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Report of the Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

At the first Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia, held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 21-22 June 2018, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan pledged to restore a total of over 2.5 million ha of forest landscape under the Bonn Challenge by 2030. A summary of national commitments announced during the Ministerial Roundtable is available in section 6.

The meeting also adopted the Astana Resolution, committing the Caucasus and Central Asia region to go beyond 2.5 million ha, and strengthen partnerships and regional cooperation to this end. The Astana Resolution can be found in Annex 1.

1. Background and introduction

The Bonn Challenge target to bring 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded lands into restoration by 2020 was launched by world leaders at a ministerial roundtable in Bonn, Germany, in September 2011. This global target was subsequently extended to 350 million hectares by 2030 by the New York Declaration on Forests, issued at the UN Climate Summit in 2014. Underlying the Bonn Challenge is the forest landscape restoration (FLR) approach, which aims to restore ecological integrity while improving human wellbeing through multi-functional landscapes. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is the Secretariat of the Bonn Challenge. Germany has supported the Bonn Challenge from the start of the process. More information about FLR can be found at: www.InfoFLR.org and www.forestlandscaperestoration.org.

The Bonn Challenge is an implementation vehicle for national priorities such as water and food security, disaster risk reduction and rural development, as well as for international commitments such as Aichi Biodiversity Target 15, the UNFCCC REDD+ goal, and the Rio+20 land degradation neutrality goal now embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals. More information can be found at: www.bonnchallenge.org.

The Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia was held on the 21 - 22 June 2018 in Astana, Kazakhstan. The two-day event began with a tree planting ceremony in front of the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation followed by a field trip to the Green Belt of Astana city on the first day. Roundtable discussions followed on the second day. The Ministerial Roundtable was organized jointly by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in cooperation with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and with the kind support of Germany. Participants included high-level representatives from the Caucasus and Central Asia, senior Bonn Challenge partners from the international and the donor community, leaders from international organizations and selected observers. Presentations held during the meeting are available to download in English and Russian from the Ministerial Roundtable website (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47712>). Video recordings of pledges are available on UNECE's YouTube channel, links are provided in Annex 2.

The Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia was part of a series of high-level regional meetings organized in support of the Bonn Challenge. For example, the Latin America region held Ministerial meetings in El Salvador (2015), Panama (2016), Honduras (2017) and Guatemala (2018). In Africa, regional Bonn Challenge high-level events were organized by Rwanda (2016), Malawi (2017), and the Republic of Congo (2018). Indonesia hosted the first regional meeting for Asia in 2017, and the regional meeting for the Mediterranean region took place in Morocco the same year. The Astana Ministerial Roundtable (2018) was the first high-level event in the Caucasus and Central Asia region.

2. Objectives

The Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia was the first opportunity to align national and regional efforts in the Caucasus and Central Asia with the international Bonn Challenge. It brought together key decision makers from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to discuss challenges, identify solutions and enhance commitments towards forest landscape restoration in the region.

The specific objectives of the Ministerial Roundtable were to:

- Discuss opportunities for forest landscape restoration under the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia;
- Share regional and national experiences of forest landscape restoration, challenges faced during implementation, and ways of addressing them;
- Discuss strategies and approaches for unlocking financial resources required for restoration;
- Consider ways of reporting on progress in restoration;
- Provide an opportunity for identifying and selecting additional areas for restoration.

3. Outcomes

At the first Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia, held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 21-22 June 2018, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan pledged to restore a total of over 2.5 million ha of forest landscape under the Bonn Challenge by 2030. A summary of national commitments announced during the Ministerial Roundtable is available in section 6.3. Roundtable session 3: Pledges and commitments.

The meeting also adopted the Astana Resolution, committing the Caucasus and Central Asia region to go beyond 2.5 million ha, and strengthen partnerships and regional cooperation to this end. The Astana Resolution can be found in Annex 1.

4. Tree planting ceremony

In the morning of 21 June 2018, high-level participants of the Ministerial Roundtable took part in a tree planting ceremony by the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, a 77-metre high pyramid in Astana city celebrating the multicultural and multiethnic character of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Commemorative plaques are now displayed in the Presidential Park of Astana next to trees planted by representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan as well as UNECE, FAO, IUCN, Germany and the Russian Federation. “This [tree planting ceremony] is just a small gesture but it is symbolic of the planting of millions of trees to come in the whole Caucasus and Central Asia region,” commented Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary, UNECE. The tree planting ceremony was followed by a field trip to the Green Belt of Astana.

5. Opening session

The Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia was officially opened by Mr. Umirzak Shukeyev, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan. On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr. Shukeyev welcomed all delegates and observers to Astana and wished participants a productive Roundtable. Mr. Shukeyev added that the Republic of Kazakhstan was honoured to host the event.

