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Items 3 (a), 3 (b), 6, 8 and 9 of the provisional agenda*

Implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030:

Policy dialogue on the thematic and operational priorities, priority actions and resource needs for the period 2019–2020, taking into account the review cycle of the high-level political forum on sustainable development during the biennium and the theme of the International Day of Forests

Voluntary announcement of voluntary national contributions

Emerging issues and challenges

High-level segment, including a forest partnership forum with the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, non-governmental organizations and private sector chief executive officers

Adoption of the quadrennial programme of work for the period 2021–2024, including consideration of its priority actions and resource needs

Implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

In accordance with its quadrennial programme of work, the United Nations Forum on Forests will consider the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 at its fifteenth session. The present note provides the background information, highlights the results of the intersessional activities undertaken since the fourteenth session of the Forum and serves as the basis for discussion on agenda items 3 (a), 3 (b), 6, 8 and 9 at its fifteenth session.

* E/CN.18/2020/1.



I. Introduction

1. In accordance with the quadrennial programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2017–2020, the Forum will consider the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 at its fifteenth session. Under agenda item 3 (a), it will hold a policy dialogue on the thematic and operational priorities, priority actions and resource needs, taking into account the theme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development for 2020, “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development” and the theme of the International Day of Forests for 2020, “Forests and biodiversity”. At the same session, a discussion on agenda item 6 will be held as part of the policy dialogue under item 3 (a).

2. Under agenda item 3 (b), the Forum will consider the voluntary announcement of voluntary national contributions. Under agenda item 8, the Forum will convene a high-level segment, which will include a forest partnership forum with the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, non-governmental organizations and private sector chief executive officers. Under agenda item 9, the Forum will consider and adopt its quadrennial programme of work for the period 2021–2024.

3. The present note has been prepared to serve as the basis for discussion on agenda items 3 (a), 3 (b), 6, 8 and 9 of the provisional agenda for the fifteenth session of the Forum. It provides an overview of the relevant intersessional activities, as well as information on the implementation of the communication and outreach strategy in relation to the strategic plan, including with respect to the International Day of Forests, since the fourteenth session of the Forum.

II. Background

4. On the basis of the decision of the Bureau of its fourteenth session, the Forum considered the following thematic priorities for technical discussion at that session: (a) forests and climate change; (b) forests, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and employment; and (c) forests, peaceful and inclusive societies, reduced inequality, education and inclusive institutions at all levels.

5. At its fourteenth session, the Forum discussed thoroughly the interlinkages between the thematic priorities and the global forest goals and targets of the strategic plan and the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2019,¹ as shown in table 1.

¹ The following Sustainable Development Goals were reviewed in depth at the 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development: Goals 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all), 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels) and 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development).

Table 1

Interlinkages between the thematic priorities and the global forest goals and targets of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2019

<i>Thematic priority</i>	<i>Global forest goals</i>	<i>Most relevant targets of the global forest goals</i>	<i>Sustainable Development Goals under in depth review</i>
Forests and climate change	1–4, 6	1.1–1.4, 2.5, 3.1, 4.1–4.4, 6.4	13, 17
Forests, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and employment	2, 4, 6	2.1–2.4, 4.3, 6.3	8, 17
Forests, peaceful and inclusive societies, reduced inequality, education and inclusive institutions at all levels	3, 5, 6	3.3, 5.1–5.4, 6.1–6.5	4, 10, 16, 17

6. Members of the Forum discussed the ways in which meeting the global forest goals and targets can accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals under review. A brief overview of the discussions of the Forum on these issues, as well as the main points, are reflected in the Chair's summary (see [E/2019/42](#), annex I, sect. II.A, paras. 5–11). The technical discussions also provided the basis for the Forum's input to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2019.

7. In accordance with the guidance provided in the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for the period 2017–2020 and on the basis of the above-mentioned technical discussions at the fourteenth session, the Chair included the following key proposals in his summary of the discussions at that session, which are relevant to discussions on items 3 (a) and 3 (b) at the fifteenth session:²

(a) Enhanced use of the strategic plan as an integrated framework for forest-based national actions and international cooperation to accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 15, and the objectives of the Paris Agreement;

(b) Further recognition by the high-level political forum on sustainable development of the value of the strategic plan as an integrated framework for forest-related actions to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) Exploration of opportunities for enhanced synergies between voluntary national contributions under the strategic plan and forest-related nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement.

8. The Chair also included the following suggestions on item 3 (b) in his summary of the discussions held at the fourteenth session in the list of potential intersessional activities of the Forum secretariat ([E/2019/42](#), annex I, sect. V):

(a) Prepare a streamlined synthesis of voluntary national contributions communicated to date, aligned with specific global forest goals and targets;

(b) Develop, in consultation with members of the Forum, a simple format for use by countries on a voluntary basis to communicate their voluntary national contributions.

² For a complete list of the key proposals made by the Chair of the fourteenth session of the Forum, see [E/2019/42](#), annex I, sect. II.B.

