

decision is expected on how the global community will deal with forest issues in the years to come.

A Neutral Forum to Discuss International Arrangements

Recognizing the need to make an informed decision on international arrangements and mechanisms and responding to requests for further deliberation on possible elements and functions of any future approach, Costa Rica and Canada formed the Costa Rica–Canada Initiative (CRCI) to support the work of the IFF in this area, providing a neutral, transparent, participatory, and representative forum to facilitate technical discussions. Participation was open to governments, intergovernmental institutions, nongovernmental organizations, Indigenous peoples, women's groups, and the private sector. Attention was also paid to achieving balanced geographic representation and to reflecting the range of views.

The CRCI consisted of three stages: a meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica, February 22–26, 1999; eight regional meetings that took place between August and November 1999 in Argentina, Cameroon, Ecuador, Malaysia, Mexico, Spain, Turkey, and Zimbabwe; and a final meeting in Ottawa, Canada, December 6–10, 1999, to consolidate the results of regional meetings and produce a report for submission to IFF 4.

Participants expressed their appreciation for the CRCI and the process it established through extensive consultations at the regional and national levels. They noted the extent to which regional meetings raised the level of awareness on global forest issues and increased the involvement of many experts who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to learn from and participate in the dialogue. The large number of source documents that the CRCI initiated significantly contributed to increasing understanding worldwide of key forest issues. Experts were also grateful for the frank, open, and transparent exchange of information and views that occurred between regions, allowing them to take stock of the range of opinions and the areas of agreement that could provide the basis for further cooperation.

As with the other meetings held under the auspices of the CRCI, the discussions in Ottawa were attended by experts who participated in a personal capacity. As such, the report is not negotiated text and should not be interpreted as reflecting consensus. Rather, it reflects the range of views expressed. However, broad areas of agreement that emerged from regional meetings were noted: forest issues are not adequately

Consensus on what constitutes "sustainable forest management" can be reached only if there is a common understanding of the issues and objectives. For this reason, Canada is continuing to promote the need for an international convention on forests as the best means of dealing with sustainable forest management in a comprehensive and balanced way.