The official opening of the Ministerial Roundtable was followed by the speech of Ms. Beate Jessel, President of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation of Germany. Ms. Jessel referred to Germany’s well-established cooperation with Central Asian States, particularly in areas of environmental protection and nature conservation. Ms. Jessel stressed the importance of regional cooperation and intergovernmental exchange in tackling issues of transnational character, including land degradation, loss of biodiversity and the effects of climate change. Participants heard that the global deforestation rate currently amounts to approximately 13 million ha annually, equivalent to the surface areas of Armenia and Azerbaijan combined. Ms. Jessel identified unsustainable use in the form of uncontrolled logging and grazing as the main cause of land degradation worldwide. Forest landscape restoration is a priority for Germany’s Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), which launched the Bonn Challenge together with IUCN in 2011. Although no universal solution to the many issues faced by the world today, forest landscape restoration can contribute greatly to sustainable development. “After a century of forest degradation, we must make sure that a century of forest restoration follows”, urged the President of Germany’s Agency for Nature Conservation.

Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) thanked the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan for its leadership and support in organizing the Ministerial Roundtable and expressed her appreciation to the country delegates and representatives of international organizations present at the meeting. Ms. Algayerova noted that the Roundtable offers countries a chance to gain visibility and recognition at the international level and highlight their commitment to sustainable development. UNECE cooperates with the Caucasus and Central Asia region on various topics, including energy, transport, environment and forestry. Forest-related projects in the region are carried out by the joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section and include a capacity-building project aimed at supporting Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the development of national criteria and indicators to monitor sustainable forest management (“Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, 2016-2019). Further, the Section is conducting research on “The State of Forests in the Caucasus and Central Asia” to obtain a comprehensive picture of the region’s forest sector. Ms. Algayerova stated that the present Ministerial Roundtable is a result of UNECE, FAO and Germany joining forces with partners in the Caucasus and Central Asia to strengthen their capacity to restore deforested and degraded lands in support of the

international Bonn Challenge. The ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section is prepared to assist its partners in these efforts and stands ready to intensify cooperation, added Ms. Algayerova.

The fourth speaker invited to give opening remarks was Mr. Vladimir Rakhmanin, Assistant Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia. Despite forests' essential role in achieving sustainable development through biodiversity conservation, through climate change adaptation and mitigation, and by serving as sources of renewable materials, FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment conducted in 2015 showed that forest degradation is on the rise worldwide. In response to these challenges, the Organization has recently launched the Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism (FLRM), which helps countries fulfill their international commitments by coordinating and facilitating the development and implementation of forest and landscape restoration projects, programmes and related activities, in collaboration with key actors such as the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR). The first report on the work of the FLRM will be presented at the 24th session of FAO's Committee on Forestry on 16-20 July 2018. The FLRM is complemented by other projects and activities on forest landscape restoration supported through FAO's regional offices.

Mr. Stewart Maginnis, Global Director of the Nature-based Solutions Group, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) set the scene for discussions with a keynote speech. Mr. Maginnis informed participants that IUCN is a union of more than 1,300 State and non-State members, including two State and eleven non-State members in the Caucasus and Central Asia region. Supporting its members and other partners in the region lies at the heart of IUCN's mission. Mr. Maginnis further highlighted the importance of investing in forest landscape restoration (FLR), noting that the direct cost of land degradation in just five countries of Central Asia has been estimated at USD 6 billion per year. "The costs of inaction outweigh the costs of restoration", stated the IUCN representative, citing the Economics of Land Degradation – a comprehensive study commissioned by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) which found that the cumulative cost of soil erosion, forest loss and other types of land degradation over the next 30 years could be as high as USD 288 billion in Central Asia.

Mr. Maginnis reiterated that FLR is not about trying to recreate the past, but an investment both in the present and the future. Nevertheless, in order for it to be sustainable and continue to deliver benefits to society, FLR needs to work with nature and natural processes. A good sign that FLR is working as intended will be the return of biodiversity and associated ecosystem services, suggested Mr. Maginnis. For this reason, it is important that we do not inadvertently erode the condition of existing natural ecosystems as we undertake FLR.

The desire to reverse the negative impacts generated through previous unsustainable practices is a driving force of the Bonn Challenge and 47 actors have already committed to the restoration of more than 160 million ha. Since high-level political pledges are only the first step, IUCN and its partners are also supporting countries in delivering restoration on the ground. So far, IUCN has helped countries assess the restoration potential of over 450 million ha worldwide and supported 35 national and sub-national jurisdictions in developing FLR plans, strategies, legal arrangements and investment plans. IUCN is continuously assisting countries in building the technical capacity of their staff, including training over 250 national leaders on a purpose designed course taught by Yale University. Finally, IUCN recognizes the importance of understanding and documenting on-the-ground progress and has developed a progress tracking tool called the Bonn Challenge Barometer in order to equip countries with the information needed to accelerate action, identify and address implementation bottlenecks and more precisely direct interested investors and donors towards the areas of greatest need.

Lastly, Mr. Maginnis noted that many countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia region are already implementing policies and programmes that fall under Forest Landscape Restoration approach. IUCN looks forward to working with countries of the region to translate their immense restoration potential into tangible change on the ground, concluded Mr. Maginnis.

