

Statement by Dr. P. J. Dilip Kumar, Director General and Special Secretary (Forests), Ministry of Environment and Forests at the Roundtable on “Forests and People”, during the High level Segment of the UN Forum for Forests on February 2, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates

It is with the greatest pleasure that we are participating here today at the 9th Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests. We compliment you and other members of the Bureau for the excellent meeting that you have organized, and assure you of our continuing efforts to implementation of the recommendations of the Forum.

Forestry in India has, over the past one and a half centuries, built on two major foundations: firstly, giving protection to the resource itself by legal and administrative measures to identify and notify forest reserves, and secondly, working with the communities to maintain, over the long term, the productivity of services and materials from the forests, in support of their agricultural needs and livelihoods. Various models of Social Forestry and Agro-Forestry have been developed and implemented successfully, with the result that today it is the trees outside forest (TOF) that provide for the major portion of the timber and wood demand in the economy, thereby reducing the pressure on the remaining tracts of natural forest and habitat.

Mr. Chairman,

The need to drastically reduce the rate of deforestation was given legal strength by the Forest Conservation Act, 1980. This one piece of legislation has done more to protect the remaining forest and natural habitats than any other, and it has been vigorously defended and amplified by a pro-active judiciary in the subsequent decades. It has been our experience that all the different strands of the polity are important in ensuring the long-term survival and sustainable management of this precious resource: well-thought out legislation, a strong and independent judiciary, strong community and civil society participation, and a professional state forester cadre and other administrative personnel and apparatus.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the past two decades, the community has been integrated into the regular forest administration as partners, through the Joint Forest Management framework, which has been an eminently successful application of the “Care and Share” principle. As a result of this paradigm shift in the traditional top-down approach, the country has been able to not just maintain its forests and tree cover in spite of a large human and livestock population, but even to achieve a modest increase of around 3 million hectares over the decade 1997 to 2007. The 100,000 or so JFM committees set up so far in forest-fringe villages are protecting and managing, jointly with the state forest departments, around 20 million hectares fringe forest. Recently, it has been decided to strengthen the already existing linkages of JFM with the local governance structures, by suitable amendments in both the Forest and the Panchayat legislations in the states, to formally make these Village Forest Committees function under the overall supervision and guidance of the basic general body of all the residents in each village, the Gram Sabha or Village Council.

A landmark legislation passed in 2006, popularly known as the Forest Rights Act, is another measure of the resolve of the Government of India to recognize and safeguard the tenorial rights of traditionally forest-dependent people and communities to the lands they have been occupying over a long term, and the habitats they have traditionally utilised for their livelihoods and cultural activities. The Forest Rights Act further strengthens their right to protect and manage these natural common property resources in a sustainable manner, thereby setting right any historical wrongs that may have been committed to generations past, at the time of formation of these forest reserves.

The need for a broader landscape-level approach to forest conservation and sustainable management has been recognized in the National Mission to Green India. It has been proposed to achieve, over the next 10 years, ecological restoration of some 10 million hectares forest and natural habitats (including grasslands, wetlands, urban lands) presently at various stages of degradation, and to create fresh forest and tree crops on another 10 million hectares.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we would like to say with confidence that as the general levels of prosperity improve, there is every likelihood that dependence on forests will correspondingly go down, and the degrading forests and natural habitats will spring back to life, leading to regeneration, both of natural ecosystems and of the communities, in place of the bleak current scenario of a vicious cycle of poverty and environmental degradation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)