III. Contribution of the Forum to, and its impact on, the high-level political forum on sustainable development

9. The Forum has provided the following inputs to the annual sessions of the high-level political forum on sustainable development since 2017: the relevant part of the Chair's summary of the discussions held during the twelfth session of the Forum (for the high-level political forum in 2017); the relevant part of the Chair's summary and the resolution adopted at the thirteenth session (for the high-level political forum in 2018); and input by the Bureau of the fourteenth session and the relevant part of the Chair's summary of that session (for the high-level political forum in 2019).³

10. In order to assist the Forum in providing its inputs to the high-level political forum, the Forum secretariat commissioned seven analytical studies on the interlinkages between forests and various Sustainable Development Goals.⁴ The studies generated interactive exchanges among members of the Forum and contributed to a better understanding of the important role of forests, as well as the global forest goals, in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

11. In addition, the Forum secretariat provided its contribution to the relevant reports and documents in the context of the high-level political forum through participation in the departmental activities and related expert group meetings. It also provided substantive support to the Bureau for participation in the relevant meetings and for organizing events.

12. In addition to the inputs submitted by the Forum, the secretariat, under the initiative of the Bureaux of the Forum's thirteenth and fourteenth sessions, held an event on 8 July 2018 in conjunction with the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development. The event was entitled "Forest-based transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies: lessons learned and success stories" and was held to complement the outcome of the Forum's thirteenth session, bringing together representatives of the delegations to the high-level political forum.

13. In 2019, the Chair of the fourteenth session of the Forum participated in the ministerial segment of the high-level political forum, convened on 16 July under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, and delivered key messages highlighting the Forum's input to the high-level political forum.

14. As a result of these activities, the Forum has been one of the most active contributors to the high-level political forum. Its most visible impact was reflected in the outcome documents of the 2018 and 2019 sessions of the high-level political forum, owing to closer national coordination among relevant representatives attending the Forum and the high-level political forum.

15. The Chair of the 2018 high-level political forum highlighted in her summary the loss of forest areas as a key challenge in the context of the review of progress made on Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 15. The importance of transformational actions on forests through the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and its global forest goals and targets was also mentioned.

16. The Chair of the 2019 high-level political forum underscored in her summary the key contribution of sustainably managed forests to combating climate change.

17. The main theme of the 2020 session of the high-level political forum and of the Economic and Social Council in 2020 will be "Accelerated action and transformative

³ The Forum's annual inputs to the high-level political forum on sustainable development are available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/inputs>.

⁴ The studies are available at www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/background-analytical-studies/index.html.

pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”. It is expected that the contribution of the fifteenth session of the Forum to the 2020 session of the high-level political forum, including its theme, will be reflected in the final substantive outcomes of the session, namely the resolution and the ministerial declaration.

18. While the Forum has been considerably active in highlighting the contribution of forests to the efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals during the current quadrennium, it should take additional steps to effectively interact with the high-level political forum in the context of the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024. To ensure coherence and synergy in the processes related to the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum and their work beyond 2020, the President of the General Assembly, by his letter dated 13 January 2020, appointed the Permanent Representatives of Benin and Georgia as co-facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations related to these important review processes. At the time of finalizing the present note, no information was available on the schedule and modality for consultations within the Assembly on this matter.

19. Nevertheless, by maintaining the primary focus of the Forum sessions on the global forest goals, the Forum should continue to highlight the interaction between forests and the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024 and provide regular inputs to the sessions of the high-level political forum.

20. In addition, it is imperative for members of the Forum to actively participate in the sessions of the high-level political forum through their delegations and convey and highlight the messages of the Forum at the relevant meetings of the high-level political forum, including through their voluntary national reviews. The Forum secretariat will also continue its active engagement in the relevant departmental work within the United Nations and in supporting relevant initiatives of the Bureau.

IV. Voluntary national contributions

21. In accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of the strategic plan, Member States may, on a voluntary basis, determine their contributions to achieving the global forest goals and targets, taking into account their national circumstances, policies, priorities, capacities, levels of development and forest conditions. They may include in their voluntary national contributions, as appropriate, national actions and targets related to other international forest-related commitments and goals, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and actions to address climate change under the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

22. As at December 2019, 17 countries (Australia, Canada, China, Ecuador, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Jamaica, Liberia, Madagascar, Morocco, New Zealand, Slovakia, Thailand, Ukraine and Uzbekistan) had officially announced their voluntary national contributions. All such contributions communicated to the secretariat have been compiled in a publicly accessible and centralized repository on the Forum’s website.⁵

23. Several members of the Forum that did not previously announce voluntary national contributions have included information about such contributions in their voluntary national reports to the fifteenth session of the Forum, which marks a

⁵ Available at www.un.org/esa/forests/documents/un-strategic-plan-for-forests-2030/vnccs/index.html.

positive development.⁶ They may wish to consider sending their voluntary national contributions to the secretariat in a separate official communication.

