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Sustainable Forest Management and Use in Policy and Practice

Background paper for ASEM meeting on the sustainable management of forests (hosted by Slovenia)

Forests cover around 30 percent of the total land area. According to FAO data, close to 1.6 billion people, representing more than 25 percent of the world's population, rely on forest resources for their livelihoods. Forests provide us with many economic, social, cultural, health, and environmental benefits.

In terms of ecology, forests protect fertile soil from erosion, protect biodiversity, purify water, and maintain a balanced drainage of precipitation into watercourses. Forests provide a softening influence on the climate by balancing temperature, and absorb carbon dioxide.

The social functions of forest, such as the protection of natural and cultural heritage, recreation, tourism, research, and health have not been evaluated in financial terms, but they are undoubtedly our major, universal and, indirectly, material value.

Timber and other forest products have economic value. According to FAO estimates, forest industries contribute more than US\$ 450 billion to national incomes, which amounted to nearly one per cent of the global GDP in 2008.

While forests have major positive impacts on our lives and the planet, we face many forest-related challenges with severe consequences for the environment and societies. Forests continue to be under threat from deforestation and degradation. They are also threatened by biodiversity loss, climate change, and land degradation. In this regard, the inventory and restoring of forests are basic preconditions for sustainable forest management.

Sustainable forest management and the sustainable use of forest resources are essential for sustainable development. Sustainable forest management should not only aim to secure stable revenue from forest products, but should also promote and secure the existence of healthy forests that will continue to provide us with economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Our countries have a share in the global forest industry and its income. Taking this into consideration, we also bear our share of responsibility for the global conservation, sustainable management, and multifunctional use of forests and forest products. Forests in ASEM countries are very diverse, ranging from polar to tropical rainforests. However, the basic principles of sustainable forest management and use are applicable globally.

The meeting is aimed at exchanging experiences between policy-makers and experts involved in the implementation of sustainable forest management. Special attention will be given to good practices and the possibility of strengthening the application of sustainable forest management principles in formulating forest-related policies.

Some of the challenges we wish to address at the meeting include:

- How the principles of sustainable forest management and use can be incorporated into national forest policies and strategies? What experiences the participating states have had?
- What are some main obstacles to the implementation of sustainable forest management policies and principles in the participating states?
- How can policy-making institutions and implementing agencies best cooperate to increase the sustainability of forest management?

We encourage the participation of ASEM countries' policy-makers and experts from institutions involved in forest management and/or forestry.

Date and venue: The meetings will take place in Slovenia, in spring of 2015.

Costs: The host will cover the costs of organisation (the venue, meals and local transportation/field trip). Participants from ASEM partners are requested to cover their travel and accommodation expenses.

Language: The working language of the meeting will be English.