MESSAGE OF IUFRO INTERNATIONAL UNION OF FOREST RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great privilege and honor for me to be here and represent IUFRO at this Conference and celebrate the 70 years of activity of the Romanian Forest Research and Management Institute. On behalf of the IUFRO Board and International Council I wish to express our sincere congratulations to ICAS on the attainment of an extensive period of outstanding research. ICAS is a long-time member of IUFRO and has provided our Union with many active officers in different IUFRO Units. ICAS scientists have also organized successful IUFRO meetings and contributed to IUFRO's publications. All this demonstrates good relations between ICAS and IUFRO but I am looking forward to even more intensified collaboration in the future.

Forests and forestry issues have been given significant and increasing attention in the public debate as well as in national and international processes during the last decade.

New challenges are confronting the managers of the world's forests, with stakeholders demanding a broader range of goods and services, and emphasizing the widening scope of the concept of sustainable forestry. This poses huge challenges, even threats, but also opportunities to forest policy, forest management and forest science.

THE WIDENING SCOPE OF SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Sustainable living has been defined as the ability to meet the needs of today's generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainable forest management was long understood as sustained wood-resources management. In recent decades the concept has widened considerably. Especially the sustainability of forest ecosystems has been emphasized. In spite of the fact that the

widened scope of sustainability has been generally accepted, the earlier narrow wood-resources sustainability has often been transferred to an equally narrow biological diversity conservation. For many people, forest conservation is synonymous with preservation, meaning permanent exclusion of people from forest resources. This leads us to ask whether we have forgotten the basics: what and for whom forestry really is? Although the forests under sustainable management must provide benefits to all species living therein, they still also must serve the needs of the people.

TOWARDS FOREST PLANTATIONS

Forest plantations are likely to become increasingly important in wood production. It has been predicted that by 2050 half of the industrial wood will come from a relatively small area of fast-growing industrial plantations while the current share is only ten percent. This shift will have major implications not only for timber supply, but also for the environment and the future of forestry in general.

Increasing forest plantations will mean a push towards increasing segregation in the use of forests. Under the segregation paradigm, most of the fiber will be produced in intensively managed plantations of fast growing, and in the future probably genetically modified, trees. Natural forests will be conserved in areas, which are either unsuitable for wood production purposes, or not required for them.

It is understandable that segregation is very much promoted by timber industry because it means usually low-cost and competitive wood production. It is, however, supported also by many environmental groups. The reason is that an efficient production in a relatively small area means that the pressure to use natural forests for industrial purposes will diminish.

Because conditions favorable to plantation forestry are very unequal in various countries, a greater role for plantations implies greater international specialization in timber production. Although this is in line with the economic theory that suggests specialization for efficient production, it does not guarantee worldwide conservation. Plantation forestry cannot be applied everywhere, and therefore, many countries will continue to face a choice between the natural forest harvest, resulting loss of biodiversity, and reliance on wood imports.

UNUTILIZED POTENTIAL OF FOREST BIOTECHNOLOGY

Balancing the demand for forest products and the responsibility for forest protection is not an easy task. The challenge is gaining more wood more efficiently on less land and with less environment intrusion. Biotechnology offers a strategy for addressing this challenge. Possibilities include trees with new growth characteristics, altered processing capabilities, resistance to external threats, and economically valuable product

traits. For some applications, the technologies are essentially ready today.

Since the pioneering work of Mendel, biotechnology in agriculture has progressed in leaps and bounds. Compared with agriculture, there has been little effort in forestry to produce genetically superior material for forest plantations and reforestation programmes. At best, the practice in forest plantations has been to produce cuttings from clonal orchards, whose selection is based on phenotypic traits rather than genetic traits. Anyway, there is a full reason to believe that adoption of transgenic crops will occur also in forestry.

Often the term biotechnology is associated entirely with genetic transformation, the most controversial of all biotechnologies as it involves the introduction of selected "foreign" genes into the plant genome. While genetically modified foods are a controversial issue especially in Europe, forestry has so far been exposed to such issues only very minimally, obviously because the applications have been so few. Although the biotech concerns in forestry might appear modest also in the future, the forest sector should be prepared to the debate on these issues.

Need for better science-policy interface

The traditional forest research community has not always been able to react properly and promptly to the needs of the users of research results. The users blame researchers that they do not work on relevant problems and are not able to supply users with the information they need right now. The decision-makers also criticize researchers that they give conflicting information on definite issues. Finally, the users blame researchers that their language is not understandable to them. These accusations can be dangerous for the research community, because the users often represent those who make decisions on research funding, and their dissatisfaction with researchers and their findings can have a negative impact on research budgets.

As for researchers, we, of course, tend to criticize the user community: our clients do not understand and do not even want to understand what we say; they do not base their decisions on the best available scientific information. This is really often true, especially if our results and advice are not in line with the thinking and values of the decision-makers. This, in fact, is the very difference between the research community and the user community: we researchers tend to stress facts, while the decision-makers tend to focus more on values. If we researchers want to get our message across, we must learn how to deal with values. In addition, we have to remember that research is only one policy instrument among many others.

It is obvious that there are clear "cultural" differences between the research community and the user community. Despite these differences - or rather because of them - we need to improve the interaction and interface between the two communities. We have to create mechanisms and structures, which make sure that scientific information is utilized in policy-making. This presupposes that we researchers work with relevant problems and try seriously to translate our scientific information to the knowledge and

know-how of the policy-makers. In order to facilitate this process, IUFRO has established a Task Force on Science-Policy Interface.

Global Forest Information Service: a tool for a better information management

The amount of information is increasing so rapidly that we can speak about information overpopulation. This also applies to forestry, and the problem is less in having more information than how to find the most appropriate information. On the other hand, information providers often do not find appropriate platforms for presenting what they have, and this leaves their data and information inaccessible to others. In order to help address these problems, GFIS, the Global Forest Information Service, is under construction as a joint effort by an extensive international consortium, IUFRO being the lead agency. GFIS will provide the forest community with an Internet gateway to forest-related information from around the world. It will be a remarkable step forward in improving the efficient use of existing information.

Interdisciplinary research in demand

When the concept of sustainable forestry meant more or less only the sustainable use of timber resources, it was sufficient that forest research focused mainly on the biophysical aspects of forest management. Although the sustainable forest management now means, in addition to economic and ecological sustainability, also social, cultural and spiritual functions, research is still poorly linked to these other issues. In today's complex world the problems facing forestry can only be adequately understood by adopting an interdisciplinary approach. This means combining methodologies from the biological and social sciences, sociology, political science, and even such disciplines as geography and cultural anthropology. Only this kind of alliance can provide means and ways to address problems efficiently.

Homage to ICAS

IUFRO wants to give a visible recognition to the Forest Research and Management Institute to memorize its Anniversary. We have prepared a special congratulation plaque, and it is my great pleasure to hand it over to ICAS' Director, Dr. Ovidiu Ionescu. Once more, IUFRO's and my own personal sincere congratulations to ICAS for 70 years of suberb leadership and outstanding service in forest science.