6. Summary of roundtable discussions

Roundtable session I: Achieving forest landscape restoration – national/regional experiences

The session was co-chaired by Mr. Yerlan Nysanbayev, Deputy Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Ms. Beate Jessel, President of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation of Germany.

Ms. Beate Jessel welcomed participants to the first roundtable discussion of the day, noting that forest landscape restoration is an important topic for all present in the room and that many countries represented are already implementing restoration activities. Ms. Jessel referred to Kazakhstan's efforts to create Green Belts around cities, plant

shelterbelts and set up protected areas of Saxaul woodland, Georgia's commitment under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to reforest and afforest an area of 1,500 ha around the Borjomi National Park and assist the natural regeneration of forests on 7,500 ha by 2030, and numerous initiatives addressing forest landscape restoration in the Walnut wild fruit forest region in Kyrgyzstan.

Country representatives were invited to share their domestic experiences in identifying restoration opportunities and addressing challenges to implementation. Following the tour-de-table, Mr. Nysanbayev moderated a roundtable discussion, guided by the following questions:

- *How are restoration opportunities identified and prioritised in your country?*
- *What are the challenges in moving from assessing restoration opportunities, to developing concrete restoration plans, to implementing these plans?*
- *What is the role of national and provincial/state governments in providing an enabling policy environment or facilitating and incentivising for restoration?*
- *How do inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms contribute to advancing a comprehensive agenda on FLR?*
- *How do challenges and opportunities differ based on the specific national context – policies, regulation the role of the private sector, etc.?*

As part of the Republic of Armenia's efforts to increase forest cover to 20.1%, a number of factors and priorities are considered, including soil conditions and characteristics, the level of forest cover required for watersheds and to ensure soil protection, population density and the level of air pollution, forest areas in urban areas, as well as recreation opportunities available in forests around cities. To encourage restoration, the Forest Code of Armenia allows for free of charge allocation of State forest lands to users prepared to carry out afforestation at their own expense. However, in order to increase forested areas in Armenia, it is particularly important to establish partnerships between the State, the private sector and local communities, because many lands in need of restoration are under community and private ownership.

In Azerbaijan, reforestation and afforestation on lands of the State Forest Fund is conducted on a zonal-typological basis, taking into consideration the condition of potential forest sites, forest functions and environmental conditions in the region. One of the challenges Azerbaijan is currently addressing are outdated methods of forest management, including in the conduct of forest inventories.

Similarly, in Georgia, forest inventories have not yet been finalized on most lands of the State Forest Fund, rendering it difficult to identify degraded lands and evaluate their restoration potential accurately. Notably, Georgia's forests are characterized by a high capacity for self-regeneration, authorities' have prioritized actions supporting the natural regeneration of the forest. A key challenge Georgia encountered in implementing FLR is the lack of financial resources. In addition, there is limited land in the State Forest Fund available for FLR, and privately-owned land presents further challenges. In order to tackle some of these issues, Georgia is actively encouraging inter-agency and intersectoral cooperation through the National Forest Programme (2013) aimed at reforming the forest sector by involving all stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Kazakhstan has taken legislative action in order to restore its forests and prevent further deforestation by, for example, introducing a moratorium on the felling of Saxaul in 2015. Forest landscape restoration in Kazakhstan targets numerous forest types, including Saxaul forests and Tugai forests. These efforts are complemented by supporting tree nurseries across the country. Lately, the authorities have prioritised cooperation with the private sector by encouraging the development of private tree nurseries that would produce enough planting material to support large-scale landscape restoration.

Kyrgyzstan highlighted the importance of forest landscape restoration as a long-term process and noted its incorporation into wider national strategic documents, particularly the newly adopted "Unity, Trust, Creation" Government Program 2018-2022. In implementing restoration, Kyrgyzstan has worked with many international partners including FAO, UNDP, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the World Bank.

A key challenge for forest landscape restoration in Tajikistan are the 330 ha of the State Forest Fund currently in the long-term use of agricultural enterprises, predominantly utilized as pastureland. This hinders the forest authorities' ability to restore degraded lands. Nevertheless, between 1,500 and 2,000 ha are restored annually. The lack of funding for restoration is another obstacle to FLR in Tajikistan. In response to these challenges, the authorities are currently introducing Joint Forest Management across the country, wherein the local population work to restore and protect forests while also using the land of the State Forest Fund for agriculture and farming.

Uzbekistan's forest sector was reformed in 2017 with the extensive revision of the country's forestry legislation. Over the past 40 years, the Forestry Research Institute of Uzbekistan has been conducting studies to identify new territories for restoration. The Aral Sea tragedy remains a key issue, one that the Republic of Uzbekistan is actively tackling in cooperation with its international partners. Among these are FAO, UNDP, GIZ, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA).