Synthesis of voluntary national contributions and simple format for communication

24. During the fourteenth session of the Forum, members discussed the need to take stock of the voluntary national contributions that had been announced and to facilitate such announcements in the future. In the light of that discussion, the Chair made a number of proposals in his summary, including the preparation of a synthesis of previously announced voluntary national contributions and the development of a simple format for use by countries on a voluntary basis to communicate their voluntary national contributions (see para. 6 above). The secretariat has prepared a simple format for consideration by the Forum at its fifteenth session (see annex II).

25. A review of the 17 voluntary national contributions that have been submitted is presented in table 2.

⁶ The members are the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Guinea, Lesotho, Myanmar, Panama, Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Suriname, Turkmenistan and the United States of America.

Table 2
Overview of voluntary national contributions to the global forest goals and targets

	Global forest goal 1: reverse loss of forest cover				Global forest goal 2: enhance forest-based benefits					Global forest goal 3: increase area of protected forests and sustainably managed forests and products			Global forest goal 4: mobilize new, additional financing for sustainable forest management					Global forest goal 5: promote governance frameworks for sustainable forest management and support Sustainable Development Goals				Global forest goal 6: enhance forest-related coordination in the United Nations and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests				
	Target				Target					Target			Target					Target				Target				
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5
Australia	x	x						x	x		x	x	x						x						x	
Canada			x	x				x	x																	
China	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	
Ecuador		x	x																							
Germany	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x			x	x			x	x	x		x
Ghana		x	x				x				x		x													
Guatemala	x		x				x					x														
India	x	x	x																						x	
Jamaica	x							x		x	x								x							
Liberia	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x
Madagascar	x	x	x	x					x	x		x														
Morocco		x	x					x	x	x			x													
New Zealand	x	x	x					x	x																	
Slovakia				x				x	x				x	x												
Thailand	x							x		x	x								x							
Ukraine	x		x	x						x			x	x			x		x	x						
Uzbekistan	x		x	x			x			x		x	x	x					x						x	
Number of submissions	12	10	13	8	3	2	6	10	9	9	7	6	9	6	3	2	3	3	8	3	1	1	1	6	2	2

26. As indicated in table 2, while some voluntary national contributions cover most of the global forest goals and targets, others are focused primarily on goals 1 to 4, with few contributions concerning goals 5 and 6. Goal 1 received attention in the largest number of contributions, followed by goals 2 and 3.

27. Approximately 35 per cent of the contributions were focused on forest cover, forests under sustainable forest management, the hectareage of protected areas and, to a lesser degree, the economic benefits of forests.

28. A few of the voluntary national contributions include commitments under other initiatives such as the Bonn Challenge, nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement and bilateral donor agreements. Examples of commitments include achieving zero deforestation, developing new forest policies and norms, adopting new forest legislation and specific reforestation targets in support of initiatives such as global forest goal 1, the Bonn Challenge and the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative.

29. In terms of specific targets of the global forest goals, those that received the greatest attention were targets 1.1–1.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 4.1 and 5.2. These targets concern issues that have been at the forefront of the Forum's work since the adoption of the United Nations forest instrument. Four of the targets were covered by the largest number of contributions, namely targets 1.1–1.3 and 3.1.

30. The voluntary national contributions submitted to date are an important commitment to the global forest goals and targets. Nevertheless, more contributions are required for any comprehensive assessment of their impact on the achievement of the goals and targets. Such a comprehensive assessment also requires uniform presentation of the contributions. In that regard, agreeing on a simple format for the communication and announcement of the contributions could help to make them more comparable.

V. High-level segment of the fifteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests

31. In accordance with its quadrennial programme of work for the period 2017–2020, the Forum will include a high-level segment. The Bureau of the Forum for its fifteenth session has decided that the high-level segment of that session will be held on 7 May 2020, with the objective of adopting a ministerial declaration. The segment will include a forest partnership forum with the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, non-governmental organizations and private sector chief executive officers.

32. The high-level segment of the fifteenth session of the Forum is being organized at a time when forests are in the spotlight, in mainstream news, in political arenas and across and beyond the United Nations system. In its special report entitled *Climate Change and Land*, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change emphasized that deforestation was not only a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, but that improving sustainable forest management was a key part of the climate solution, as a mitigation strategy and as an adaptation mechanism, and essential in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

33. At the Climate Action Summit held in New York in September 2019, more than 150 nature-based solutions to cut carbon emissions were announced, many of them involving forests. Several countries around the world made major commitments to plant more than 11 billion trees.

34. At the Sustainable Development Goal Summit held in New York in September 2019, there was also growing recognition of the importance of forests and other

nature-based solutions in accelerating progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. World leaders called for a decade of action to deliver the Goals by 2030 and announced more than 100 acceleration actions that they are taking to advance the agenda, including 26 directly related to Goal 15 on life on land.

35. Several other important meetings and conferences will be organized in 2020. In October, at its fifteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity is expected to decide a post-2020 global biodiversity framework, while the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will be held in November 2020 to advance global efforts in mitigating and adapting to climate change. In 2020, the General Assembly is also expected to decide the methods and programme of work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development beyond 2020.

