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Reporting on the Committee's Programme of Work:

**Climate change and forests in the Economic
Commission for Europe region**

Climate change and forests in the Economic Commission for Europe region

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This document provides background information for the discussion on forests and climate change in the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region. It summarizes the results of group work held on this topic during the forty-fifth session of the Joint Economic Commission for Europe and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management (JWP) on 23 May 2024, and outlines possible ways forward.

Delegations are invited to provide guidance to the secretariat on possible directions of work, and activities related to forests, the forest sector and climate change, also in the context of preparations for the next Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The document is submitted according to A/78/6 (Section 20); ECE/TIM/EFC/WP.2/2024/2, para 23.



I. Background

1. Climate change is a global emergency that goes beyond national borders and requires an intergovernmental cooperation, which at the global level is led by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The twenty-first meeting of Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the UNFCCC held in 2015 reached the historic Paris Agreement aiming to substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and keep global temperature increase to well below 2°C above, and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
2. The UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow (2021) advanced on the sustainable management and conservation of forests in the context of climate change. Over 130 leaders, representing more than 90 per cent of the world's forests, committed to work together to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030.
3. COP28 in Dubai (2023) marked the conclusion of the first 'global stocktake' of efforts to address climate change under the Paris Agreement. Having shown that progress was too slow across all areas of climate action – from reducing greenhouse gas emissions, to strengthening resilience to a changing climate, to getting the financial and technological support to vulnerable nations – countries responded with a decision to accelerate action across all areas by 2030.
4. COP29 in Baku in 2024, like its predecessors, will focus on advancing the goals of the Paris Agreement, including the efforts to limit global warming, to adapt to the impacts of climate change, and to mobilize financing for these activities.
5. COP30 in 2025, as announced by its host, Brazil, is expected to be a milestone for a global deal on climate mitigation through land-use and forest management, enhancing global north and south cooperation for maintaining the 2°C target at the global level. This can create a distinctive momentum for an enhanced role of forests in the global climate talks.

II. Forests and Climate Change

6. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates¹ the global forest area to be at 4.1 billion ha, representing 31% of total land area. Most forests are situated in the tropics (45%), followed by boreal (27%), temperate (16%) and subtropical (11%) domains. Forest loss rates differ among regions, but the global trend is towards a net forest loss with the global forest area having declined by more than 4% in the last 30 years (FAO, 2020).
7. Climate change impacts forest ecosystems in multiple ways. The strong and direct impacts on forests are brought about by weather (e.g., temperature, precipitation) and carbon dioxide concentration changes. They will lead to the modification in the frequency and intensity of wildfires, insect, and disease outbreaks as well as extreme weather events that could have substantive effects on forest ecosystems in the long term.
8. The sixth Assessment Report² of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) found that global forests were under severe threat, while sustainably managed forests played a key role in both reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change. In this context, sustainably managed forests can provide wood, a key low emission raw material for a low carbon future, non-wood forest products, and many ecosystem goods and services including biodiversity protection and maintaining water supply

¹ FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020
<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/e233d727-a8c9-4f90-a05d-a34b93c8a923/content>.

² Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, pp. 35-115, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.

and soil quality for years to come. This will also contribute to the sustainable livelihoods of millions of people around the world.

9. In the ECE region, climate change could increase wood productivity in some parts through accelerated growth because of a warmer climate. It could contribute to the forest area's expansion toward the north, longer growing seasons and higher carbon dioxide concentrations. However, it is uncertain if an increase in tree growth rates in some parts of the ECE region would offset the wood loss in other parts because of adverse climate change-induced impacts on ecosystems.

10. In addition, for the past three decades the ECE region has been struggling with forest damage caused by droughts, fires, storms, and insect infestations. These resulted in large-scale tree mortality in forest ecosystems which impacted their overall vitality and health losses already very apparent today. Forests landscapes have been altered by the massive climate-change induced mortality of forests. This in turn caused economic distress on timber markets because of the massive accumulation of salvage timber. Given climate change projections, this trend is expected to continue and intensify in the future.