Mr. Talgat Kerteshev, Biodiversity projects Portfolio Manager at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kazakhstan, delivered a presentation on "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Multiple Benefits". Mr. Kerteshev shared some general information about the state, distribution and composition of forests in Kazakhstan, as well as the country's restoration potential. An increase of Kazakhstan's forest cover from 4.6% to 5% by 2030 and the sustainable management of forest ecosystems would allow for the sequestration of 2.9 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent every year. Mr. Kerteshev provided participants with an overview of several projects supported by UNDP in Kazakhstan, including a pilot project on the rehabilitation of Asiatic poplar groves, a pilot project on the establishment of the Aral tree nursery, and a pilot project on sand stabilisation using hardy-shrub species.

Finally, Mr. Kerteshev informed participants about the GEF-UNDP project on "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Multiple Benefits" (2018-2023), aimed at improving the conservation and management of key forests and associated grassland, riparian and desert ecosystems for the conservation of biodiversity, land resources and the provision of livelihoods for local communities.

The first session of the Ministerial Roundtable concluded with a summary presentation by Dr. Niels Thevs, Coordinator of the Central Asia Program at the World Agroforestry Center, who shared with participants the findings of his research on forest landscape restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with it. Dr. Thevs' study paper, entitled Forest Landscape Restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia: Challenges and Opportunities, served as background information for the preparation of country pledges under the Bonn Challenge.

According to Dr. Thevs, most countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia share several common features such as a large number of individuals employed in agriculture, over 40% of the population living in rural areas, and a relatively low forest cover. Following an overview of forest distribution and composition in each country, Dr. Thevs shared his findings on the key drivers of forest degradation in Caucasus and Central Asia. In the 1990s, these included fuel wood removal, uncontrolled grazing in forests and logging for timber. The latter two remain drivers of forest degradation to this day. Fuel wood removal has reduced substantially in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, where gas supply was improved, however, it continues to contribute to forest degradation in other countries. The degradation of Tugai forests is attributed to reduced and altered river runoffs.

Dr. Thevs identified several opportunities for forest restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia, including the restoration of Tugai forests, Saxaul forests, forests near open cast mining sites, forests on slopes and forests located near settlements. In undertaking FLR, countries face various challenges. For instance, given the local population's reliance on livestock grazing as a source of immediate and continuous income, the conversion of pastures into forests calls for the creation of alternative income opportunities in the period before trees yield fruits or wood. Dr. Thevs noted that restoration could also focus on areas that have degraded since 1990, where intensive high value agriculture or grazing has not been established and so competition with other land uses is low. In addition, agroforestry offers an opportunity to extend forest landscapes beyond the forest as such. Dr. Thevs' presentation concluded with an overview of areas designated for restoration in each country of the Caucasus and Central Asia in the coming years.

Roundtable session 2: Financing restoration

The session was chaired by Ms. Carole Saint-Laurent, Coordinator of the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR), International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Ms. Saint-Laurent welcomed participants to the second session of the Ministerial Roundtable and provided a brief introduction to financing of forest landscape restoration. FLR is often criticized for “costing too much and taking too long”, she noted. However, a study conducted at the Colorado State University in 2017 found that achieving the Bonn Challenge would generate a net benefit of between USD 0.7 trillion and USD 9 trillion. In addition, investing in restoration brings countless social and environmental benefits.

Ms. Saint-Laurent identified numerous reasons why financing forest landscape restoration remains a challenge. Firstly, it is sometimes said that there is not enough funding available for FLR. In addition, there is a lack of “bankable projects” that respond to the interests of investors. Finally, some argue that only private sector investment can fill the finance gap. Mindful not to downplay such challenges, Ms. Saint-Laurent stated that solutions are already available and can be found both within countries and internationally. Financial solutions are very diverse, ranging from public finance from domestic sources (income taxes, indirect taxes, customs revenues, state enterprise profits, land use incentive schemes), to investments from the finance sector (crowdfunding, impact investors, private equity impact funds, commercial banks, pension funds), to regional funds and programs, to international sources (official development assistance, climate finance, World Bank country programme funds), to private sector funding and non-commercial funding from private entities.

The key sources of international funding for FLR include bilateral funding programmes (particularly Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which has a mandate for funding mitigation and adaptation projects, with many restoration projects already under development. In fact, GEF will expand support for restoration in GEF-7 cycle, beginning on 1 July 2018. All countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia have access to allocations from the GEF.

Ms. Saint-Laurent added that to take advantage of innovative funding arrangements targeting mobilization of private sector investment such as the Coalition for Private Investment in Conservation (CPIC), Governments need to provide not only financial guarantees, but also demonstrate coherent spatial planning and reforms of policies that lower investment risks.

Mr. Jens Wunderlich, Project Manager on Nature Conservation in Central Asia at the Michael Succow Foundation delivered a presentation entitled “Forest restoration in Central Asia: A matter of proper incentive setting”. Firstly, Mr. Wunderlich introduced the Michael Succow Foundation’s project targeting the rehabilitation of ecosystem functions of the natural pistachio communities in Uzbekistan, financed by the Government of Germany and implemented together with the GEF Small Grants Programme in Uzbekistan and the Republic’s Scientific-Production Center for Decorative Gardening and Forestry. Economic analyses show that prospective income from pistachio harvests are much better than those from the current (unsustainable) land use practices, noted Mr. Wunderlich. Therefore, the Michael Succow Foundation is supporting the establishment of “pistachio growing centers” in Ugam Chatkal National Park, which will provide varieties of pistachio and almond trees for grafting to local farmers, while offering training facilities and advice at the same time.

