Press release: NGOs reject adopted text of the legally binding agreement on forests

Warsaw, June 14, 2013

A broad coalition of European NGOs has strongly criticised the text for a Pan-European Forest Convention discussed last week by European Government Representatives.2 Members of the 30-strong coalition, such as FERN, Friends of the Earth Europe, BirdLife Europe, Greenpeace, ClientEarth and the German Nature Conservation League, believe the draft text is biased towards wood production without improving the overall state of forest ecosystems in Europe. They claim the text is too general to be meaningful, and too restrictive with regard to public participation.

“The treaty focuses on regulation of sustainable forest management without clarifying what this means”, said Saskia Ozinga, FERN campaign coordinator. “It does nothing to improve the state of Europe’s forests or their protection, and offers a purely economic view of sustainable forest management, overlooking social, environmental and cultural aspects embedded in existing law and policy.”

Peri Kourakli, Forest Task Force Coordinator for BirdLife Europe said that Europe’s forests are in a poor state of conservation and that the text is too general to create the much needed improvements. “Over 60% of Europe’s forest habitats are in an unfavourable conservation status, and only 5% of the European forests are undisturbed by humans” she explains, “yet the proposed convention lacks any determination to address this. It appears like business as usual, no European forestry law will have to be changed to fulfil the convention’s obligations and there is no tool to check on impact.”

Public participation is also far from satisfactory. NGOs suggested changes to the text at the four negotiation sessions of the international negotiating Committee, but none were taken up. Similarly, written inputs by forest owners and industry were readily published and distributed, but this was not the case for all NGO documents. “What concerns us most is the lack of any rules for public participation in the negotiated text”, Friedrich Wulf, biodiversity campaigner for Friends of the Earth Europe, states. “We are very worried that we are not allowed to raise concerns with the compliance committee. If we are not able to do this, it will not be aware of the full picture. The Committee will therefore be unable to take steps to ensure that the agreement is implemented in full.”

“The draft Forest convention is miles away from what is actually needed to protect forests”, Emily Unwin concludes. “Worse, by its mere existence it seeks to shift the principles according to which forests are governed, to an approach that could never be truly sustainable. This convention will be an attempted act of greenwashing at best, and potentially positively destructive, when it is adopted this fall.”

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2The text is mostly agreed but the discussions continue about institutional arrangements, notably about who will host the secretariat.
For more information, please see:

NGO response to 5 April 2013 negotiating text
(http://www.fern.org/NGOconcernsaboutforeststatement)
NGO Opening statement to most recent discussions on the legally binding agreement on forests
(http://www.fern.org/NGOLBAstatement)
NGO letter to the 3rd round of negotiations (http://www.fern.org/NGOconcernswithLBA)

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