

April 14, 2007

THE 7th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
FORUM ON FORESTS

Thursday, April 12, 2007, 10:00 AM -12:00 PM

Background Information:

This briefing looked at issues before the 7th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests held April 16 to 27 at United Nations Headquarters. In recent years, forests have disappeared at a high rate as a result of climate change, deforestation, armed conflict and other disastrous circumstances. From 1990 to 2005, the world lost three percent of its four billion hectares of forest area at an average decline of two percent per year. These causes as well as on-going efforts by national governments, NGOs and international institutions to adopt sustainable forest management practices was discussed.

A compilation of the “United Nations in Action” videos reporting on forestry initiatives around the world was screened at the start of the conference. The film showed what is happening in forests (i.e. Russia, etc) and how Russian students are being educated in re-forestation.

Representatives from the United Nations are working with their schools and students to educate them on this task. The film showed examples of how the students there are working to restore their forests. This establishes a bond between the students and the forests there. The film was short but excellent. We in the United States should be doing the same thing

Moderator:

Ms. Robin Della Rocca, DPI/NGO Office Representative

Speakers:

Mr. Pekka Patosaari, Director, Secretary of the United Nations
Forum on Forests

Mr. Tri Tharyat, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Indonesia
to the United Nations

Ms. Lene Ostergaard, Executive Director, Rain Forest International

Mr. Kiyotaka Akasaka, Under Secretary-General for Sustainable
Development Communications at the United Nations

Mr. Raymond Sommeryns, Deputy Secretary-General of DPI introduced Mr. Akasaka

1. After the film, the Moderator, Ms. Rocca welcomed everyone and introduced each of the speakers with their backgrounds.
2. The first speaker, Mr. Pekka Patosaari, before joining the United Nations worked extensively on forests in his home country Finland. Mr. Patosaari described actions by the United Nations on the issue of the worlds' forests. All Member Nations at the United Nations are also members of the Forest Session.

The Sustainable Efforts on the World Forests was started in 1992. He indicated that the task has been difficult. It has been hindered by trade, national and local issues. There has also been dis-agreements on what to do. The United Nations are trying to adopt a non-binding resolution on the forests. Negotiations on this are taking place at the United Nations over the next three weeks, April 12 thru May 3rd.

He stated that it has been a long process on the international level on how to manage and preserve the forests. Global objectives are important. The first step that must be taken is to conclude the on-going discussions including the private sector. The second step needs program and policing initiatives and coordination. Next they need to provide guidance to local governments on the management of their forests.

Mr. Patosaari stated that there must be close collaboration on this effort with Civil Society. He stated that we must show different people what forests can provide for them.

3. The second speaker, Mr. Kiotaka Akasaka of Japan, was introduced by Mr. Raymond Sommeryns. Mr. Akasaka has worked as the Under-Secretary at the United Nations for four years. In 1997, he was part of Japan's Climate Change effort. He came to the United Nations in 2007. Mr. Akasaka is now in Sustainable Development.

Mr. Akasaka stated that the seventh session of the Forests was very important. It provides for the possibility of a unique agreement on the World's Forests by Member Nations. Forests areas in Developing Countries have been declining. In Developed Countries forest areas have been improving. The problem is very critical in Developing Countries.

In China, their efforts have resulted in thousands of trees being planted. Action by Civil Society there was vital. The year 2011 is the International year of Forests. This year, the September 2007 Conference at the United Nations will address Climate Change. That is very important and an excellent agenda.

4. Questions/Answers to and by Kiyotaka Akasaka who had to leave early:

4.1 This year's Climate Change task is one of the top priorities of the new Secretary-General of the United Nations for protecting both the forests and the economies of the developing and developed countries of the world.

4.2 He stated that this year was very important for all people and organizations that are working on Sustainable Development.

5. The third speaker, Mr. Tri Tharyat, from 2001 to 2003 served in Nairobi on the Commission on Sustainable Development. His government, Indonesia, hosted the conference two months ago in his country. Everyone there at the conference finale agreed on the Global Initiatives.

6. The last speaker, Ms. Lene Osterbaard, has had fifteen years in the Development Field in her country of Sweden and in the European Union. As part of her talk she presented a film entitled the "Rain Forest Tragedy". She indicated that half of America has already been deforested. Each year rain forests the size of New York disappears.

Tropical deforestation results in a twenty percent increase in carbon pollution in the world. Indigenous people living in or near forests are critical to the solution of the problems.

She showed examples in the world of indigenous people in her film. The mission of her organization, Rain Forest International, is to support indigenous and traditional people in their efforts to protect the forests. Her organization is helping governments live up to their responsibilities, raise their awareness and training them on the management of their resources.

7. Questions/Answers:

7.1 Ms. Lene Ostergaard; One to two million people live in or near forests. Many have been pushed out by logging companies.

7.2 Ms. Lene Ostergaard; Sustainable use of rain forests by logging companies can be good with local government supervision. Careful logging required. Unfortunately logging and mining companies have been very destructive.

7.3 Mr. Pekka Patosaari; Logging is not bad if done in the right way. The root causes of destruction is still a critical question. Addressing this involves the rights of the people. How to use natural resources in a sustainable way needs sustainable management.

The Brazilian government has undertaken efforts to balance these conflicting requirements. Everyone of us is involved. We buy furniture made from timber from these forests

Developing countries need assistances for this effort. Cooperation between local governments and their people very important. If forests are not valued they disappear. It is a land of wealth and education. Forests can make a difference

7.4 Mr. Pekka Patosaari; Member states from fourteen countries have been invited to support the forest initiatives in affected countries. We can also interface with other government bodies at the United Nations on these issues. We need a better system of control. Success will take time.

7.5 Mr. Tri Tharyat; Governments at the United Nations did not agree on legally binding instruments to take affect until 2015. Whatever is adopted must wait until agree to at National levels.

7.6 Mr. Pekka Patosaari; He indicated that they need legal advice on these issues as to what is legally binding in a country. However, commitment is critical and is not a legally binding issue.

8. Concluding Remarks by Ms. Lene Ostergaard:

At the internal level need binding policies and enforcement now. We need the help of the developed countries for this effort. Civil Rights and NGOs have a lot of power if correctly used by Corporations. She indicated that they are going to Rome in May of this year to plan and Set-up the scheduled 2011 Conference on Forests.

PDC George Weinstein
National UN Chairman