



Press release - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Government ministers, forest decision-makers from around the world gather for the XIV World Forestry Congress in Durban, South Africa

7 September 2015

Durban, South Africa - Government ministers and forest decision-makers from around the world are gathering for the XIV World Forestry Congress in Durban, South Africa, from 7 to 11 September 2015. The need for governments, civil society and the private sector to boost investment in forests as a key element for sustainable development will be the focus of the Congress, which will include around 4000 people.

Under the theme *Forests and People: Investing in a Sustainable Future*, participants will discuss ways to unleash the full potential of forests to lift rural populations out of poverty, act as buffers against climate change and inspire new technologies and renewable products. Ministers and deputy ministers from around the world will join heads of international and national agencies and several thousand delegates gathering for the Congress, which takes place every six years. Around 20 ministers and deputy ministers will take part in a high-level dialogue on the global forest agenda to explore how investments in forests, forestry and forest communities can best contribute to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This year's event is hosted by the Republic of South Africa with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and marks the first time the Congress will be held on African soil since its inception in 1926. Cyril Ramaposa, Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, Prince Laurent of Belgium, Special Ambassador to FAO for Forests and the Environment, and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, are among speakers who will open the Congress.

At the Congress, FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva will launch FAO's latest Global Forest Resources Assessment, which reveals how the world's forests have changed over the last 25 years and provides the latest information on the state of sustainable forest management.

The Congress outcome, Vision 2050, is set to strengthen the role of forests and forestry in sustainable development and pave the road to a new climate change agreement at the UNFCCC COP21 in Paris in December.

"RECOFTC is at the World Forestry Congress to ensure that the voices, concerns and solutions of local people are heard by the world's forest decision-makers," said Tint Lwin Thuang, Executive Director of RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests, "While forestry stakeholders agree on the need for sustainable forest management, how to achieve it continues to be debated. We must keep in mind that globally, 350 million of the world's poorest people depend almost entirely on forests for their subsistence and survival, and 1.6 billion people depend on them to some extent. These staggering numbers cannot be ignored. Rural people who live in forests are the ones who know the forests best

and have been effectively managing their forests for decades. Thus there are already 1.6 billion potential effective sustainable forest managers in place. These people are the essential drivers of change in sustainable forest management, capable of making sustainable forest management effective if they are included in forest decision-making.”

RECOFTC’s delegation to the World Forestry Congress includes six forest smallholders, community forest members and indigenous peoples from Asia, who were elected as representatives for the region by participants in the *Pre-World Forestry Congress regional meeting in Asia*, held in Bangkok in July 2015. The delegation are involved in more than 25 Congress activities, including a RECOFTC-led Side Event where Congress participants will hear first-hand from forest smallholders, community forest members and indigenous peoples themselves on what it is like from their perspectives to deliver on sustainable forest management on the ground in forests in Asia. The side event, titled *I am the Forest*, will be held Tuesday, 8 September, 18.15-19.30pm in Room 11 CDE in Durban. For more information on RECOFTC’s activities at the XIV World Forestry Congress, see <http://www.recoftc.org/events/recoftc-wfc2015>

To schedule interviews with RECOFTC’s delegation members, or for further information, contact:

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Notes to editors:

- For more information on *The XIV World Forestry Congress*, see www.fao.org/about/meetings/world-forestry-congress/en/ and www.wfc2015.org.za/
- *Background on people and forests in Asia - Investing in social and human capital is an essential part of investing in natural capital and ensuring a sustainable future:* More than 450 million people in Asia and the Pacific are dependent on forests for part of their livelihoods – for food, fuel, fodder and other forest products – as well as for environmental services such as water and microclimate regulation, biodiversity and cultural conservation. Despite many positive developments, these forests are still subject to wide-scale degradation and conversion, and are becoming fragmented within increasingly diverse and intensively used landscapes. This often creates negative impacts for local people, particularly the poor and excluded, as well as on national and global issues such as climate change.

It is thus essential to enable the rural poor to convert natural capital to other forms of capital in a sustainable way. Empowering local communities by investing in tenure rights and appropriate regulatory and supporting frameworks to achieve sustainable forest management is essential.

Community forestry and related community-based forest landscape management has proven to be an effective approach for reducing forest loss and degradation and improving forest conservation and restoration. It is a powerful approach for improving the rights, governance and fairer access to benefits of local people and smallholders and consequently, their livelihoods and food security. There is increasing national policy support for this approach in many forested countries in the Asia and the Pacific region, and growing interest in more sustainable forest management by national entities and international agencies. For more information, see www.recoftc.org.