



**PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Statement**

**by**

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**Under-Secretary-General**

**Executive Secretary**

**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at**

**the International Day of Forests event 2016**

**Geneva,**

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Distinguished Speakers, Chairs, Guests and Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this wonderful International Day of Forests celebration, with the theme of this year's event being "forests and water. Organized by our joint FAO/UNECE Forestry and Timber section and our Water Convention Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, with the support of the Governments of Finland and Switzerland.

Of course, forests and water are inextricably linked. Let me give you a striking statistic: One third of the world's 105 largest cities obtain a significant portion of their drinking water from protected forested areas, including Sydney, Tokyo, New York, Washington, Kiev and Moscow.

I have also made a miniscule contribution here as the land on my farm near Copenhagen, where I have now planted 10 hectares of forest, is designated for drinking water for Copenhagen. My new small forest will help to protect this water resource.

Therefore, protecting our forest resources has significant implications for availability of water, and our access to it. And in fact, using forests to clean water is often cheaper than treating water in plants, even if the water needs to be transported further. A study found that for every 10% increase in forest cover in the source watershed, treatment costs decreased by approximately 20%. We all have the right to accessible, affordable water. Protecting our forests can help us ensure this right.

This is also good economics. Recent research assesses the value of the services provided by forests at \$16.2 trillion per year and wetlands' services at \$26.4 trillion per year. Together, this is more than 50% of global GDP! An important role here is related to water. It is a very good deal to protect our forests and wetlands – not least because of their crucial role in providing us with fresh water. But too often we do not account for it, we do not achieve it, we fail on our forests. It may not be a coincidence that the word Timber-Men or Tømmermænd - in my Danish native language both

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means people chopping down timber in a forest and the also means hang-over you have had when drinking to much alcohol and – to my understanding – too little water. When looking at international forest management in the recent decades we should have a hangover and a headache.

However, the future looks more promising. Governments recognized the vital interdependence between forests and water when they adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Target 15.1 stresses the need to conserve and restore both freshwater and forest ecosystems and target 6.6 calls for protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems, including forests.

How can we ensure that more forests are properly managed and protected, and that water basins are reforested to provide clean water? We need resources. We need awareness. We need adequate legal and policy frameworks. We need good governance, and in particular, increased cooperation between forest and water experts.

Concerning resources, our Water Convention has developed recommendations on payments for ecosystem services. Such payments are a useful tool whereby, for example, water users pay upstream forest managers to use forests more sustainably. This approach is already effectively used worldwide. And it was used when I planted my own forest.

As for frameworks, I would like to mention the Sustainable Forest Management Framework, which has proven itself to be a very effective one. According to recent FAO Forest Resources Assessment, almost 40% of forests in the UNECE region are designated for water soil and water protection – and a significant 54 million hectares of them are managed and protected exclusively for the water purification.

In the area of governance, I would like to highlight the good work done by our Water Convention. In the UNECE region, waters are often transboundary, as more than 50% of the territory belongs to

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transboundary basins. This adds another challenge to water management. Our Water Convention recognizes the need for water cooperation not only across borders, but also across different sectors. This is crucial as multiple sectors have a direct impact on the quality and quantity of water. We cannot protect our transboundary water resources if we do not grant similar protection to water-related forests and wetlands. The Convention therefore makes protection and restoration of ecosystems a core obligation for its Parties.

The Water Convention also considers forests in its assessments of the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in transboundary basins, and in joint adaptation to climate change. For instance, in the Dniester River basin, shared by Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, we implemented a project where seven thousands trees were planted to reduce vulnerability to climate change and floods.

The Water Convention also has a Protocol on Water and Health, which recognizes that by protecting water ecosystems, we protect the health and well-being of our citizens. Therefore, the Protocol requires its Parties to set targets across the whole water cycle. These targets have a strong focus on prevention, where forests can play a significant role.

It is apparent that we need to focus even more on these forest-water links. The forest and water communities– those dealing with Integrated Water Resources Management plans and those dealing with National Forest Programmes - have enormous influence on each other. They should aim to work in synergy to help us progress toward the SDGs.

At UNECE, we have already made efforts in this direction, often organizing back-to-back or joint meetings of forest and water managers. The event today, which reunites water, health and forest experts, is also a testimony to this approach. Today we celebrate healthy forests and clean waters. These celebrations should remind us how much we need both, and that one cannot exist without the other. Let us work together for these

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precious resources, so that they can sustain the needs of the present and future generations.

Thank you.

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