III. Results of Discussions at the Joint Economic Commission for Europe and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management

11. In May 2024, the topic was included in a dedicated session of the Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management addressed the topic of climate change in an interactive session. Noting the timeliness and relevance of the topic, as climate change was shaping increasingly the management of forests in the ECE region in the long term, an expert panel and delegates exchanged information and collected provided guidance to the work of the secretariat. Discussions covered information about international and national priorities on climate change mitigation and adaptation, national policy, available tools, and strategies supporting their implementation, in view of the preparations for the upcoming Conventions of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

12. During the interactive part of the session delegates shared information about their national priorities for their forest sectors related to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The latter was considered the priority, given that only healthy and resilient forests can effectively mitigate climate change, and provide products and services. Participants highlighted the role and need for an active implementation of sustainable forest management. They stressed the need for an integrated land use management to increase forests resilience to the changing climate, in particular the wildfires which may result from it. They noted that many of their national forest management objectives focused on the continued increase of the overall forests cover (e.g., afforestation), and on the need to further increase the diversity of forest landscapes, ecosystems, species, and genetic pools. Delegates also emphasized the important role of wood and its use as a way of locking carbon, in particular in the construction sector.

13. Delegates also informed about their national policies and other tools that support the implementation of their climate change related priorities. They highlighted their coordinated national climate strategies, climate adaptation plans and other supportive policies (e.g., Regulation on land use, land use change, and forestry (LULUCF) targets, and building-with-wood policies). The role of data collection and monitoring systems (e.g., national forest inventories) as the foundation for any other specific measures was considered fundamental. They also mentioned the need for funding programmes and communication strategies, including forest owners.

14. Delegates also discussed how the secretariat could support countries of the ECE region and other national and international stakeholders in achieving their climate change priorities. Participants indicated predominantly the importance of the Joint Section in facilitating the exchange of information among countries and sharing best practices through

knowledge-building studies, organizing events and enhancing communication around climate change. Thematic priorities highlighted by delegates included:

(a) Analysis of methodologies for forest adaptation and resilience planning, the reconciliation of short-, medium-, and long-term forest management issues in the context of climate change;

(b) Socioeconomic aspects in forestry and forest-based industries to manage a just transition (e.g., value of products, embedded carbon, costs of climate adaptation to forest owners, etc.);

(c) Information for member States how to manage potential land use conflicts (e.g., between productive use, protection) between forests and other land use/cover (e.g., nature).

15. Further, delegates suggested that the secretariat could prepare a substantive document on climate change in the forests of the ECE region (including case studies of good practice). The continued provision of relevant statistical data contributing to forest monitoring was appreciated. They also highlighted communication and outreach activities, and their coordination with other United Nations agencies and regional forest organizations, for instance through joint events during the upcoming COPs.

IV. Possible Way Forward

16. Building on the discussion at the JWP and taking into consideration organizational mandates, the work of the secretariat could include serving as a focused platform for the exchange of information on links between forests and climate change, particularly on:

(a) Climate change issue at the sessions of the JWP, the ECE Committee on Forests and Forest Industry (COFFI) and the Joint session of COFFI/EFC (FAO European Forestry Commission), related to the work of the technical Team of Specialists;

(b) Knowledge-sharing workshops, regional policy dialogues, capacity building events (including with climate negotiators) upon request;

(c) Data collection on forests, forest sector and climate change and its impacts, including on forest damages;

(d) Analytical thematic studies (upon request), and/or preparing chapters on climate change in upcoming publications.

17. The work could also include raising awareness about the multisectoral interconnections between forests and climate change. This could be done through the development of:

(a) Communication material, e.g., for COP29 and COP30;

(b) Dedicated social media campaigns;

(c) Coordination of outreach activities with other United Nations agencies and regional forest organizations, including joint events during the COPs upon availability of resources.
