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Subject:	COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS with a view to the participation of the European Union and its Member States in the Thirteenth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF 13) - <i>Council conclusions</i>

Delegations will find in ANNEX the Council conclusions, as adopted by the Council on 16 April 2018, with a view to the participation of the European Union and its Member States in the Thirteenth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF 13).

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

**with a view to the participation of the European Union and its Member States in the
Thirteenth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF 13)**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. RECALLING its earlier conclusions of 25 April 2017 on the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) and with a view to the participation of the European Union and its Member States in the Twelfth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF12), held from 1-5 May 2017 in New York at the United Nations Headquarters, as well as previous conclusions with a view to the participation of the European Union and its Member States in the previous sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests;
2. RECALLING its earlier conclusions of 20 June 2017 on a sustainable European future: 'The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', and of 4 December 2008 on addressing the challenges of deforestation and forest degradation to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss;
3. RECOGNISING that the world's forests are fundamental to life on the planet and that forests and sustainable forest management play a vital role in tackling current global challenges such as loss of biological diversity, land degradation and climate change and in meeting our sustainable development commitments, including those related to climate, energy and biodiversity. Furthermore, they are a key provider of a wide range of ecosystem services which improve quality of life, providing multiple benefits to the environment, society and economy, such as enhancing food security, availability of water and protection of human settlements;
4. NOTING that, despite progress in recent years, deforestation and forest degradation continue at alarming rates, with as much as 80 % of global forest loss being driven by expansion of agricultural land, according to FAO estimates;

5. APPRECIATING the various initiatives at global and regional level to fight deforestation and forest degradation, such as the New York Declaration on Forests (2014), the Amsterdam Declaration 'Towards Eliminating Deforestation from Agricultural Commodity Chains with European Countries' (2015) and the Amsterdam Declaration in Support of a Fully Sustainable Palm Oil Supply Chain by 2020 (2015);
6. RECALLING the mandate of the UNFF Secretariat, as set out in ECOSOC Resolution 2015/33, to ensure the effective management of the strengthened facilitative process (Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN)) and the implementation of its activities;
7. REITERATING the significant role of the EU and its Member States in promoting sustainable forest management globally, halting deforestation and forest degradation, combating illegal logging and associated trade and promoting resource- and energy-efficient products from sustainably managed forests, in line with the guiding principles of the EU Forest Strategy and the EU FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade) Action Plan;
8. HIGHLIGHTING the importance of the UNSPF and REITERATING the need and our responsibility to implement it in a way which contributes to protecting and enhancing biodiversity and fighting desertification and to the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – taking into account its cross-cutting issues, including *inter alia* human rights, gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, ending poverty, combating inequalities, and combating climate change and its impacts;
9. STRESSES that the successful promotion and implementation of sustainable forest management require good governance at all levels, including law enforcement and effective and accountable institutions, and the involvement of all major groups and other relevant stakeholders - including *inter alia* the scientific community, civil society organisations and the private sector – as well as regional and sub-regional bodies and processes; and the strengthening of multi-stakeholder partnerships and fora;
10. RECALLS in this regard also the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

11. URGES all members of the UNFF, stakeholders (including the private sector) and institutions to undertake concerted collective action across countries and sectors and at all levels in order to halt deforestation and forest degradation, because their drivers stem from a variety of sectors, and CALLS for action to resolve land-use competition, especially between forest and agricultural land, with a view to progressing towards sustainable and integrated land-use systems;
12. STRESSES that forest landscape restoration initiatives offer opportunities to reverse deforestation, restore degraded forest landscapes and re-establish forest cover where it has been lost, thus improving the human environment and forest ecosystem services including biodiversity, and UNDERLINES the need for all relevant stakeholders to support restoration initiatives;
13. WELCOMES the first ever joint Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) International Conference, 'Working Across Sectors to Halt Deforestation and Increase Forest Area-from Aspiration to Action' (held in Rome from 20-22 February 2018) and its outcome, in particular the call for urgency in upscaling activities to halt deforestation and restore degraded forest, promoting sustainable value chains in agriculture and forestry and greening the finance sector by supporting sustainable and deforestation-free investments and reducing harmful subsidies. ENCOURAGES the organisation of further joint events aimed at sharing information and discussing joint CPF action and programmes involving all relevant sectors and stakeholders, including youth;
14. CALLS on all stakeholders at all levels to strive for continuous efforts to improve the coherence of forest-related international activities and to help develop and support collective action and joint projects by CPF members;
15. UNDERLINES the need for a strong, effective and efficient UNFF Secretariat, servicing and supporting the UNFF in all matters related to the Forum's quadrennial programmes and the UNSPF as set out in ECOSOC resolution 2015/33, and carrying out its functions in full transparency;

