

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is an overview of the international forest dialogue in the post-UNCED era and, as such, will address the purpose, background, considerations and options that are relevant to this dialogue. It is in Canada's economic and environmental interests that this international dialogue continues and that an international forestry strategy is adopted. Recommendations and a conclusion are oriented toward such a strategy.

During the past few years, issues related to global forests have been receiving increasing attention in international deliberations, and recently, in the context of UNCED, the need for environmental protection in industrialized countries versus the need for economic development in the developing countries polarized the North and South with respect to forest-related issues. The sovereign right of nations to use their forests as they see fit also polarized interests.

There is now almost universal recognition of the fact that conservation, management and sustainable development of global forests is not only an environmental priority but also necessary to secure economic development, and to provide for basic human needs such as food, fuel, shelter, fodder, fibre, literacy and employment. The latter needs are particularly threatened in developing countries facing tremendous population growth and aggravated poverty; environmental concerns are, for this reason, not as preoccupying as development concerns in these countries. In order to ensure the South's participation in any future international deliberations on forests, development aspects must therefore be appropriately accentuated in international discussions, taking into account the multiple dimensions of this critical issue, and exploring potential solutions that would strengthen international cooperation.

Canada should support the proposed establishment of a World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development (WCFSD) in order to address its strategic domestic and international agenda on forests. Such an initiative will maintain the momentum of the international dialogue on the conservation and sustainable development of forests. Canada should start positioning itself now, in order to influence the deliberations of such a Commission.

Jim MacNeill - an eminent Canadian - articulates in a recent book the need to build trust and to strike comprehensive deals in order to respond to new information and an evolving political situation. His words are clearly relevant to the situation Canada is presently facing with respect to the on-going dialogue on forest-related issues:

"The key to action and to winning is to get on base and to play the game as it develops. The aggressive pursuit of a series of smaller bargains would build trust. This course would also offer the opportunity to move around potential blocking coalitions that could obstruct more comprehensive deals; it would generate information on what works and what doesn't work; and it could take advantage of the progressive changes in environmental values and domestic political pressure."¹

¹ MACNEILL, Jim, WINSEMIUS, Pieter and Taizo YAKUSHIJI, Beyond Interdependence: The Meshing of the World's Economy and the Earth's Ecology, Oxford University Press, New-York, 1991, p. 117.