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**Statement by Mr. Sven Alkalaj
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations
Economic Commission for Europe**

at

United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

Forests: the heart of the green economy

on

18 June 2012

Room P3-A, 9.00 - 17:30

Mr Chair,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very grateful to FAO for having invited me to participate in this important event. Its title, 'Forests: the heart of the green economy', reflects well the focus of our work at the joint ECE-FAO Forestry and Timber Section in Geneva.

You might know that ECE and FAO have been working for the 18 months on the preparation of an Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy.

This Action Plan covers the region of the Economic Commission for Europe which, despite its name, is much larger than Europe. It includes Canada and the USA in North America, Western and Eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. As a result, our work covers almost 41% of the worlds' forests.

Contrary to world trends, the forest area in our region is growing. Since 1990, 25 million hectares of new forest have been added, for the most part in Europe – this is equivalent to the total area of the United Kingdom. The average area of forest per inhabitant in the region is 1.3 hectares which is 3 times larger than in other regions. This is due to our region's higher forest coverage of 36%, compared to the global total

of 31%, as well as our lower population density and many of the region's forests being located in remote areas of boreal countries.

A recent ECE study on the Outlook for the forest sector going up to 2030 clearly highlights that, in the near future, more and more demands will be placed on forests in the region. What we call the 'multi-functionality' of forests will be tested as we ask forests to store more carbon and, conserve more biodiversity, while at the same time increasing their productivity and diversifying their products, from raw materials, to wood for energy, to non-wood forest products. Looking at sustainability and emissions, building the economy of the future on bio-based products is a wise choice, but we need to be equally wise in ensuring that bio-based growth is undertaken in a sustainable manner.

So, how can we guarantee the balance between all these functions without infringing on the forest's resilience? What actions are needed to make the economy of forests truly green, and ensure that ECE forests can remain both healthy AND productive?

The Action Plan we are developing has the potential to help all countries –based on their own leadership and respective national differences – to accelerate their transition towards a green economy. The Action Plan identifies which steps are needed at both the national and international levels. It includes a list of actions for their implementation, identifies key actors and objectives, and builds on existing initiatives.

The Action Plan revolves around 5 main pillars:

1. Sustainable production and consumption of forest products
2. The low carbon forest sector
3. Decent green jobs in the forest sector
4. Valuation and payment of ecosystem services
5. Monitoring and governance of the forest sector in the green economy

The Action Plan supports the forest sector in the UNECE region so that it can make the greatest possible contribution to the emerging green economy by improving human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. The forest sector, in every aspect of its activities, needs to minimise its carbon emissions, use its resources efficiently, and be socially inclusive.

What is the goal for the Plan? What do we expect to achieve?

The goal is for the UNECE region is to:

- Use all its resources, and especially those arising from the forest, wisely and economically, minimising waste, recovering, reusing and recycling as much as possible
- Consume only wood from forests which can demonstrate that they are managed sustainably

- Contribute to climate change mitigation through the sequestration of carbon in forests and products, and by substituting renewable wood-based products and fuels for non-renewable products and fuels
- Care for, and build up, its workforce, developing the necessary skills and significantly improving occupational safety and health of workers
- Take all externalities fully into account in policy making, and introduce payment for forest ecosystem services whenever possible
- Base its governance on evidence-based decision making and transparent monitoring of progress towards sustainable forest management.
- Learn from other sectors, and
- Show the way to other sectors in building the green economy

The Strategy defines how the UNECE region forest sector should contribute to the development of a green economy, and monitor progress in this respect.

The Plan includes actions to be carried out by all actors, including governments, research institutes, the private sector, civil society and international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Indeed the “possible actions” included in the plan are not attributed to any specific organization or actor. In fact, many will probably be implemented by ad hoc partnerships, and a mapping exercise may well be necessary to determine the appropriate partners for each activity. It is meant to inspire action and provide the basis for many organizations’ plans and activities so that they focus on forests in a green economy.

UNECE and FAO invite their member governments, as well as relevant international partner organisations, to consider how they can contribute to the implementation of the Plan. For their part, the ECE and FAO will incorporate relevant actions identified by the Strategy into their own work programme at their joint session in 2013.

I hope this short summary of the Action Plan has triggered your interest and possibly also interested you in providing an input to its further development. Should you be interested in adding your priority action to the Action plan, please join us for a side event organized by ECE and FAO on 22 June at Riocentro, the conference venue at 13:30 PM. During this event you will be given an opportunity, by filling out cards like this one (ES shows card) to add your voice to those that are working at making the ECE forest sector greener and even more sustainable.

We would like to make the best use of this short side event for coming up with practical suggestions that could then be included in the Action Plan of ECE and FAO. Our event will provide space for your contribution so that more and more voices can be heard and ideas and solutions included in the Action Plan.

The Action Plan will be presented at METSA 2013, which is the next joint meeting of the ECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission, and will take place in Finland in December 2013. It is in the next months that final negotiations and discussions will take place to refine this plan and make sure it becomes a focused, clear, easy to understand and operational document. For this we need your help, your contributions, your comments, your critical eye and your support.

I trust that events like the one today, as well as the ECE-FAO side event on 22 June, will offer you an opportunity to provide ideas, feedback and discuss next steps in this journey towards greener, forest-based economies.
