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Talking points

By

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at the

In Focus: SDG 15 Day

2 November, 10 am – 1 pm

Webinar

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Colleagues,

I am honoured to welcome you to this webinar today, which serves as a call for action for Sustainable Development Goal 15: Life on Land. As you guessed from the title, forests are at the heart of this call.

Why do we feel the need for such a call for action?

A while ago, I wrote a blog post titled “A paradigm lost? Making sense of 2020, the Super Year of Nature”. I share the concern of many colleagues in and beyond the UN system that the current health crisis may divert attention, action, and funding away from some of the greatest challenges of our time: climate change, biodiversity loss and degradation of natural ecosystems. Yet, as I wrote in that blog piece, the present crisis has its origins precisely in our inability to live in fine balance with nature. As such, this should only strengthen our determination to get back on the right track.

I believe we can do this – and today, I hope we can show to the world that we *can*. We *know* how to do it.

Forests are absolutely central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in particular SDG 15. Most of the forest area in the UNECE region is managed sustainably. Our forests act as carbon sinks, help moderate extreme temperatures, and host the incredible biodiversity that surrounds us. But, our forests are no strangers to the challenges haunting their global counterparts: they are threatened by changing climate, storms, beetle infestations, and wildfires.

So here is my call to you: let us make sure that we really put forests at the heart of green recovery and our aims to achieve SDG 15. Let us discuss how we can mobilize potential of our forests to mitigate climate change, and how we can conserve forest biodiversity. And let's make sure we walk the talk: we need to assess, realistically, how we can fund green recovery and how can we work together to make this a reality.

I extend my gratitude to all our partner agencies and organizations who joined this call for action today – thank you. In particular, thank you to our dear colleagues at the Food and Agriculture Organization, with whom we continue to enjoy an outstanding working relationship through our joint Forestry and Timber Section.

Finally, I thank UNECE member States for their continued support, especially in these trying times. I was delighted to learn that Mr. Flasbarth, the State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety will be a keynote speaker at this event today – thank you, Mr. Flasbarth, for this honour. We are deeply grateful for your country's and more specifically your Ministry's support to the Secretariat, which has enabled, among other things, capacity-building and awareness-raising on the opportunities for forest landscape restoration in Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. We look forward to hearing your thoughts.

I wish you all an excellent discussion.

Thank you.