

In his video message at the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) at Forest Research Institute (FRI) Dehradun Shri Yadav stressed that forest fires not only cause irreparable damage to flora and fauna but also affect the livelihoods of communities living at forest peripheries. He emphasized that an important tool for promotion of sustainability of forests is forest certification, which nonetheless, presents numerous challenges notably for small-scale producers in developing countries. The Union Minister said India has embarked on its national forest certification scheme to address these challenges. He called on all participants to work together to create a sustainable future that is equitable, just, and resilient.

Minister of Forests, Languages & Technical Education, Government of Uttarakhand Shri Subodh Uniyal in his address today welcomed all distinguished delegates to “Dev Bhoomi”, the state of Uttarakhand. In his remarks he dwelled into the states initiatives and programmes and stated to minimize forest fire incidences, empowering communities living in proximity to forests and incentivizing them to work in tandem with the forest departments has been a strategy that has found success. He affirmed that Forest Certification is an equally important area, being a mechanism for forest monitoring, and is the focus within Global Forest Goals. He emphasized that all will benefit from the exchange at the Forum of traditional knowledge, technology innovation, and community engagement practices.

Director, UNFF, Ms. Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo said that issue of forest fires has been escalated as a global concern, and their detrimental impact on ecosystems, and communities makes action imperative and the second theme for the CLI being forest certification has been a long-standing topic for discussion and actionable solutions are now need of the hour. She highlighted the impact of forest fires on ecosystem are more profound now and mentioned about the challenges of numerous stakeholders and upcoming regulations that need attention. She stressed that the outcome of this CLI is very important and the success will lie in all our collective ability to identify areas for action and recommendations to UNFF 19.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India has taken the initiative for hosting a United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), from 26-28 October 2023, at Forest Research Institute (FRI) Dehradun. More than 80 delegates are participating from 40 countries and 20 International Organisations, both in person and online, are attending the programme, including Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), along with delegates and organisations from India. The programme has adopted a hybrid, physical and online formats for enabling participation across the globe.

This Country Led Initiative (CLI) focuses on two thematic areas: forest fires/wildfires and best practices on its prevention and restoration in fire-affected areas, and forest certification and sustainable forest management.

Forest fires/wildfires profoundly impact biodiversity, ecosystem services, human well-being, livelihoods, and national economies. In recent years, forest fires/wildfires have increased in scale and duration. Accordingly, there is a need to enhance collaboration and action at local, regional and international level on its prevention, reduction of its impacts and restoration of impacted land.

Forest certification has received growing global attention in recent years. Between 2020 and 2021, the certified forest area increased by 27 million hectares, led mainly by Europe and Northern America. However, developing countries and marginal forest managers continue to face challenges with the certification process. The Forum aims to provide a platform to discuss these aspects and the aspect of aligning certification systems with trade rules.

The Forum is planned over two days of exchange on the thematic areas and will host sessions on how to live with fire in a warming world, policies needed for implementing integrated fire management, how to make best use of the newly developed Global Fire Management Hub, and Forest Certification and Sustainable Forest Management. The discussions will be followed by cultural programmes at the end of each day, and field trip to Rajaji National Park on the third day.

The Director-General, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change shared with the delegates the importance of CLI and deliberations in these meetings in enhancing international cooperation on global forestry related issues. He highlighted the issues that accompany these forest fires/wildfires and its negative impact on public health, economic activity and forest biodiversity. He also spoke about the current scenario in India where more than 62% of Indian states are prone to high-intensity forest fires and how India has significantly improved its forest fire monitoring systems and fire forecast models. He shared with the participants the country's proposed global collaboration i.e. Gandhinagar Implementation Roadmap and Gandhinagar Information Platform, that emanated from G20 deliberations, to tackle restoration of forest fire and mining degraded lands.

The forum's meeting witnessed today varied panel discussions on forest fires, policies enhancing prevention of forest fires and on the global forest management hub. Various countries and International Organisations participated as panelists including New Zealand, Madagascar, Colombia, Morocco, India, Portugal, Malawi, Botswana, Russia, Nigeria, South Africa, Spain, FAO, UNEP, ITTO and IUFRO. Subsequently many other countries and organizations expressed their views and suggestions on prevention and effective management including the role of community participation.

The forum on Thursday, the 27th October, 2023 will cover a round of interaction on Forest Certification and Sustainable Forest Management with country presentations from South Africa, Russia and India.

The outcome of the Forum will be a summary by the Co-chairs on the discussions held, which will be submitted to the 19th session of UNFF for consideration. UNFF19 will be held in May 2024 at United Nations headquarters.



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