36. The high-level segment thus provides a timely and valuable opportunity to discuss global and emerging issues of major concern to forests,⁷ the contribution of the Forum to global forest-related processes and the ongoing efforts of the Secretary-General and, more importantly, to shed light on how implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and its global forest goals can be integrated into those processes.

37. In December 2019, seven heads and other senior representatives of the United Nations system entities that have substantive programmes on forests met at a high-level leadership dialogue on how to turn the tide on deforestation, during the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and committed themselves to the common goal of helping countries to reduce deforestation and improve forest management.⁸ The dialogue was held to facilitate the work of the Executive Committee of the Secretary-General in mobilizing the United Nations system to find a common path to tackling deforestation.

38. In his annual address to the General Assembly, on 22 January 2020, marking the start of the New Year, the Secretary-General launched the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. He spoke of the need to engage with partners from the local to the global level to mobilize a movement, unlock financing and generate the ambition, solutions and innovations needed to deliver the Goals for everyone everywhere. The announcement of the Decade also provides an important opportunity for senior officials to highlight the interlinkages between forests and the Goals and the ways in which the Forum can contribute to the initiative of the Secretary-General.⁹

39. Ministers and other senior officials who will attend the high-level segment of the Forum's fifteenth session are expected to adopt a declaration. In order to facilitate the smooth adoption of the declaration, the Chair of the Bureau of the fifteenth session, in his letter dated 5 June 2019, solicited inputs from members of the Forum on key elements or building blocks of the declaration. In response to the request, six members of the Forum, three member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, one major group focal point and one stakeholder submitted their inputs.¹⁰

⁷ For example, during the fourteenth session of the Forum, it was suggested that the experiences and impact of extreme events, namely fire, bark beetle attacks and storms, be discussed at its fifteenth session.

⁸ Further information on the dialogue is available at www.un.org/esa/forests/news/2019/12/at-cop25-un-agencies-commit-to-turn-the-tide-on-deforestation/index.html.

⁹ For further information about the Decade, see www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/decade-of-action.

¹⁰ The inputs submitted to the secretariat are available at www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html.

40. Considering the inputs received, the Bureau of the Forum's fifteenth session prepared a concise zero-draft ministerial declaration and circulated it among members of the Forum in January 2020. The Bureau also plans to hold informal consultations with members in New York on 3 and 4 March to advance finalization of the draft declaration prior to the session.

VI. Quadrennial programme work of the Forum for the period 2021–2024

41. In accordance with its provisional agenda, the Forum should decide on its quadrennial programme of work for the period 2021–2024 at its fifteenth session. Following discussions during its fourteenth session, the Forum secretariat conducted several activities to initiate a broad-based consultation with its members and to gather their initial thoughts on possible elements of the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024. Those activities were aimed at facilitating consideration and adoption of the programme of work by the Forum at its fifteenth session.

42. The Forum secretariat circulated a survey on 19 August 2019 to gather the initial thoughts of members of the Forum on possible elements for the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024. The survey included four questions focused on the following areas: (a) thematic priorities for the 2021–2022 and 2023–2024 bienniums; (b) operational priorities for the quadrennium; (c) other elements to be considered during the quadrennium; and (d) improved organization of technical sessions.

43. The Forum secretariat received 36 responses from 28 Member States, four member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, one regional organization and three major group focal points.¹¹

44. The Forum secretariat also commissioned a discussion paper on possible draft elements for the quadrennial programme of work for the period 2021–2024 to analyse responses to the survey, consider lessons learned from the quadrennial programme of work for 2017–2020 and suggest possible elements for the new programme of work.

45. The secretariat also organized an expert group meeting on the quadrennial programme of work of the Forum for 2021–2024, held at the United Nations Office at Geneva on 14 and 15 November 2019. It brought together 89 experts from Member States, member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and regional and subregional organizations and processes, as well as major groups and other stakeholders.

46. The experts reviewed and discussed the results of the survey on the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024 and elaborated possible elements for the new quadrennial programme of work with a view to making its proposal, taking into account lessons learned from the implementation of the quadrennial programme of work for 2017–2020. The main views and proposals regarding the elements for the new quadrennial programme of work are contained in the Co-Chairs' summary of the meeting.¹²

47. With regard to the development of the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024, experts highlighted the following general considerations:

¹¹ The full responses submitted to the secretariat are available at www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/programme-of-work/questionnaire-4pow-21-24/index.html.

¹² Available at <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EGM-Geneva-Chair-Summary-4POW-21-24.pdf>.

(a) It should be flexible and clearly structured in support of the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, addressing specific global forest goals and targets with a view to advancing their achievement;

(b) It should reflect a cross-sectoral approach, avoid looking at forests in isolation and promote engagement with other key sectors;

(c) It should highlight interlinkages between forests and climate change and forests and biodiversity;

(d) The science-policy interface and emerging issues should be addressed in the context of the Forum's technical discussion;

(e) It should address the contributions of forests to the Sustainable Development Goals and continue to provide concise annual inputs and messages for the high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(f) Means of implementation should be addressed at all Forum sessions;

(g) It should promote voluntary national contributions;

(h) It should incorporate a gender perspective into the Forum's work, and there should be greater involvement of the private sector in the Forum's work, for which several targets provide entry points.

