www.unece.org/press/pr2005/05tim_p07e.html

Geneva

Forest certification is a voluntary market-based instrument to promote sustainable forest management, and, as such, driven by market actors. However governments have a major role to play in setting out a policy and institutional framework, and as significant actors themselves, for instance as forest owners and, increasingly, as buyers of wood products. They may also contribute to capacity building, provide support, including finance, to drafting national standards and putting in place the necessary institutions, moderate between competing schemes and provide assurance of a level playing field in international trade and on domestic markets.

The UNECE Timber Committee, together with the FAO European Forestry Commission, held an in-session, one-day policy forum on governments' roles in forest certification for sustainable forest management on 29 September 2005.
Among the forum's conclusions are:

Governments should endeavour to remain neutral between competing schemes.

Governments and other stakeholders should refocus on the commonly shared objective of promoting sustainable forest management, and especially combating deforestation. Certification is only one tool to achieve this objective.

Certification offers an opportunity to promote the sound use of wood: this opportunity should be grasped, by governments and other stakeholders.

There is growing concern among governments and industry about the continuing fierce competition between schemes, which is seen as weakening the image of wood as an environmentally friendly material. Industry representatives also expressed concern about emerging differences between public procurement policies in different countries leading to possible distortion of competition and effects on trade.

The lack of information on production, consumption and trade of certified forest products hampers policy makers, analysts and market actors.

The presentations and discussions of the policy forum will be made available in a UNECE/FAO Geneva Timber and Forest Discussion Paper. The presentations are available at http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/docs/tc-sessions/tc-63/Policy_Forum/2005TCPolicyForum.htm.

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