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Statement

by

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at

"Foresta2021"

**Joint 79th session of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the
41st session of the FAO European Forestry Commission**

Rome, 22 November 2021 (remote participation)

Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A future of our planet is impossible without forests. The effects of climate change are exposing our societies to vulnerability. **Forests are key to climate mitigation and adaptation.** Their potential as a natural carbon sink is essential to stabilise greenhouse gas emissions and to tackle global warming. Forests are crucial for preventing natural disasters and building resilience for our citizens, while, at the same time, they are extremely vulnerable to climate induced impacts such as insect damages and wildfires. Therefore, restoring our forest landscapes and keeping them intact is indispensable for climate action.

Each year, forests provide 75-100 billion USD in goods and services to society. At the same time, they contain 80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity. **We have no other ecosystem that offers us this multitude of services** linking climate mitigation, green economy and biodiversity protection.

Forests are an integral part of our current and future wellbeing. The livelihoods of 1.6 billion people worldwide are directly linked to forests. The Covid-19 pandemic taught us to value their contribution to our health and comfort. But the pandemic also led to global disruptions in forest-based supply chains and affected the timber industry. Forest-dependent communities increasingly face extreme temperatures, long dry seasons and large wildfire outbreaks. Our forests and their future are at risk. Therefore, we need to strengthen our commitment to ensuring forests continue to deliver the vital goods and services we all rely on.

In the past four years, the Warsaw Integrated Programme of Work has guided our work and we supported our member States and regional integration organizations in their efforts to sustainably manage forests.

More than 3 million hectares of forest land in the Caucasus and Central Asia have been pledged for restoration under the Bonn Challenge by 2030. And, just last month, another 4 million hectares of land were committed to restoration in Eastern and South-Eastern European countries by 2030. We will support the countries in the region to ensure that these pledges are implemented.

Balancing the competing societal and economic needs and pressure on forests is one of the challenges facing pan-European forest policy. Through communication and outreach beyond the forest sector, we have been able to engage other sectors and industries that rely on forest products, such as textiles and construction. In addition, we localized action by encouraging cities and local governments to sign up to the Trees in Cities Challenge, a global initiative to foster sustainable urban forestry.

Together with partners and member States, we have been at the forefront of modelling what the future of forests might look like. The new Forest Sector Outlook study will be launched this week – after years of modelling work and countless hours of policy and technical dialogues. This very timely study will provide food for thought to guide decisions on complex trade-offs facing forest managers and policymakers, in light of climate change and changing demographics.

The Joint UNECE-FAO Forestry and Timber Section has also published numerous reports on forest products, forest ownership, landscape restoration and urban trees. Workshops were held on circular bioeconomy, wood energy and green jobs. Through this, UNECE and FAO contributed to indicator development, the validation of forest statistics and the assessment of forest management.

This session will adopt a new plan of work for the next four years, which can help ensure a healthy and safe future by preserving our forests and the services and products they provide. Whether on trees in urban areas or the role of forests in a circular bioeconomy, Foresta2021 and the 6th European Forest Week give us the opportunity to recognize **forests as the cornerstones of our heritage, our economy, our long-term well-being, and sustainable development.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you a successful meeting in Rome and online. Let me also take this opportunity to thank our colleagues from FAO for hosting this meeting in Rome.

Thank you for your attention.