48. With regard to the themes of the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024, experts highlighted that:

(a) It should give more prominence to the global forest goals and targets as thematic priorities. The decision as to which goals and targets will be the thematic focus of each biennium may be left to the Bureau based on an exchange of views by the Forum at relevant sessions;

(b) It is important to thematically link technical and policy sessions within a biennium based on the global forest goals and targets, with technical session outputs feeding into and informing policy discussions;

(c) The Bureau may highlight specific targets or sub-themes of the global forest goals based on the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on sustainable development or new or recent global forest-related developments, such as in the context of the Rio Conventions. Suggestions were made with regard to governance, biodiversity, the green economy, emerging issues and catastrophic events such as fire and tropical storms.

49. While not directly relevant to the content of the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024, experts also expressed views on the organization of technical sessions of the Forum, including the following points:

(a) It is important that the exchange of experiences among participants on the themes be interactive and involve perspectives from outside the forest sector. The organization of work should provide the time and format needed to foster and stimulate such interactions within the one-week time limit;

(b) A variety of suggestions was made in this regard, including reducing the number of panels and panellists, better focusing of panels and better time management, inviting the leaders of United Nations system entities and those outside the forest sector to present the linkages between the work of individual entities and the global forest goals, reducing time for opening statements and making use of side events;

(c) Panels may also be a useful way to explore linkages between the global forest goals and targets and the Sustainable Development Goals.

50. On the basis of the above, experts agreed on the draft elements for the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024, as reflected in the Co-Chairs' summary,¹² for consideration and adoption by the Forum at its fifteenth session. The proposal for the quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024, as agreed upon at the expert group meeting, is contained in annex I to the present note.

VII. Communications and the International Day of Forests

51. In accordance with the aim of the communications and outreach strategy of raising awareness about forests and trees, the secretariat of the Forum, since the fourteenth session in May 2019, has organized events on the sidelines of major international conferences and meetings, including the fourteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, in September 2019, and the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in December 2019. The secretariat also used those opportunities to raise awareness of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and to promote synergy between the strategic plan, the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and land degradation neutrality initiatives.

52. In order to raise awareness of the global forest goals and encourage implementation of the strategic plan, the Forum secretariat prepared presentations, social media advisories, issue briefs and publications on the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, the contributions of forests to the 2030 Agenda and capacity development activities conducted by the secretariat, including in relation to monitoring, assessment, reporting and forest financing.

53. The Forum secretariat continued to work closely with the Strategic Planning and Communications Service of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which provides outreach and web and social media services for the Department and facilitates the use of information technology and knowledge-sharing. The secretariat worked with the Service on articles for the Department's newsletter, news stories and social media outreach in support of Forum meetings and activities to mark the International Day of Forests. The secretariat also continued to work closely with the Department of Global Communications to showcase the role of forests in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

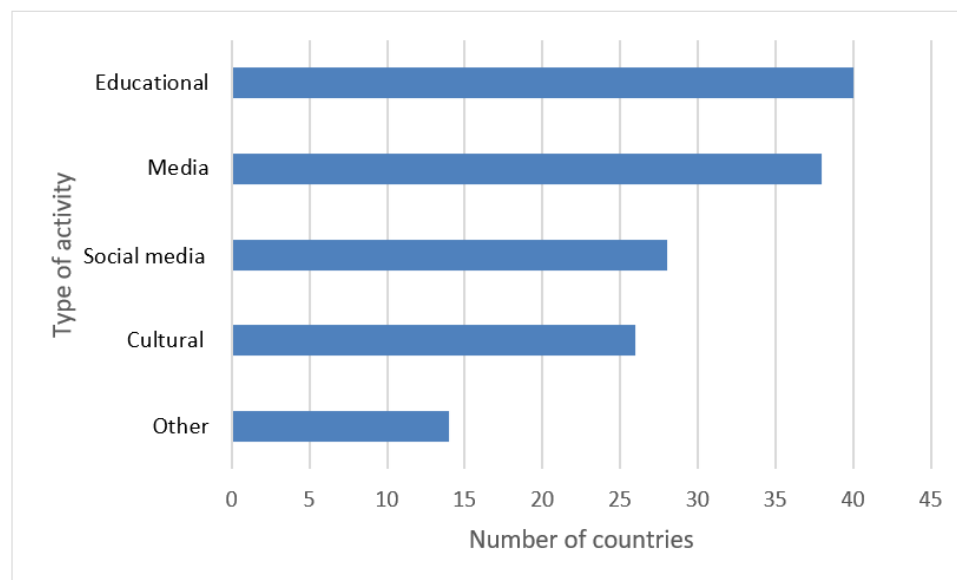
54. With a view to amplifying communications from forest stakeholders, the Forum secretariat continues to work in close cooperation with partners at the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) regional communications networks to enhance cooperation and synergies on communications and outreach and to increase the impact of messaging, including through the annual celebration of the International Day of Forests. In this regard, the theme proposed by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests for the International Day of Forests in 2020, "Forests and biodiversity", was supported and endorsed by the Forum at its fourteenth session.