Mr. Wunderlich informed participants about the Michael Succow Foundation’s efforts to restore Saxaul forests in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan under the Central Asian Desert Initiative (CADI). CADI brings international organizations and national stakeholders together to engage in constructive dialogue and use their knowledge, networks and experience to halt and reverse land degradation, promote the conservation of desert ecosystems and increase Central Asia’s resilience to climate change and extreme weather events in the long run. Mr. Wunderlich urged participants of the Ministerial Roundtable to join CADI and support the Michael Succow Foundation in the establishment of an intergovernmental Central Asian Desert Conservation Secretariat.

Following the presentation, Ms. Saint-Laurent invited delegates and country representatives to share their experience in accessing funding for restoration activities, costs per hectare, returns achieved, challenges and opportunities. Ms. Saint-Laurent moderated a roundtable discussion, with focus on the following issues:

- *How can the Bonn Challenge serve as a platform to facilitate greater access to internal and external financing for restoration?*
- *What motivates different actors to engage in and finance restoration?*
- *What results are they seeing in line with these motivations/expectations?*

- *How can domestic resources be mobilized or redirected to better support restoration of forest landscapes (e.g. current fiscal or tax incentives that could support activities compatible with restoration)?*

Participants agreed on the importance of addressing the issue of financing, with representatives of numerous countries including Georgia and Tajikistan stating that lack of financing is a key obstacle to successful forest landscape restoration. Delegates have highlighted numerous challenges such as financing for scaling up restoration, addressing competing land uses, the fact that restoration is a long-term process, and the requirement of broad societal support for restoration.

The discussion also addressed different and innovative approaches and solutions for the mobilization of funding, including joint forest management projects (Tajikistan), the generation of local income while pursuing broader objectives such as adaptation, and the re-investment of profits from state agencies into restoration. In addition, participants discussed the possibilities of engaging local people, the wider society and private sector through information campaigns (Georgia, Armenia), the partial reimbursement of restoration costs by the private sector, engagement of the agriculture sector and creating favourable conditions for partnerships with the private sector (Armenia, Kazakhstan), e.g. for tree nurseries and orchards. Further financing solutions identified included seeking funding from foundations and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Kazakhstan), joint financing drawing on multiple sources (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan), and the use of modest investments to leverage larger projects and investments by other sectors.

Mr. Xia Jun, Assistant Executive Director of the Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet), focused on APFNet's cooperation with the Central Asia region in his presentation. The Network was established by leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 2007 to enhance capacity building and strengthen information sharing in the forestry sector, and to work on achieving an APEC-wide goal of increasing forest cover in the region by at least 20 million ha by 2020. Today, APFNet has a total of 31 members, including 26 economies and 5 international organisations. In 2015, Great Central Asia (GCA) was identified as one of seven sub-regions of Geographic Focus in APFNet's Strategic Plan (2015-2020). The following year, the First Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Forestry in GCA was held in Astana. The APFNet Council granted Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan observer status in March 2017. Today, APFNet has a Thematic Training workshop and Scholarship Program (ASP) specially designed for GCA economies. The Network's cooperation with the region will continue with the Second Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Forestry in GCA, which will take place on 15-17 August 2018 in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan. APFNet's work in Central Asia will predominantly focus on encouraging policy dialogue, capacity building, supporting demonstration projects on forest restoration, use and management, and cooperating with the private sector through the APFNet Foundation.

The moderator concluded that Bonn Challenge commitments can send a signal to the international community, including to donors and investors, demonstrating that a country is committed to forest landscape restoration and to ensuring the related enabling conditions. IUCN, UNECE and FAO stressed that they stand ready to support the countries' efforts towards reaching their commitments under the Bonn Challenge.

Roundtable session 3: Pledges and commitments

The session was co-chaired by Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary of UNECE and Mr. Vladimir Rakhmanin, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia.

Ms. Algayerova welcomed participants to the session on pledges and commitments, the final session of the Ministerial Roundtable. The moderator reminded delegates and country representatives that pledges to the Bonn Challenge are voluntary and can be conditional, dependent, for instance, on the availability of funding. A pledge demonstrates the political will of a country and its commitment to restoration, and is thus an important first step to the implementation of forest landscape restoration. Bonn Challenge commitments can consist of both new forest landscape restoration initiatives as well as existing national and sub-national restoration programmes (implemented since January 2011).

Delegates and country representatives were then invited to present their pledges to the Bonn Challenge or give a brief statement. A link to the video recordings of each announcement is provided in Annex 2.

