

Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee –First Session
Vienna, 27 February 2012

Mr. Lars Peder Brekk
Minister of Agriculture and Food
Norway

Opening statement

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen;

In June last year I had the pleasure to host the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference in Oslo. It was arranged together with Spain.

The Oslo conference discussed how sustainable forest management can be part of the solution to fundamental challenges to society. This is becoming more and more relevant. Since the Oslo conference, the economic situation in Europe has become even harder. The unemployment rates are increasing in parts of our region. There is a need for more jobs and economic stability. We have the threat of climate change. We experience higher demands for renewable resources, especially for energy purposes. There are also challenges related to biological diversity and water supply.

The forest sector can contribute to solving these challenges. Forestry can create jobs. Forestry can contribute to the shift towards a green economy. The role of forests in combating climate change is well known.

Two decisions were adopted and signed at the Ministerial Conference in Oslo. The first one – “European Forests 2020” – represents a common European strategy, and a framework for actions. The countries agreed on a clear vision for European forests, concrete goals and ambitious 2020 targets. We singled out priority actions to strengthen sustainable forest management and to achieve the 2020 targets.

At the Expert Level Meeting in Madrid two weeks ago, FOREST EUROPE participants discussed how to implement this strategy. The meeting agreed on a FOREST EUROPE work programme. Important tasks will be to further develop sustainable forest management and the policy tools, and to improve information for policy making. I congratulate Spain and the

Liaison Unit Madrid with an excellent start on their leadership. I am pleased that Norway will continue to play an important role in this process, as member of the FOREST EUROPE General Coordinating Committee.

The other decision adopted in Oslo was the “Oslo Ministerial Mandate for Negotiating a Legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe”. This is a historic decision. It is a major step towards a balanced and stable continuity of all forest functions – social, economic and environmental. A legally binding agreement can strengthen the implementation of sustainable forest management. It can help us to tackle the increasing pressure on forest resources. It can lead to a future where forests contribute effectively to sustainable development and a green economy. In other words - it can help us to achieve our goals and targets.

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee – the INC – is tasked to fulfil the Oslo Mandate. It is a great pleasure to see all of you here in Vienna to start this process.

I will not pre-judge any outcome of the negotiations. Instead, please allow me to address some principle points, as well as some personal views, on the process;

- For me as co-chair of the Oslo Conference, and Norwegian minister, it is important that the INC works in accordance with the Oslo Mandate. The negotiation process should be transparent and participatory. In this context I would like to highlight that the Rules of Procedure are based on examples of existing United Nations rules.
- In accordance with the Oslo mandate, the committee will be facilitated by the Chair and the Bureau of the INC. But it is entirely up to you - the parties, through the INC, to deliberate a negotiation result.
- The INC should deliver results as soon as possible. The goal is to complete the work by June 2013. In order to answer to the challenges I have outlined, any delay should be avoided.
- We are dependent on excellent secretariat arrangements. I thank all of you who have contributed to arranging this first session. I trust that the arrangements for the coming

sessions are in safe hands.

- Finally, I encourage you to be ambitious. At the Oslo conference I was impressed by all countries' commitment towards a strengthened European cooperation on forests. I found it very encouraging to co-chair a conference with such a vital outcome. I trust that you will continue in this manner. Let us be motivated by the objective to secure European forests to the benefit of society. The task in front of us is complex. Time is limited. I hope you will show flexibility, to avoid compromising with the overall aim.

I wish you good luck these days in Vienna and for the rest of the negotiation process.

Thank you.