55. The International Day of Forests, on 21 March, continues to provide a powerful platform for public outreach activities on forests. In their voluntary national reports to the fifteenth session of the Forum,¹³ 48 of the 50 countries that provided reports indicated that they had conducted activities in observance of the International Day.

¹³ See www.un.org/esa/forests/documents/national-reports/unffl15/index.html.

Among the 48 countries, the activities included educational activities (83 per cent), media activities (79 per cent), social media activities (58 per cent), cultural activities (54 per cent) and other types of activities (29 per cent) (see figure below).

Celebrations of International Day of Forests



56. Australia, Botswana, Bulgaria, Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Slovenia, the Sudan, Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and the State of Palestine reported that media outreach was conducted through television, radio, social media and press conferences and releases. Scientific symposiums, seminars, workshops and public forums were held in Australia, Austria, Guinea, Jamaica, Morocco, Nepal, the Philippines, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, the Sudan and Switzerland. Tree-planting events were organized in Australia, Botswana, Cameroon, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ghana, Turkmenistan and Ukraine. Activities involving schools and young people were carried out in Botswana, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Turkey and the United States.

57. In 2019, the International Day of Forests was focused on the interlinkages between sustainable forest management and education. Education is a key enabler of sustainable development and the sustainable management of forests. Learning about forests and their sustainable management is thus vital for both the environment and for sustainable livelihoods and communities. The theme was of particular relevance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Goal 4 on education. A major component of the communications and outreach campaign led by the Forum secretariat was the preparation of a social media advisory, which featured digital cards and suggested messaging for use on Facebook and Twitter. The hashtag #IntlForestDay was widely used, and throughout the International Day was included in over 28,000 tweets by 17,000 contributors, with 247 million timeline deliveries, and over 105 million accounts reached, according to estimates.

58. Statements on the occasion of the 2019 International Day were made by the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council, Mona Juul, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, Maria Francesca Spatolisano, among others.

59. Recognizing the critical relevance of young people in the context of forests and education, the Forum secretariat worked with partners in the United States Forest Service to involve teenage girls' groups in the event held at United Nations Headquarters. Representatives of the Las Fotos girls' organization, in Los Angeles, and the Lower East Side Girls Club, in New York, participated in the opening session of the event and shared their specific perspectives on their roles as environmental stewards. A short film by Club Balam, a girls' club in Chiapas, Mexico, entitled "Forests are the future", was screened at the event. The film showcased forest restoration activities being carried out in Chiapas and the important role of girls and young women in such activities.

60. The event at United Nations Headquarters also featured a panel discussion with senior officials of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration of China and the United States Forest Service and representatives of FAO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The FAO representative provided an overview of the various knowledge products that FAO produces in support of forests and education. The representative of the International Union for Conservation of Nature highlighted the role of science and knowledge in promoting action and in raising awareness across sectors, as well as the untapped potential of ecosystem restoration.

61. A representative of the Three-North Shelterbelt Development Bureau of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration of China presented the results of the Three-North Shelterbelt Programme, which has rehabilitated 336,000 km² of land and recovered more than 10 million ha of grassland that had undergone desertification, leading to ecosystem restoration and poverty alleviation. A representative of the New York City Urban Field Station shared her experiences of working with communities in New York and the important role of education in community development, governance and human well-being.

VIII. Conclusions

62. The United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and its global forest goals and targets represent an ambitious and transformational plan of action for countries, the United Nations system, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and all other actors to address the challenges facing the world's forests and maximize the contribution of forests to the Sustainable Development Goals. In that context, accelerated implementation of the strategic plan and achievement of its global forest goals and targets should continue to be the priority for the Forum and other components of the international arrangement on forests.

63. In advancing the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and achievement of the global forest goals and targets, it is imperative to unleash the potential of the voluntary national contributions to serve as the countries' main path to accelerate progress on the global forest goals, while contributing to all other globally agreed forest-related commitments, including the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and in a post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), among others.

64. The high-level segment of the fifteenth session and the consideration of the Forum's quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024 offer an important opportunity for ministers and other senior officials of countries to discuss among themselves the emerging issues and challenges of significant concern in relation to forests and to interact with key stakeholders, as well as to collectively identify means to address these challenges. The fifteenth session of the Forum also provides a platform to elevate the role of forests in the global policy-setting agenda, including

by highlighting their roles in addressing current global challenges and the interlinkages between forests and other issues on the agendas of major international conferences.

