
Opening remarks: Forest Europe Ministerial Conference

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

Welcome to Oslo and to Norway.

A good colleague of mine, and our former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Thorvald Stoltenberg, once said - with a smile - that Norway's major contribution to world peace is that there are so few Norwegians. For the same reason, Norway is one of the countries in Europe with the highest share of forest resources per capita.

Forests definitely are of great social, economic and cultural importance to Norwegians - and an important part of our history as well. During the pre-industrial age the forest was our most important natural resource. Forestry was in fact one of the industries contributing to the

industrialisation of Norway. As you are well aware of, the utilisation of natural resources in the past put the forests under pressure. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Norwegian forests were only one third of what it is today measured by volume. At that time our forests were unsustainably managed.

Luckily some well-informed persons took action and initiated important work to restore our forest resources.

It is important that we learn from this experience. Forests need continuous management, stewardship and attention. We need forest policies which take into account all the values of forests – the economic, environmental, social and cultural role. We need forest policies which ensure the continuity of this renewable resource. Forest policies must be long-term and forward-looking.

When I was a child during the sixties, 350 persons were occupied in forestry in the native district where I grew up.

Today, there are less than 10 persons left. They produce, however, exactly the same amount of timber.

I find this deeply thought-provoking. It clearly illustrates that forestry is one of the industries which during the last decades really has gone through rapid technological developments. It also reminds us that without continuous re-investments in the forestry resources of tomorrow, there will be less to harvest 70 – 80 years ahead.

I would therefore like to stress this: Our generation should not be remembered for exploitation of not renewable resources such as oil and gas, while at the same time being the generation which forgot to re-invest in the renewable resource, forestry.

I know from my own experience as a long time lumber jack what forests mean for development and human well-being. It has been an amazing experience to view the development of sustainable forest management in Norway

and elsewhere. It has also been encouraging to follow the development of international and regional cooperation on the development of sustainable forest management.

Based on our experience in Norway and from other regions, I'm deeply convinced that the development of sustainable forest management has to build on core human rights values to succeed. Forest management is about social equity, economic equity and good governance. In other words, you need natural resources in order to make development, but in order to make *successful* development you need human knowledge as well.

The Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, often wrote of human nature, and in one of his most famous plays the main character declares: Yes, think of it, wish for it or dream about it - but doing it is quite another matter.

To put it another way: turning words into actions requires conviction, courage and leadership.

FOREST EUROPE is an excellent example of cooperation and leadership among countries on all elements of sustainable forest management. However, either cooperation or leadership does occur without effort, and I wish to compliment you all for what you have achieved at a European level. Your achievements have served as examples for similar efforts in other regions and contributed to the global cooperation on forest issues. Based on what you have achieved so far, I am convinced that FOREST EUROPE can serve as a basis for even more complex issues in the future.

Forestry in the future must accomplish many tasks. Sustainable forest management can contribute to mitigate climate change. It can also help meeting the growing global demand for renewable energy. And it can secure opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Primarily, however, forestry shall in the future contribute to economic and ecologically sustainable production of forests.

I wish you all the best for the conference.

Thank you for your attention.