



**STATEMENT BY HON'BLE MR. NAMO NARIN MEENA, MINISTER OF
STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND FOREST AT THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
FIFTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON FORESTS ON
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Mr. Chairman,

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in the Fifth session of United Nations Forum on Forests. We compliment you and other members of the Bureau for the arrangements made for this meeting. We assure you of our cooperation in ensuring the successful conclusion of UNFF-5.

India has been participating actively in the international dialogue on Forests in different processes. India is committed to the forest principles evolved at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio in 1992. Forestry management in India falls under the concurrent responsibility of federal and state governments. The Forest Conservation Act of 1980 sought to regulate the diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes. The National forest policy of 1988, formulated four years before the Rio summit, embodies the principles of sustainable forest management, involvement of local communities, empowerment of women and increase in forest and tree cover.

A significant development at the global level has been the establishment of United Nations Forum on Forests and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests as the international arrangement on forests aimed at addressing the forest-related issues in a holistic, comprehensive and integrated manner. UNFF and CPF have been successful in promoting better understanding of sustainable forest management-related issues as well as in facilitating coordination among forest-related instruments and processes.

National Forest Programmes (NFPs) have been formulated in many countries in response to international commitments and in conformity with the IPF/IFF proposals for action. With the limited financial resources at their command, and with competing demands for developmental programmes, many of the developing countries have not been in a position to allocate adequate resources for NFPs. It is imperative that this aspect is given due consideration in the deliberations on actions for the future.

Forests are inseparably linked with the livelihoods of people living in and around forests and sustainable forest management thus contributes to the efforts towards poverty eradication. In 1990, the Government of India adopted the principles of "care

and share”, highlighting the need and procedures for the involvement of village communities and voluntary agencies in the protection and development of degraded forests, popularly known as the “Joint Forest Management (JFM) Principles”. These have become the cornerstone for people’s participation in forest management and have effectively contributed to the efforts towards eradication of poverty.

Forest resources differ from one region to another as well as within a given region. India is one of the 12-mega bio-diverse countries having 45000 plant species and 81250 species of fauna, comprising 7% of World’s biodiversity. There are 16 major forest types, varying from alpine pasture in Himalayas to temperate forests, sub-tropical forests, and mangroves in the coastal line.

There are approximately 40 legally-binding forest-related instruments. Greater efforts are required, mainly in mobilising adequate financial resources and promoting transfer of technology, for the achievement of the objectives of these instruments. In our view, a legal framework at the global level would fail to adequately address regional/sub-regional or national-level concerns. The question before us is whether to continue the debate on a legal framework, or take serious steps to effectively address the gaps and thereby facilitate the implementation of agreed principle/proposals for actions for sustainable forest management. Several proposals have been made in the discussions at this session in this context. The core challenge, in our view, is to collectively renew our commitment towards sustainable forest management and take necessary steps to build on the progress achieved so far.

We would support strengthening of the existing international arrangement on forests to address the gaps and facilitate actions. The principal task before us is to identify priority areas and focus attention on such issues at international level that would facilitate actions at the national level to achieve sustainable forest management, keeping in view their circumstances, and, at the same time, promote actions for support to developing countries in capacity building as well as in meeting the financing gap.

The UNFF may be strengthened to evolve as the leading high-level inter-governmental forum on forests, to promote actions at the global level in accordance with the Rio Principles adopted at the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and ‘Forest Principles’, which underscore that States have common but differentiated responsibilities regarding collective global interests and concerns related to forests; that States have sovereign right to utilise their resources to meet their national policy objectives, and, at the same time, emphasise that international cooperation should focus on building human and institutional capacity in developing countries to manage their forest sustainability.

Any number of programmes or plans will not help achieve the goal of sustainable development unless we devise effective financial arrangements to implement them. India supports establishment of financial arrangements that would assist developing countries in such implementation. Setting up a Global Forest Fund and earmarking resources for forestry projects in GEF could be some of the options. We are of the view that national forest programmes, where existing, should be the basis for channelising and prioritising financial assistance for forestry sector in developing countries by donor

communities including the Collaborative Partnership on Forest (CPF). Furthermore, the mandate of CPF members for forestry sector development should be in consonance with the objectives of UNFF.

The UNFF can play a key role in creating complementarities among the forest-related conventions and relevant forest organizations, bodies and processes for the better use of resources, expertise, less likelihood of overlaps of duplication of efforts, better communication and dissemination of information. The forum should also guide the members of the CPF to focus their mandate on financial resource, transfer of technology and capacity building needed for the implementation of proposals for action to achieve sustainable development of all types of forests.

Thank You, Mr. Chairman.

[BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)