65. At its fifteenth session, a major task of the Forum is to set its agenda and priorities for the next four years and adopt its quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024. The programme of work is the main policy and operational tool for the Forum to advance implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and accelerate achievement of the global forest goals and their associated targets in harmonization with other major global policy frameworks, in particular the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

66. Communications and outreach activities can play an important role in promoting implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, by highlighting best practices and success stories and promoting greater understanding of the vital contribution of all types of forests and trees to people and the planet. In that regard, the annual celebration of the International Day of Forests continues to provide a global platform for the forest sector to communicate with a broader public audience.

IX. Proposals

67. The Forum may wish to consider the following actions:

(a) Urge its members to take specific steps to advance implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and achievement of the global forest goals and targets;

(b) Encourage its members to share best practices and success stories in support of the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030;

(c) Invite its members that have not done so to announce voluntary national contributions in support of the global forest goals and targets at its sixteenth session, using the simple format contained in annex II to the present note;

(d) Emphasize the need to provide concise targeted inputs for the annual sessions of the high-level political forum on sustainable development over the next quadrennium and encourage its members to actively convey the Forum's inputs during the sessions of the high-level political forum;

(e) Invite the high-level political forum on sustainable development to consider the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 as an integrated global framework for forest-based transformational actions to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(f) Adopt its quadrennial programme of work for the period 2021–2024, as contained in annex I to the present note, and invite the Bureau of the Forum to decide on the specific global forest goal and targets or sub-themes for each cycle of the Forum, taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on sustainable development and global forest-related developments.

Annex I

Draft elements for the Quadrennial programme work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2021–2024

General guidance¹

1. The quadrennial programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2021–2024 represents the Forum's contribution to implementing the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and achieving the global forest goals and their associated targets and provides a framework for setting the agendas for annual sessions within the quadrennium.
2. The quadrennial programme of work for 2021–2024 covers two thematically linked bienniums, in 2021–2022 (sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Forum) and 2023–2024 (eighteenth and nineteenth sessions of the Forum). Thematic priorities for each biennium will be based on the global forest goals and targets, taking into account the post-2020 programme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and relevant international forest-related developments. The Bureau will decide on the thematic priorities, taking into account guidance provided by the Forum.
3. The sixteenth and eighteenth sessions of the Forum, in 2021 and 2023, are technical sessions that will include an interactive exchange of experiences on thematic priorities among members of the Forum, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its member organizations, regional and subregional organizations, major groups and other relevant stakeholders. The interactive exchange will include consideration of the science-policy interface and emerging issues and will incorporate a gender perspective.
4. The output of the technical sessions will be a concise summary by the Chair, including proposals, for consideration at the subsequent policy session, in 2022 and 2024, respectively. The output of the policy sessions will be a concise resolution by the Forum on the next steps. At its high-level segment in 2024, the Forum will adopt an appropriate outcome document.
5. Elements for the work programme for the 2021–2022 and 2023–2024 bienniums are contained in sections A–D below.

Quadrennial programme of work for the period 2021–2024

6. The priorities in support of implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 during each session of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2014–2024 are shown below.

A. Sixteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, 2021: technical session

7. Thematic priorities for the 2021–2022 biennium: selected global forest goals and associated targets

¹ Based on Economic and Social Council resolution [2017/4](#) (annex I, United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, para. 34 and annex II, (quadrennial programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2017–2020, paras. 1–3) and suggestions made during the expert group meeting.

8. Technical session elements:

(a) Contributions of members of the Forum to implementing the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030: new announcements of voluntary national contributions, updates on voluntary national contributions and their follow-up related to the thematic priorities;

(b) Contributions of, and enhanced cooperation with, partners in achieving the following thematic priorities:

(i) Contributions of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, its member organizations and the United Nations system to achieving the thematic priorities, and progress on its workplan;

(ii) Contributions of regional and subregional organizations and processes to achieving the thematic priorities;

(iii) Contributions of major groups and other relevant stakeholders, including private and philanthropic communities, to achieving the thematic priorities, and progress on the workplans of major groups;

(c) Interlinkages between the global forest goals and targets and the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2021,² a post-2020 global biodiversity framework (to be agreed in 2020) and other relevant international forest-related developments;

(d) Implementation of the communications and outreach strategy of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and activities regarding the International Day of Forests in 2021;

(e) Means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network;

(f) Monitoring, assessment and reporting: Forum flagship publication (for release by the end of 2021), global core set of forest-related indicators and the 2020 Global Forest Resources Assessment;

(g) Trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests.

B. Seventeenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, 2022: policy session

9. Thematic priorities for the 2021–2022 biennium: global forest goals and associated targets (same as for the sixteenth session);

10. Policy session elements:

(a) Consideration of proposals contained in the summary by the Chair of the sixteenth session of the Forum;

(b) New announcements of voluntary national contributions;

(c) Progress on the workplan of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, including in relation to the thematic priorities;

(d) Interlinkages between the global forest goals and targets and the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on

² Element 2 (c) will be adjusted as needed to reflect how the Sustainable Development Goals are addressed in the post-2020 programme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

sustainable development in 2022³ and relevant international forest-related developments;

(e) Implementation of the communications and outreach strategy United Nations strategic plan for forests 2030 and activities regarding the International Day of Forests in 2022;

(f) Means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network;

(g) Monitoring, assessment and reporting: second round of voluntary national reporting on progress in implementing the United Nations strategic plan for forests, the United Nations forest instrument and voluntary national contributions (input for 2 (h));⁴

(h) Preparations for the midterm review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement for forests in achieving its objectives in 2024 (in accordance with sect. XII of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and paras. 66–68 of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030);⁵

(i) Trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests.

C. Eighteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, 2023: technical session

11. Thematic priorities for the 2023–2024 biennium: selected global forest goals and associated targets;

12. Technical session elements:

(a) Contributions of members of the Forum to implementing the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030: new announcements of voluntary national contributions, updates on the voluntary national contributions and their follow-up related to the thematic priorities;

(b) Contributions of, and enhanced cooperation with, partners to achieving the following thematic priorities:

(i) Contributions of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, its member organizations and the United Nations system to achieving the thematic priorities and progress on its workplan;

(ii) Contributions of regional and subregional organizations and processes to achieving the thematic priorities;

(iii) Contributions of major groups and other relevant stakeholders, including private and philanthropic communities, to achieving the thematic priorities and progress on the workplans of major groups;

(c) Interlinkages between the global forest goals and targets and the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on

³ Element 2 (c) will be adjusted as needed to reflect how the Sustainable Development Goals are addressed in the post-2020 programme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

⁴ The timing of the second round of voluntary national reporting will be determined at the fifteenth session of the Forum. Element 2 (g) will be adjusted accordingly.

⁵ In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 (para. 1 (b)), the international arrangement on forests is composed of the Forum and its member States, the Forum secretariat, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network and the trust fund for the Forum.

sustainable development in 2023⁶ and relevant international forest-related developments;

(d) Implementation of the communications and outreach strategy of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030 and activities regarding the International Day of Forests in 2023;

(e) Means of implementation, including operations and resources of the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network;

(f) Monitoring, assessment and reporting: second round of voluntary national reporting (input for 2 (g)),⁷ global core set of forest-related indicators and preparations for the 2025 Global Forest Resources Assessment;

(g) Preparations for the midterm review of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives in 2024 (in accordance with sect. XII of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and paras. 66–68 of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030);⁸

(h) Trust fund for the United Nations Forum on Forests.

D. Nineteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, 2024: policy session

13. Thematic priorities for the 2023–2024 biennium: global forest goals and associated targets (same as for the eighteenth session);

14. Policy session elements:

(a) Consideration of proposals contained in the summary by the Chair of the eighteenth session of the Forum;

(b) New announcements of voluntary national contributions;

(c) Interlinkages between the global forest goals and targets and the Sustainable Development Goals under review by the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2023 and relevant international forest-related developments;

(d) Midterm review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in achieving its objectives (in accordance with sect. XII of Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 and paras. 66–68 of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030);⁹

(e) High-level segment;

(f) Adoption of the Forum's quadrennial programme of work for the period 2025–2028.

⁶ Element 2 (c) will be adjusted as needed to reflect how the Sustainable Development Goals are addressed in the post-2020 programme of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

⁷ The timing of the second round of voluntary national reporting will be determined at fifteenth session of the Forum. Element 2 (f) will be adjusted accordingly.

⁸ In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 (para. 1 (b)), the international arrangement on forests is composed of the Forum and its member States, the Forum secretariat, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network and the trust fund for the Forum.

⁹ In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/33 (para. 1 (b)), the international arrangement on forests is composed of the Forum and its member States, the Forum secretariat, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, the Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network and the trust fund for the Forum.

Annex II

Draft simple format for communicating voluntary national contributions to the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests

In preparing voluntary national contributions to the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests according to the format below, please consider the following points:¹

- For each global forest goal and target towards which your country plans to contribute, please provide a concise description of the contributions and main activities to be undertaken
- Please also indicate if the voluntary national contribution includes a contribution to other global commitments, in accordance with paragraph 31 of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030

Country name

*Date/United Nations
Forum on Forests
session announced*

<i>Time frame</i>	<i>Main contribution/ activities</i>	<i>Contributes to global forest goals/targets</i>	<i>Impact of voluntary national contribution on other international forest-related commitments and goals</i>			
			<i>Sustainable Development Goals</i>	<i>Paris Agreement</i>	<i>Aichi Biodiversity Targets</i>	<i>Other</i>
By 20__	1, 2, 3, ...	[1.1–1.4]				
By 20__	1, 2, 3, ...	[2.1–2.5]				
By 20__	1, 2, 3, ...	[3.1–3.3]				
By 20__	1, 2, 3, ...	[4.1–4.5]				
By 20__	1, 2, 3, ...	[5.1–5.4]				
By 20__	1, 2, 3, ...	[6.1–6.5]				

¹ It is suggested that official communication of the voluntary national contributions to the secretariat to be undertaken by the national focal point for the United Nations Forum on Forests and through the Permanent Mission of the country to the United Nations in New York.