socio-economic and cultural benefits, especially for human health<sup>12</sup>, livelihoods, rural development, and employment from forests.
- IX. Effective measures are taken at regional, sub-regional, and national levels to eliminate illegal logging and associated trade in Europe and worldwide.
- X. The role of urban and peri-urban forests, as well as urban trees, in providing benefits to the public and making European cities sustainable and resilient, is fully recognised.

#### National and pan-European Actions

27. To jointly explore measures to improve monitoring of progress towards the above targets, and report by one of the next Ministerial Conferences on the implementation of actions to achieve them.
28. To further promote and support interdisciplinary research and development, innovation, including digitalization, in relation to forests, sustainable forest management, and the forest-based sector, contributing to a sustainable circular bio-economy, addressing climate change and disaster risk management, safeguarding biodiversity, and developing social aspects of forests.
29. To fully recognise the essential role of sustainably managed, genetically diverse and healthy forests in relation to the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components.

<sup>11</sup> Overview of approaches and methods that are practically applicable and used for valuation of forest ecosystem services in Europe is available at FOREST EUROPE web-based portal on forest ecosystem services <https://foresteurope.org/overview-valuation-approaches-methods/>

<sup>12</sup> Examples can be found in the recommendations of the FOREST EUROPE Expert Group on Human Health and Well-being [https://foresteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/HHWB-Key-conclusions\\_web.pdf](https://foresteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/HHWB-Key-conclusions_web.pdf)

30. To recognise the need for dynamic conservation and utilization of forest tree genetic resources and management of forest tree species populations for production of forest reproductive material<sup>13</sup> and continue pan-European collaboration on forest genetic resources through the EUFORGEN<sup>14</sup> to this end.
31. To enhance the attractiveness of forest-based sector employment on the labour market, by promoting, for example, fair income, adequate health and safety standards, and ensuring equality, non-discrimination, and promoting gender balance.
32. To promote enhanced cooperation with the education sector in order to identify the skills and qualification profiles required by labour markets, while streamlining forest education and training to meet the dynamic needs of the forest sector and ensure a highly qualified workforce in the long run.
33. To work further on valuation of forest ecosystem services and on exploring potential policies and instruments, including market-based, especially those that reward their provision, while taking into account regional particularities and needs, differences in national legislation and, where applicable, the existence of traditional rights of owners and citizens.
34. To further promote the important role of forests, the forest-based sector and, where relevant, sustainable afforestation<sup>15</sup>, reforestation, and forest restoration in rural development policies and in other inter-sectoral policies affecting rural welfare, addressing land abandonment, and demographic imbalances.
35. To promote the development of a circular bio-economy where forests contribute to, *inter alia*, sustainably sourced innovative bio-based products, long-lived wood products, and non-wood forest products.
36. To promote and use a proactive science-policy dialogue to further inform decision-makers.
37. To raise awareness of the importance, role, and multiple benefits of sustainably managed forests for society at large and in achieving sustainable development, *inter alia*, through strengthening dialogue with society in the most effective ways.
38. To further strengthen multi-stakeholder dialogue and involvement, including indigenous peoples and local communities, giving special attention to the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups, and by integrating a gender perspective as a cross-cutting approach, as well as to strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration, in particular with the tourism, health-care, and land-use planning sectors.

<sup>13</sup> As reflected in the updated pan-European indicator for sustainable forest management 4.6 Genetic Resources

<sup>14</sup> European Forest Genetic Resources Programme

<sup>15</sup> Pan-European Guidelines for Afforestation and Reforestation with a special focus on the provisions of the UNFCCC

#### FOREST EUROPE beyond 2020

39. To continue to work on the Pan-European Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management, in cooperation with all relevant partners, with a view to further implement and strengthen monitoring, reporting, and assessment of forest resources and sustainable forest management in Europe.
40. To continue to regularly report on, based on the Pan-European Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management, and provide a comprehensive picture of European forests in the next “State of Europe’s Forests” report.
41. To continue working on and providing guidance on policy relevant topics, as well as on emerging issues that relate to forests and the forest-based sector, while promoting policy coherence, synergies, and improving communication.
42. To strengthen inter-sectoral and cross border cooperation on the protection of European forests due to the transboundary nature of threats.
43. To analyse the need for updating the “Pan-European Operational Level Guidelines for Sustainable Forest Management”, endorsed at the Third Ministerial Conference in 1998, with a view to bringing such a possible decision on updated guidelines to the attention of the Ninth Ministerial Conference.
44. To focus our work at the pan-European level in the next programming period, with the support of the Liaison Unit and guided by the General Coordinating Committee and, as far as resources are available, on, *inter alia*, adaptation of forests to climate change and their role in climate change mitigation, on safeguarding biodiversity, facilitating the development of a sustainable circular bio-economy, and on the promotion of green jobs and forest-based sector employment.
45. To continue and further enhance, as appropriate, cooperation and synergies with the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and other relevant international actors, including other processes on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management.