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UN to Focus on Sustainable Management of The World's Forests

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By Radwan Jakeem

NEW YORK, 5 May 2023 (IDN) — The sustainable management of the world's forests will take centre stage at the United Nations Headquarters in New York at the UN Forum on Forests on 8-12 May 2023. Officials from UN Member States, the UN system, international and regional organizations, will gather to discuss this critical planetary resource.

According to a background paper, concurrently, there is growing recognition of the need to halt deforestation and tap into the potential of forests to address many of the socio-economic challenges in light of the increased level of inequality and poverty around the world, and issues related to food and energy insecurity, as well as increased prices of foods and goods.

In view of this, five crucial issues will underline the importance of this 18th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF18):

1. Forests are essential to life on Earth: Forests cover 31 per cent of the Earth's land area, contain over 80 per cent of the world's terrestrial biodiversity, and store more carbon than the atmosphere.
2. They support our well-being and livelihood: More than 1.6 billion people depend on forests for subsistence, livelihood, employment and income. Some 2 billion people, roughly one-third of the world's population and two-thirds of households in Africa, still depend on wood fuel for cooking and heating.

3. Healthy forests support healthy people: Forests and trees provide clean air and water and sustain us regardless of where we live. Zoonotic diseases account for 75 per cent of all emerging infectious diseases, and they usually occur when natural landscapes, such as forests, are cleared. Restoring forests and planting trees are an essential part of an integrated one health approach for people, species and the planet.
4. Forests continue to be at risk: Every year, we continue to lose 10 million hectares of forests, an area roughly the size of the Republic of Korea. The world's forests are at risk from illegal or unsustainable logging, forest fires, pollution, disease, pests, fragmentation and the impacts of climate change, including severe storms and other weather events.
5. Restoring forests holds the key to a sustainable future: It is estimated that two billion hectares of degraded land worldwide have the potential to be restored. Revitalizing degraded forest is critical for meeting the UN target of increasing global forest area by 3 per cent by 2030. Doing so would also help countries to create new jobs, prevent soil erosion, protect watersheds, mitigate climate change, and safeguard biodiversity.

According to the background paper, the forthcoming UNFF18 will be a technical session, and thematically linked to the policy session of UNFF19 in 2024. It is expected to include an interactive exchange of experiences and lessons learned on thematic priorities among Members of the UNFF, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and its member organizations, regional and subregional organizations and processes, and major groups and other relevant stakeholders.

Besides, the interactive exchanges are expected to include consideration of the science-policy interface and cross-sectoral and emerging issues and will take into account youth, gender and regions perspectives. The main outcome of UNFF18 will be a chair's summary of the discussions, including possible proposals for consideration at UNFF19.

The UNEF18 is expected to focus on (i) enhancing forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits (ii) Increase significantly the area of protected forests worldwide and other areas of sustainably managed forests, as well as the proportion of forest products from sustainably managed forests, and (iii) mobilizing financial resources and strengthening scientific and technical cooperation; promoting governance frameworks to advance implementation; and enhancing cooperation, coordination and coherence for sustainable forest management. [IDN-InDepthNews]

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