

Closing statement by the chairman in the final meeting of the fourth session of the AD-hoc Inter-Governmental Panel on Forests of the Commission on Sustainable Development

In these days, as we finish the four programmed sessions of the Inter-governmental Panel on Forests of the Commission on Sustainable Development of the United Nations, IPF, I have made myself several questions related to its achievements and meaning. As I think on them I assume the role of the University professor that is going to be interviewed by his students when he goes back home to lecture, after having co-chaired the IPF. I start to think about the argumentative schemes that I will employ in the articles that I usually write after experiences as relevant and intense as this one. I may as well write a book to collect and assess the resulting experience of a very positive year in terms of the collective design of appropriate policies to confront serious problems as forest degradation and deforestation.

I shall tell my alumni that the Intergovernmental Panel has once more confirmed the very slow pace of the after-Rio processes, related to the solution of environmental problems of global relevance. I will also tell my students that at the IPF basically we went through the same substantial differences between developed and developing countries that have been noticed recently at other international dialogues and negotiations, such as the conferences of the parties of the biodiversity, and climate change conventions, to mention two very telling and relevant cases.

I was in charge of the difficult task of chairing the deliberation processes of the group appointed to the topics of financial assistance, technology transfer and trade. As I foresaw it, it was a frustrating activity. During the long and occasionally Kafkaian negotiations, I was able to confirm the big differences in the understanding of Northern and Southern countries of many of the fundamental agreements achieved in the Earth Summit in Río De Janeiro. It is certainly worrying to register the enormous interpretation differences associated with the meaning of the principle of the common but differentiated responsibilities, and with the international solidarity principle, as two basic pillars, necessary to fulfill the global sustainable development objective, contained in the Río Declaration. We must recognize however that the negotiation's environment on forests was less hot-headed and more constructive than in Rio.

As it was seen at the IPF, many developed and developing countries are still far from addressing and taking the decisions required to confront the main national and international causes of deforestation and forest degradation. Well understood international solidarity not only implies a flow of financial and technical resources from northern to southern countries as a fundamental requisite for the sustainable management of tropical forests, but the definitive disposition of all countries -industrialized and developing- to develop national policies to face forest problems of domestic origins.

As I acknowledge the main constraints of the IPF negotiation process, clearly reflected in the final results, I also have to put forth some highly positive contributions, and consequences:

-With the IPF it was made clear that the forest issue do not only concern the forest sector, and that it should therefore be approached from the development perspective with a proper integral consideration of its environmental, social, economical and cultural dimensions.

-The IPF was more balanced than the Rio Conference in recognizing and considering the problems related to all types of forests.

-The IPF experience has clearly set forth the benefits of holding an integral international dialogue about forests. In consistence with this fact, it has been recommended to the CSD to establish a permanent dialogue of this nature, in order to follow the IPF recommendations, and to extend into many aspects which haven't been properly fulfilled.

-The Panel was useful in the fulfillment of the objective of obtaining better knowledge of the problems related to forests, and in designing and recommending more than one hundred proposals for action to solve them in areas such as national forest and land-use programmes, traditional forest-related knowledge, scientific research, forest assessment, the development of proper criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, trade in relation to forest products and services, and international organizations and multilateral institutions and instruments. In several cases great amounts of creativity were seen in the design processes of these proposals-which are probably too many and of very diverse nature and quality-despite the limitations that I already pointed out. This was all made possible by the country delegations that participated in the IPF sessions and in the inter-sessional background seminars and workshops, as well as by all the the civil society organizations that participated in various of our tasks -representatives of the ONG's, of the forest dwellers communities and of the private sector.

What will I tell my alumni about the final results balance of the IPF? I will certainly affirm that it would be premature and incorrect to talk about it right now, and that it will only be possible to do it some years ahead when we are able to verify the way in which the proposals for action have been implemented by the countries. It would be enough to select and implement a portion of the proposals for action -the more relevant ones-, in order to achieve a significant change on the actual processes of deforestation and forests degradation.

Therefore, everything depends on the political will and disposition of governments to implement the recommended proposals. To facilitate the whole process, it is necessary to establish concrete action plans that contain actual, tangible goals, the time periods of implementation and the adequate means and compromises that governments will acquire in order to achieve them. In the development of this task the Commission on Sustainable Development, the forest forum and its secretariat that will be eventually created under its sponsorship, as well as the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests, shall have very important roles.

Finally, it is clear that all of us here today have the unavoidable responsibility of inducing our governments and the international agencies into the implementation processes of what has been agreed. We can't afford to recreate the frustration consequence of the of the poor progress registered in the implementation of the Agenda 21, and of the other Río agreements. Our governments must assure a relevant IPF legacy.

The results of the IPF are a great opportunity to pass from conversation to action!

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