

**Opening Session**  
**Monday, 27 February 2012**

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**Opening Address by**

***Jan Heino***

***Chair of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee***

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once more thank you for your support. Allow me now to deliver a brief opening statement.

I'm grateful to all our Ministers, and through them to the governments, for displaying their political will in giving us a mandate, the Oslo Mandate, to negotiate a legally binding agreement on forests.

We are going to make a historic step, but this is not without history. May I remind you that in Europe the FOREST EUROPE process, jointly with other organizations and partners, has been working since 1990 and has achieved a great deal of success in producing policy tools and mechanisms for promoting sustainable forest management. This cooperation clearly demonstrated its value and relevance for the purpose it was designed for. The

intergovernmental negotiations which we start today have an essential and distinctive new character and a new ambitious target as well.

But the circumstances have changed profoundly recently, and they demand ambitions. Forests and societies face new global challenges and require new solutions. I look, therefore, for great things to emerge from the negotiations on which we embark today.

Distinguished delegates,

We have been given a great opportunity, and a challenging task. In fact, we have had to learn soon that only the challenges are larger than the expectations and we had to face some unforeseen complications. Nevertheless, we have been able to arrive at this remarkable moment and we can start the negotiations.

I wish to thank all those involved in the preparation of this session, including the Bureau and the secretariat. A lot of hard work has already been done by the secretariat, and my Bureau colleagues have been most committed and helpful in contributing to the preparations for this session.

My intention is to do everything possible to facilitate the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, during its sessions and during the intersessional periods. However, I'm deeply convinced that a successful process requires the ownership of all parties involved. Ladies and Gentlemen, you will have to shape this process, you are the engine and fuel to put and keep it in motion. I will be fully at your disposal and make every effort to help in

moving forward to achieve the goal set forth in the Oslo Mandate.

Distinguished delegates,

I want to conclude by thanking all of you for the interest shown during the preparation for this first session and for your participation in this gathering today. I believe that with your input we will have dynamic, transparent, flexible and inclusive negotiations, and, most importantly, that your contributions will lead to a successful end result. What we need is the spirit of compromise and recognition of mutual interests, but these are qualities inherent in negotiations of this kind. We certainly should not underestimate the difficulties which may appear during the negotiations as they progress, but I'm convinced that if there is a political will, we will succeed.

I thank you for the trust once again and I welcome you to this first session of the Committee.

Thank you.