New commitments and pledges

Mr. Kair Ryskeldinov, Chairman of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, informed participants that expansion of the country's forests is the main goal for forestry in the Republic of Kazakhstan. As stated

in the Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030, the Government's target is to increase forest cover to 5% of the country's total area by 2030 (current forest cover is 4.7%). In order to achieve this national goal and the goal of the Bonn Challenge, Kazakhstan will expand its existing restoration and afforestation efforts by 10,000 ha annually from 2021 onwards. In total, 1,500,000 ha will be restored and afforested in the period from 2011 to 2030. Should additional technical and financial support be provided, Kazakhstan will be able to expand its existing restoration and afforestation efforts by 15,000 ha annually (2021 onwards). Subject to availability of support, the total area restored and afforested in the period from 2011 to 2030 will amount to 1,800,000 ha.

Mr. Solomon Pavliashvili, Deputy Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, stated that Georgia's national priorities are in line with its international commitments to forest landscape restoration, including UN Global Forest Goals, Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Sustainable Development Goals. The restoration of degraded forest landscapes at the national level will help Georgia to slow down, halt and ultimately reverse forest cover and carbon loss, as outlined in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement. It should be noted that, in order to restore forest cover, Georgia has made an unconditional commitment to plant an additional 1,500 ha of forest and assist the natural regeneration of forests on 7500 ha by 2030. These goals are included in the action plans of forest administrations, and involve the restoration of at least 125 ha of forest per year, as well as the implementation of measures to promote the natural regeneration of forests on at least 625 ha annually. There is a need for a national assessment and the selection of specific targets and strategies, considering economic and environmental conditions. National and international support from organizations such as IUCN, GEF, FAO and others is also needed. Finally, Mr. Pavliashvili, on behalf of the Government of Georgia, declared the country's readiness to restore 1,500 ha of degraded land under the Bonn Challenge, and to promote natural regeneration on 7,500 ha by 2030 (using a variety of forest management techniques).

Mr. Bakyt Yrsaliyev, Deputy Director of Forest Ecosystems Development Department of the State Agency for Environment Protection and Forestry of Kyrgyzstan, announced that in line with national programmes, afforestation with tree species will be implemented on 23,200 ha by 2030, accompanied by the restoration of 300,000 ha of degraded pasture land through grazing restrictions. The exact figures will be clarified after a Restoration Opportunities Assessment (ROAM). The FLR approach will guide the strategic restoration of landscapes in Kyrgyzstan and open up financing opportunities from international and national sources, as well as from the private sector.

Mr. Naim Nabizoda, Deputy Head of the Forestry Agency under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, informed participants that in the period from 2011 to 2017, the Government has planted and restored forests on an area of 13,000 ha, which was funded through the national budget. An additional 5,000 ha was afforested and reforested with the support of GIZ. In total, Tajikistan has restored 18,000 ha since 2011. According to the Strategy for Forestry Development of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2030, which is currently under development, the Government aims to afforest and reforest an area of 4,000 ha per year in the period from the Strategy's adoption until 2030 (a total of 48,000 ha by 2030). Overall, Tajikistan's restoration commitment under the Bonn Challenge amounts to 66,000 ha by 2030, which takes into account the country's restoration efforts since 2011. Mr. Nabizoda added that with additional financial support, Tajikistan can prepare a separate project to boost ongoing reforestation and afforestation efforts.

Mr. Abdushukur Hamzaev, Deputy Chairman of the State Forestry Committee and Director of the Forestry Research Institute of Uzbekistan, announced that the Committee has recently submitted a request to the Cabinet of Ministers, which states that the Republic of Uzbekistan is committed to increase its forest cover by 500,000 ha in the period between 2011 and 2030 under the Bonn Challenge. Moreover, should financial support be provided, an additional 500,000 ha can be restored and afforested. The State Forestry Committee is currently awaiting approval of this commitment by the Cabinet of Ministers. Mr. Hamzaev added that, as of today, the State Forestry Committee is restoring 42,000 ha of land annually, predominantly in the steppes of Bukhara, Khorezm and Navoiy Regions, as well as on the territory of the Aral Sea. The Government would welcome additional technical support, particularly in relation to the monitoring of the work completed, objective assessment of the country's restoration progress, and assessment of Uzbekistan's capabilities to fulfill its commitment under the Bonn Challenge.

Mr. Gnel Sanosyan, Deputy Minister of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia, stated that the country's forest cover at present is 11% of the total area, corresponding to 334,100 ha. Mr. Sanosyan informed participants that Armenia ratified the Paris Agreement in February 2017, committing to increase its forest cover to 20.1% by 2030 (an increase of 260,000 ha). Expanding the forest area is undoubtedly in line with and very important to Armenia's implementation of

the Sustainable Development Goals. The Republic has adopted ecosystem-based approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation, which are also supported by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other global and regional conventions. According to Mr. Sanosyan, the following activities are particularly important when it comes to forest landscape restoration in Armenia: improving monitoring systems to ensure objective assessment and forecasting of the progress and quality of restoration; conducting and managing the forest inventory; restoring deforested and degraded lands and conducting afforestation on new territories; supporting restoration on territories outside the State Forest Fund; and developing protective agroforestry through the creation of protective forests. Deputy Minister Sanosyan concluded that, to achieve the target forest cover of 20.1%, Armenia is working hard to attract investment in restoration and improve transparency in monitoring and reporting.

