

Honorable Minister, Chair, colleagues,

As you can see, I have been asked to provide an overview of the status and prospects of forests at the global level. The data I am presenting come from the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2010 led by FAO.

But before we look forward, let me take you a bit back in time.

FAO's first global forest assessment was undertaken at the request of the very first FAO Conference due to a concern of a potential future lack of wood to rebuild Europe after the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war and to facilitate economic development in tropical countries.

It was completed in 1948 and covered 101 countries, representing 66 percent of the world's forests – and focused on what we would describe as the productive functions of forests and forest ownership.

Of course the world has changed drastically since then and our global forest resources assessments have evolved to keep up with these global changes

The latest version, FRA 2010 as we call it is, by far, the most comprehensive assessment ever done of the world's forests. It examines the current status and recent trends for more than 90 variables and all types of forests in all countries

– put together in a way that tells a complete story of what is happening in the world's forests based on seven themes related to sustainable forest management.

More than 900 experts contributed to FRA 2010 including national correspondents and their teams in 178 countries as well as representatives from more than 20 international organizations

Together we compiled information on

693 individual data points for 233 countries and areas spanning a time period of 20 years.

This adds up to 161 469 numbers –

numbers that can be used

- for setting Millennium Development Goals,
- Biological diversity targets and
- Global objectives on forests – and for measuring progress towards their achievement

So what does FRA 2010 tell us about the world's forests?

It tells us that the total forest area in 2010 is just over 4 billion hectares, corresponding to 31 percent of the total land area

As you can see, forests are found from the boreal and temperate region to the subtropical and tropical regions but the area of forest is unevenly distributed.

In fact, more than half of the world's forests are found in just 5 countries.

At the other end of the scale, 64 countries or areas have forests on less than 10 percent of their total land area, also known as "low forest cover countries". Iceland fall into this group. Ten of these countries and areas have no forests at all.

FRA 2010 also tells us that forests continue to be lost. Either through deforestation – or due to natural causes such as volcanic eruptions or extended periods of drought.

However, a key message from FRA 2010 is that while the rate of deforestation and loss of forest from natural causes is still alarmingly high, it is slowing down.

But new forests are also being created. Either through the natural expansion of existing forests unto abandoned land or, more rapidly, through the planting of trees.

These gains in forest area, while significant, are not yet as large as the losses, so, at the global level, we continue to have a net loss of forest area.

In the 1990s, this net loss was around 8.3 million hectares per year. In the period 2000-2010 this went down to about 5.2 million hectares per year – an area the size of Costa Rica.

At the regional level, however, there are large differences. South America reported the largest net loss of forests in the period 2000-2010 of just under 4 million hectares per year.

Africa also had a large net forest loss.

Asia, which had a net forest loss of some 600 000 ha per year in the 1990s, registered a net gain of forests of more than 2 million hectares per year in the last decade, primarily due to large-scale afforestation in China and despite high rates of deforestation in many countries in the region.

The forest area in Europe continued to expand, although at a slower rate in the last 10 years compared to the 1990s. North and Central America registered a relatively small annual net loss of forests over the last 20 years, while the loss in Oceania has increased, partly due to the extended drought in Australia.

This next slide shows countries with a high net gain or net loss in forest area and further amplifies an important message: Most of the net loss of forest happens in countries in the tropical region while most of the net gain takes place in the temperate and boreal zone.

Although the figures on deforestation and net forest loss attract a lot of attention, forest area is only one of many indicators of progress towards sustainable forest management. On its own, it doesn't tell us what kind of forests we have, what condition they are in nor how well they are managed. So FRA 2010 contains much more information than just the forest area.

Primary forests, which are forests with no visible signs of past or present human activities, account for 36 percent of the total forest area.

Natural forests that show some visible signs of present or past human interventions form the second and largest group of forests. This group spans a very wide range - from forests with fairly limited interventions to those, which are heavily degraded.

Forests are being planted for a variety of purposes – both productive and protective. As a result, planted forests now account for 7 percent of the global forest area.

Three-quarters of these consist of native tree species, while one-quarter mainly consists of introduced species.

Two prominent trends are: A decrease in the area of primary forests at a rate of 4 million hectares per year. Although some primary forests are converted to planted forests or to non-forest uses, this loss is largely due to reclassification of primary forests to “other naturally regenerated forests” because of selective logging or other human interventions during the reporting period.

The second trend is an increase in the area of planted forests by about 5 million hectares per year – the vast majority through afforestation – so planting of area not previously forested.

Forest fires, insects and diseases, storms and floods can be devastating, but the area of forest impacted by such events were severely underreported with information missing from many countries – particularly as regards forest fires. While the forest area affected by fires has decreased somewhat in recent years, there has been an increase in the area affected by insect pests. One of these – the mountain pine beetle – has devastated more than 10 million hectares of forests in Canada and the USA. An unprecedented attack exacerbated by milder winter temperatures.

But FRA 2010 also contains some good news:

The area of forest managed primarily for the conservation of biological diversity has increased significantly in the last 20 years – especially during the period 2000-2005. More than 460 million hectares or 12 percent of the world’s forests are now managed for this purpose. The area of forests within national parks and other protected areas has also increased – especially in the last 10 years.

Around 8% of forests are managed for conservation of soil and water

Forests are increasingly being conserved and managed for multiple uses and values – often in combination. They play a crucial role, not only in conservation of

biodiversity but also in climate change, in the provision of wood and non-wood forest products and the protection of soil and water resources. More generally, they contribute to the well-being of current and future generations.

A wide variety of wood and non-wood forest products are harvested and collected from forests, both for local consumption and for national and international markets. Forests provide jobs to more than 10 million people – not counting those working in the sawmills and the forest industry. Many more people are dependent on forests for subsistence use.

Increased awareness of forests, has resulted in changes in forests laws and policies. About  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all forests are now covered by national forest programmes, a participatory approach to preparing and implementing better forest policies and programmes,

Where does Iceland fit in?

Country area: 109 out of 233 countries and territories (103 000 km<sup>2</sup> or 10.3 million ha) : About half /top half

Forest area: 183 out of 233 - so way below the average, which is about 30% (in fact around 30 000 hectares or less than 1 % of land area) Lowest quarter (22%)

Increase in forest area 2005-2010 (in hectares/yr): 54 out of 233 (about 1 000 ha/yr ) in between Belgium and Djibouti. Top quarter

Increase in forest area 2005-2010 (in %/yr): 2 out of 233 (3.32%/year - only beaten by French Polynesia)

Global prospects:

REDD+ A window of opportunity: More than 4 Billion US\$ pledged for REDD readiness.

So perhaps there is light at the end of the tunnel?

Thank You