16. UNDERLINES the need to adopt operative guidelines allowing the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (GFFFN) to fulfil its important role in facilitating access for eligible countries to resources to implement the UNSPF and achieve its global forest goals and targets; EMPHASISES the added value of developing collaborative arrangements between the UNFF Secretariat and CPF members and other relevant organisations, and of improving the organisation of related tasks within the UNFF Secretariat in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the GFFFN; and ENCOURAGES members of the UNFF, and others in a position to do so, to facilitate mobilising voluntary contributions for operating the GFFFN;
17. STRESSES that monitoring, assessment and reporting are crucial for a better understanding of current trends and processes, for demonstrating progress and for sharing experiences related to the implementation of the UNSPF, and WELCOMES the progress made on developing global forest indicators; REQUESTS the UNFF Secretariat to provide timely information about the improvement of the reporting format and cycle;
18. UNDERLINES that the format for voluntary national reporting should facilitate the elaboration of conclusions and analysis of information and that the cycle should take into account other forest-relevant regional and international reporting cycles, in particular relevant CPF members' cycles and the Sustainable Development Goals review cycle, in order to avoid an additional reporting burden and duplication of effort;
19. WELCOMES the development of a Communication and Outreach Strategy for the UNSPF, as an instrument to promote better communication about the UNSPF with all relevant stakeholders and raise awareness about and support for sustainable forest management at all levels. STRESSES that the Communication and Outreach Strategy should be an evolving document that reflects emerging developments;

20. NOTING that the review of Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG 15) will be on the agenda of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF 2018), EMPHASISES the unique opportunity this provides for the international community to acknowledge the multiple functions forests serve in resilient societies and sustainable development and to reaffirm its commitment to the shared United Nations mission, as expressed in the UNSPF, to promote sustainable forest management and the contribution of all types of forests and trees outside forests to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, including by strengthening cooperation, coordination, coherence, synergies and political commitment and action at all levels;
21. UNDERLINES the need for UNFF 13, including its ministerial round table, to provide compelling arguments and proposals to the HLPF on how forests and sustainable forest management contribute to the implementation of the SDGs, and in particular SDG 15, with the aim of having its full support for a UN-wide implementation of the UNSPF as part of the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
22. AGREES upon the importance of working together with all partners at UNFF13, in order to reach a common understanding on strong, ambitious and balanced input by the UNFF to the HLPF which recalls and emphasises the arguments and proposals expressed by the EU and its Member States in their submission to the UNFF Secretariat on the key messages for the 2018 HLPF, including the importance of forests and their sustainable management for the other SDGs under review at the 2018 HLPF:
- to rainwater infiltration, to watershed management and to protect soil against erosion, to protect natural water reservoirs and to contribute to assure drinking-water supply and its quality; to increase overall resilience against the effects of floods and droughts as well as other extreme meteorological phenomena as a result of climate change (SDG6);
 - to contribute to security of energy supply, to sustainability and to the accomplishment of energy/climate-related targets (SDG7);

- to improve living environment and human health and well-being in urbanised societies and the resilience of rural-urban interfaces, by enhancing air quality, maintaining the protective function of forests, preventing and fighting against wild fires and thus enhancing the safety of populations (SDG11);
 - to promote a rational use of wood as a natural renewable resource, minimizing waste including by recycling wood products, and striving towards a circular economy while eliminating illegal and unsustainable practices (SDG12).
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