

EDITORIAL

XV WORLD FORESTRY CONGRESS

“Building a Green, Healthy and Resilient Future with Forests” is the motto of the XV World Forestry Congress, held from 2 to 6 May 2022 in the South Korean capital, Seoul. The first congress took place as far back as 1926 in Rome, and since then has been held every six years. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) also joined the host country in the organisation of the Congress. The congress was attended by more than 15.000 participants from 146 countries, making it the largest global gathering on forests in history. Participants included representatives of governments, public agencies, international organisations, the private sector, academic and research institutions, non-governmental organizations and organizations of communities and indigenous peoples. Since the congress was held in a hybrid format, about 4,500 participants took part online. There were 30 thematic sessions organized within six sub-themes that addressed the most important current issues concerning forests and the products and services they provide. The sub-themes were: reversing deforestation and forest degradation; nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation and biodiversity conservation; the green pathway to growth and sustainability; forests and human health; managing and communicating forest information, data and knowledge; and enhancing management and cooperation. The key highlights of the conference were how forests can help combat the multiple crises facing humanity, including climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, hunger and poverty.

A total of 141 countries participating in the Congress endorsed the Seoul Forest Declaration with the following conclusions:

- Forests transcend political, social and environmental boundaries and are vital for biodiversity and the carbon, water and energy cycles at a planetary scale. The responsibility over forests should be shared and integrated across institutions, sectors and stakeholders in order to achieve a sustainable future.
- Vast areas of degraded land require restoration. Investment in forest and landscape restoration globally must be at least tripled by 2030 to implement global commitments and meet internationally agreed goals and targets.
- There is no healthy economy on an unhealthy planet. Production and consumption need to be sustainable and policies should foster innovative green financing mechanisms to upscale investment in forest conservation, restoration and sustainable use.
- Wood is one of humanity’s most ancient raw materials but can take us into the future – it is renewable, recyclable and incredibly versatile. The full potential of legal, sustainably produced wood must be used to transform the building sector, provide renewable energy and innovative new materials, and move towards a circular bio-economy and climate neutrality.
- Forest degradation and destruction have serious negative impacts on human health and well-being. Healthy, productive forest must be maintained to reduce the risk of, and improve responsiveness to, future pandemics and provide other essential benefits for human physical and mental health.
- Innovative technologies and mechanisms are emerging for the provision of, and equitable access to, accurate information and knowledge on forests. These must be applied widely to enable evidence - based forest and landscape decision-making and effective forest communication.

In addition to the Forest Declaration, the Congress also heard the Youth Call for Action and the Ministerial Call on Sustainable Wood. The future will show us how successfully the world has implemented conclusions despite all the crisis situations of the last few years, such as pandemics and wars. Climate change suggests that there are delays in proper actions towards forests and the entire planet.

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