



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **International Year of Forests: Taking Action for Our Forests Europe's forests contribute to sustainable societies and a healthy environment across the globe**

Forests are a unique renewable natural resource. Today, the United Nations are launching the International Year of Forests 2011 at their Headquarters in New York. The overall objective is to raise awareness about the need to strengthen the sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests for the benefit of current and future generations. The upcoming FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, which will be convened on 14-16 June in the Norwegian capital Oslo, represents a major European contribution to the International Year of Forests. The launch of this important global forest initiative takes place in conjunction with the Ninth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF9), 24 January-4 February, in New York, USA. The UNFF deliberations will address key challenges of forests for people, livelihoods and poverty eradication.

“Benefits of healthy, sustainably managed forests in Europe go far beyond the borders of the continent and make significant contributions globally”, says the Norwegian Minister of Agriculture and Food, Mr Lars Peder Brekk. Norway currently holds the chairmanship of FOREST EUROPE and will host the next Ministerial Conference.

The cooperation within FOREST EUROPE develops policies to safeguard the vitality of forests in order to meet societies' needs. FOREST EUROPE has been working for 20 years to develop and improve policies on sustainable forest management. The FOREST EUROPE participating countries and the European Union make a substantial contribution to the achievement of the four Global Objectives on Forests agreed by UNFF. Criteria, indicators and guidelines for sustainable forest management have established a solid basis for growth and diversity in today's forests. Forests cover 44 percent of Europe's land area and they continue to expand. Europe's forests represent 25 per cent of the world's forest resources.

#### **Forests for people and nature**

Europe's forests represent a huge potential in mitigating climate change - through carbon sequestration in trees and soils, carbon storage in forest products and substitution of non-renewable materials and energy sources. Forests are also a source of essential and environmentally friendly wood and non-wood products. They help preserve biodiversity and secure the supply of fresh water and they minimise the risks of damage from storms, floods and droughts. Forestry and agriculture are also crucial for employment, land use and the management of natural resources in Europe. Over half of Europe's population lives in rural areas. Forests play an important role in providing jobs and generating income. Forests also provide benefits to human health through a broad range of recreation opportunities.



### **Protecting and safeguarding healthy forests for future generations**

When ministers responsible for forests in Europe gather at the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference on 14-16 June in Oslo, Norway, they will continue to commit to working towards addressing global environmental and societal challenges and objectives. “At the Ministerial Conference in Oslo the European countries will take decisions aimed at the preservation of forests and the safeguarding of their environmental, societal and economic benefits for present and future generations. Norway looks forward to welcoming high level representatives from signatory countries and observer organisations and countries and the media to Oslo in June”, Mr Brekk says. Ministers are expected to adopt a vision, goals and targets for Europe’s forests and address ways to strengthen cooperation on sustainable forest management in Europe. In this context, they will consider opening negotiations on a legally binding agreement on forests and their management in Europe. “It is our intention that the results of the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference Oslo 2011 will be a milestone in international forest policy and a significant celebration of the International Year of Forests”, Mr Brekk says.

### **About FOREST EUROPE – The Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe**

FOREST EUROPE is the pan-European policy process for the sustainable management of the continent’s forests. It develops common strategies for its 46 participating countries and the European Union on how to protect and sustainably manage forests. Founded in 1990, the continuous co-operation of FOREST EUROPE has led to achievements such as the guidelines, indicators and criteria for sustainable forest management.

Priority topics of FOREST EUROPE are to strengthen the role of forests in mitigating climate change, to secure the supply of good-quality fresh water, enhance and preserve forest biodiversity and provide renewable forest products. Other important tasks are to develop a framework for future political collaboration and to prepare options for decision by ministers on a possible legally binding agreement on forests in Europe. Norway currently holds the chairmanship of FOREST EUROPE and will convene the next Ministerial Conference on 14-16 June 2011.

For more information about FOREST EUROPE: [www.foresteurope.org](http://www.foresteurope.org)

For more information about the International Year of Forests: [www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011](http://www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011)

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