



## **PRESS RELEASE**

Oslo, 19 May 2009

### **Growing the Future of Europe's Forests European Forest Policy Makers Discuss a Legally Binding Agreement**

**Climate change is our biggest environmental challenge. By capturing and storing CO<sub>2</sub>, forests and wood play a key role in mitigating the negative effects of climate change. The European concept of sustainable forest management is to safeguard the environmental, economical and social functions of woodlands. It is based on the principles developed by the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE). The pan-European cooperation provides a policy framework for forests and forestry in Europe, thereby creating the basis for national forest policies. Representatives of the member countries are gathered in Oslo, Norway, for a two-day meeting to deliberate the possibilities for a legally binding agreement on forests in Europe.**

Over the last 15 years the MCPFE has carried out remarkable work in developing common principles, criteria and guidelines for sustainable management of forest resources in the pan-European region. However, the framework consisting of declaratory instruments may not be strong enough to effectively address the new challenges facing European forests and the forestry sector. The severe consequences of climate change, impacts of globalisation, increasing demands for biomass and bio-energy, the need to further enhance the full range of ecosystem services from European forests require robust political solutions and effective means. "I think that forest management will be strongly influenced by climate change policy in the years to come. In this situation we must ask ourselves if the present form of cooperation on sustainable forest management in Europe is able to provide what we all aim at, protection of the forests in Europe", says Norway's Forestry Minister and chairman of the MCPFE, Mr Lars Peder Brekk, whose official title is Minister of Agriculture and Food. Norway is currently holding the chairmanship of the pan-European forest collaboration.

At the most recent Ministerial Conference in Warsaw, Poland, in 2007, it was proposed to explore the potential for a legally binding agreement (LBA) on forests in the pan-European region. At the Expert Level Meeting in May 2008, the member countries agreed on establishing an MCPFE Working Group for carrying out this task. The working group consists of representatives of the MCPFE countries as well as observer organisations. One of the main objectives is to describe possible options for a future LBA and to analyse the potential added value as well as pros and cons of a legal format for forests in the pan-European region.

#### **Impacts of a Legally Binding Agreement**

At the Oslo meeting, the participants will discuss options of a legally binding agreement for further analysis of added value and pros and cons. Furthermore, they will focus on examples of levels of commitments and on possible institutional arrangements, including bodies and procedures.

A legally binding agreement for Europe might have great impact throughout Europe and on a global scale. Thus, the working group will assess implications of such an instrument for the MCPFE process, other European agreements, institutions and processes, the EU forest related activities and other international forest related agreements and bodies. The working group will also assess the costs and elaborate a description of a possible negotiation process and recommendations.

**Background information:**

**The MCPFE**

The MCPFE is the pan-European policy process for the sustainable management of the continent's forests. It develops common rules for its 46 member countries and the European Community on ways to protect and sustainably manage forests. Founded in 1990, it is a continuous process which has led to achievements such as the Sustainable Forest Management Principles, which are now being applied to 95% of Europe's forests. High-priority topics of the MCPFE are safeguarding sustainable production of biomass from forests, and to enhance the role of forests in mitigating climate change, securing water supplies and protecting against droughts and floods. These are highly topical issues on the political agenda in Europe. Other important tasks are to develop a framework for future forest collaboration and to explore the possibilities for a legally binding instrument on forests in Europe. Norway currently holds the chairmanship of the MCPFE.

For further information, please contact:  
MCPFE Liaison Unit Oslo  
Kristin Dawes, Communications and Public Affairs  
Mobile +47 941 49 351  
e-mail: [kristin.dawes@mcpfe.org](mailto:kristin.dawes@mcpfe.org)  
[www.mcpfe.org](http://www.mcpfe.org)