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**Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations****Economic Commission for Europe****Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry****Seventy-third session**

Engelberg, 2-6 November 2015

Item 7(a) of the provisional agenda

**ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry  
matters**

**Food and Agriculture Organization****European Forestry Commission****Thirty-eight session**

Engelberg, 2-6 November 2015

**Matters arising from the sixty-sixth session of the  
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe****Informal note by the Secretariat***Summary*

This note presents the outcomes of the sixty-sixth session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, held from 14 to 16 April 2015 in Geneva, and focuses on those decisions which have a bearing on the work of the Committee.

The note is submitted to the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry for information.

**I. Introduction**

1. This document presents the outcome of the sixty-sixth session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), held from 14 to 16 April 2015. In particular it focuses on those decisions which have a bearing on the work of the Committee.

**II. High-level statement on the post-2015 development agenda  
and expected sustainable development goals**

2. The ECE session endorsed a high-level statement on the post-2015 development agenda and expected sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the ECE region (E/ECE/1475). The statement notes that "ECE is ideally placed to continue to make a strong contribution to sustainable development by", among others, "strengthening the

sustainable management of ecosystems and natural resources”. It also notes that “in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, ECE contributes to the sustainable management of forests in the region and fosters the contribution of forests to a green economy.”

### **III. Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing**

3. The Commission decided to endorse the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing (E/ECE/1478/rev.1) as a non-legally binding document, and transmit it as a regional input to the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) as requested in paragraph 6 of decision 64/14 of the UN-Habitat Governing Council and as stipulated in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 68/239.

4. The goal of the Charter is to support member States as they seek to ensure access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all, with due attention to reducing the impact of the housing sector on the environment. The Charter is relevant to the work of COFFI as its scope is to improve the sustainability of housing in the ECE region through effective policies and actions at all levels, supported by international cooperation, in order to contribute to sustainable development in the region. The Charter contributes to the implementation of relevant Sustainable Development Goals on Cities and Human Settlements and the implementation of the UN HABITAT Global Housing Strategy Framework.

5. Many provisions of the Charter refer to the sustainability of the construction sector, which is also relevant to the work of the COFFI. For instance the Charter states that housing should be planned, constructed and used in a way that minimizes environmental impact and promotes environmental sustainability. This should be addressed also through housing practices that contribute to reducing the carbon footprint of buildings throughout their life-cycle, from design, material supply, manufacturing, and construction, to use, maintenance, refurbishment, and demolition. This issue is often discussed in COFFI meetings and regularly covered by the Forest Products Annual Market Review under green building.

6. COFFI members are invited to become familiar with this document and to apply the Charter, as appropriate, in their work related to green building and the constructions sector.

### **IV. High level dialogue and thematic discussions Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing**

7. The Commission session also included a high level dialogue on committing to action on sustainable development in times of change and high-level thematic discussions. One thematic discussion focused on the sustainable management of ecosystems and natural resources, and included presentations from Ms. Tiina Ryttilä, State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland and Mr. Janusz Zaleski, Deputy Director General, Polish State Forest, Poland.

8. Ms. Tiina Ryttilä, State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland, said that Finland was very dependent on its natural resources; it has large forest coverage, and its forest-based industry is essential for the country’s economy. Finland is very committed to the sustainable management of forests and other natural resources and welcomes the

work of ECE on water and forests. The forest-based industry managed to renew itself and through innovation created new products to put the bio-economy in practice, like biofuels. To increase the relevance of the forest sector in a green economy, the Rovaniemi Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy, adopted on 13 December 2013 at the joint session of the ECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission, provides an overall framework for how the sector can become even greener. It contains a wide range of actions for key actors in the sector and is also a tool for communication and awareness-raising. Finland is committed to the Action Plan. On the global level, recently ECE and FAO published a landmark study on trends and challenges in the achievement of the global objectives on forests, and she hoped the study could be a good basis for discussion at the United Nations Forum on Forests and for implementation of the United Nations post-2015 agenda.

9. Mr. Janusz Zaleski, Deputy Director General, Polish State Forest, Poland, presented the Polish Forest Exhibition, prepared on the occasion of the International Day of Forests at the Palais des Nations on 21 March, which is a way to demonstrate the economic, social and environmental functions of forests. There is still much work to be done going forward in the forest sector in ECE. However, as the recent ECE/FAO report showed, the region is moving in a good direction. The concept of sustainable forest management is not a new one — it has been around in Europe for three hundred years now — but progress needs to be made on its measurement through a solid set of indicators. In the area of environmental agreements a lot remains to be done. It is true that, after Rio, international commitments and goals have not been achieved. Governments and other key stakeholders have to change their mindsets and their way of work. Cooperation and understanding and voluntary agreements are a good way forward in the region in the forest sector. Poland is satisfied with the effective work and results of the Joint ECE-FAO forestry and timber section. The detailed report of the Commission session, relevant decisions and the summaries of the dialogue and thematic discussions are contained in the report of the session, available on the UNECE website (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=35851#>).

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