Mr. Sohrab Abbasov, Director of Forests Development Department at the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan stated that, although Azerbaijan will not be announcing their pledge to the Bonn Challenge during this meeting, the Government recognises the importance of forest landscape restoration for future generations. As such, Azerbaijan will be discussing the possibility of joining the Bonn Challenge in the near future. Azerbaijan is already undertaking forest restoration activities every year. Mr. Abbasov cited the Decree signed by the President of Azerbaijan Mr. Ilham Aliyev in December 2016, approving the Strategic Roadmaps for the National Economy and Main Economic Sectors. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan has consequently initiated a project aimed at the creation of fruit forests in the country. Since December 2016, an area of 5,220 ha under the State Forest Fund was afforested with various fruit tree species. Between 2017 and 2021 fruit trees will be planted on 24,000 ha in total.

Ms. Algayerova and Mr. Rakhmanin thanked country representatives for their pledges and noted that this was an important moment for forestry and environment in the Caucasus and Central Asia. In total, the pledges announced by representatives of Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan amount to over 2.5 million ha of degraded and deforested land to be restored in support of the Bonn Challenge by 2030. Subject to availability of financial support, the commitment of the Caucasus and Central Asia region to the Bonn Challenge exceeds 3 million ha. Ms. Algayerova emphasized that the exercise was not about comparing countries, but about joining efforts and collectively working on restoring landscapes for the benefit of the environment and the people of the Caucasus and Central Asia. UNECE/FAO as well as IUCN, as the Bonn Challenge Secretariat, stand ready to support countries and intensify cooperation to reach implementation of the country pledges. A summary of the national commitments announced is provided in the table below.

Tab.1: National commitments announced at the Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Country	National commitment to forest landscape restoration under the Bonn Challenge
Armenia	260,000 ha by 2030
Azerbaijan	To be determined
Georgia	1,500 ha by 2030 Assist natural regeneration of forests on 7,500 ha by 2030
Kazakhstan	1,500,000 ha by 2030 Subject to support: additional 300,000 ha by 2030
Kyrgyzstan	Forest Landscape Restoration on 23,200 ha by 2030 Restoration of 300,000 ha of degraded pasture land by 2030
Tajikistan	66,000 ha by 2030
Uzbekistan	500,000 ha by 2030 Subject to support: additional 500,000 ha by 2030
Total pledged by the region: 2,658,200 ha	
Total pledged by the region including restoration subject to additional support: 3,458,200 ha	

Astana Resolution

Following the announcement of national commitments, Mr. Kair Ryskeldinov, Chairman of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan tabled a Resolution, drafted by the Republic of Kazakhstan, for the

consideration of and adoption by delegates present at the Ministerial Roundtable. Mr. Rakhmanin invited delegates and country representatives to comment on the Resolution.

Mr. Stewart Maginnis, Global Director of the Nature-based Solutions Group at IUCN, congratulated countries for their pledges and advised participants that IUCN stands ready to work with international partners to support their implementation. Mr. Maginnis described the Resolution as a good summary of countries' commitments and an inspiring document. Referencing the Bonn Challenge, named after the city of Bonn where it was launched, and the Kigali Declaration, which was adopted in Kigali, Rwanda, Mr. Maginnis proposed that the Resolution be entitled the "Astana Resolution".

Seeing no objections, the Astana Resolution was adopted as presented by the Republic of Kazakhstan. The document can be found in Annex 1.

Additional remarks

Mr. Solomon Pavliashvili, Deputy Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, thanked the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan for their hospitality and for hosting the event. Mr. Pavliashvili further thanked UNECE, FAO and IUCN for the organisation of the Ministerial Roundtable, as well as the Government of Germany for its cooperation and support of forestry in the region. Georgia recognised that intensive action is required to address the challenge of restoration and find relevant solutions. Georgia is committed to introducing systems of sustainable forest management that will incorporate and address environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development, including the mitigation of climate change, fostering green growth and green jobs creation. Mr. Pavliashvili stressed the importance of international support for sustainable forest management in Georgia, referencing ongoing initiatives such as the implementation of the national forest inventory with the support of Germany. The Georgian representative reiterated the Government's firm support of forest landscape restoration and of making forests into a sustainable, effectively managed and well preserved common good for future generations.

Dr. *Kuralay Karibayeva*, Director of the Institute of Ecology and Sustainable Development and Kazakhstan's Science and Technology Correspondent under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), noted that forest landscape restoration is a priority issue not only in Kazakhstan, but in all countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Dr. Karibayeva referenced the First Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Forestry in Greater Central Asia, organized by the State Forestry Administration of China and APFNet in May 2016 in Astana, which culminated with the adoption of the Astana Declaration. This document emphasized the need for closer regional cooperation in forestry in line with UNCCD, CBD and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Building on it, Dr. Karibayeva proposed that forest landscape restoration under the Bonn Challenge can be further integrated into countries' international commitments under the three conventions. For instance, pledges under the Bonn Challenge should be considered during country reporting under the UNCCD. Further, Dr. Karibayeva suggested that countries take advantage of the support, instruments and tools offered by international bodies such as IUCN and the Secretariat of the UNCCD, citing the success of the land degradation neutrality (LDN) target setting process in Central Asia.

Mr. Rakhmanin thanked the represented countries for their commitment to forest landscape restoration, which contributes not only to the achievement of the Bonn Challenge goal and the aims of the conventions, but also to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 15, which will be discussed at the upcoming High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (9-18 July 2018, New York, USA). Mr. Rakhmanin invited delegates to continue the discussion at the next session of FAO's Committee on Forestry (16-20 July 2018, Rome, Italy), also addressing the topics raised at the Ministerial Roundtable. The moderator concluded, however, that the most important outcome of the Ministerial Roundtable is the investment country representatives have made into the wellbeing of their people, the planet, and the generations to come.

7. Conclusion

Following a short break, participants gathered once again in the conference room for a press conference. Mr. Kair Ryskeldinov, Chairman of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, closed the session.

Annex I – Astana Resolution

Participants in the Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Ministerial Roundtable) organized by the Government of Kazakhstan in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, with the support of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the Government of Germany,

Welcoming the ongoing efforts of national forest authorities to increase forest cover in the Caucasus and Central Asia and halt the processes of desertification and land degradation,

Aware that countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia face similar challenges and common problems related to land degradation, the planning and implementation of forest landscape restoration, and that countries have an opportunity to engage and strengthen regional cooperation, as well as to strengthen partnerships in order to identify best solutions and implement action in support of forests, their ecosystems, and people depending on them,

Recognizing the major contribution of Forest Landscape Restoration to the implementation of actions for the achievement of global commitments made by countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia within the framework of the Rio Conventions, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF),

Noting that achieving the Bonn Challenge's 350 million-hectare restoration goal by 2030 could generate US\$ 170 billion per year globally in net benefits from watershed protection, improved crop yields and forest products, and could sequester up to 1.7 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent annually,

Emphasizing the importance of the Bonn Challenge, an international initiative intended to align quantified national commitments on forest landscape restoration,

Reaffirming our commitments to the Bonn Challenge global target to restore 150 million hectares of deforested and degraded lands by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030, and in accordance with national pledges from the region,

AGREE to:

1. Identify degraded lands within our respective countries and work to restore and afforest them by 2030, taking into account existing national efforts as well as initiatives already outlined in the relevant policy documents;
2. Assess the national potential for forest landscape restoration in order to enhance the voluntary regional target;
3. Reinforce regional cooperation on forest landscape restoration, in particular through policy dialogues, forest policy development and joint programming;
4. Call on development partners, in particular the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, as well as international finance institutions and the private sector, to support efforts and investment at the national and regional level in forest landscape restoration and facilitate access to external investment opportunities;
5. Cooperate among interested partners to develop a strategy for the financing of forest landscape restoration efforts and reinforce national capacities in order to better mobilize existing financial instruments;
6. Periodically assess our respective efforts through alignment with the Bonn Challenge Barometer of Progress in order to voluntarily monitor and report progress towards forest landscape restoration targets in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Adopted in Astana on 22 June 2018

Annex II – Media and Materials

Official website of the Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47712>

Official website of the Bonn Challenge: www.bonnchallenge.org

Official website of the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR): www.forestlandscaperestoration.org

UNECE Press release: “2.5 million ha committed to the Bonn Challenge by the Caucasus and Central Asia”, <https://www.unece.org/?id=48965>

FAO Press release in English: “Over 2.5 million hectares committed to the Bonn Challenge by the Caucasus and Central Asia”, <http://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail-news/en/c/1142410/>

FAO press release in Russian: “Кавказ и Центральная Азия восстановят 2,5 млн га в рамках Боннского вызова”, <http://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail-news/ru/c/1142448/>

International Union for Conservation of Nature: “1st Bonn Challenge Roundtable in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, <https://www.iucn.org/news/forests/201805/1st-bonn-challenge-roundtable-caucasus-and-central-asia>

International Union for Conservation of Nature: “Caucasus and Central Asia demonstrate impressive political will for restoration and the Bonn Challenge”, <https://www.iucn.org/news/forests/201807/caucasus-and-central-asia-demonstrate-impressive-political-will-restoration-and-bonn-challenge>

Event image gallery: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/121632478@N08/sets/72157694571561432>

Videos of the announcement of national commitments under the Bonn Challenge:

Armenia	https://youtu.be/xNbvy3To9cc
Georgia	https://youtu.be/oWwozxt0KM
Kazakhstan	https://youtu.be/eZhSxaikNWg
Kyrgyzstan	https://youtu.be/VGQ-HM7qubQ
Tajikistan	https://youtu.be/q9VQIaOkRxE
Uzbekistan	https://youtu.be/1PL3QM2pnwM