

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

21 March 2014

Forests are the lungs of our planet. They cover one-third of all land area, and are home to 80 per cent of terrestrial biodiversity. They are crucial for addressing a multitude of sustainable development imperatives, from poverty eradication to food security, from mitigating and adapting to climate change to reducing disaster risk.

It is estimated that 1.6 billion people depend on forests for food, fuel, shelter and income. The World Health Organization estimates that between 65 and 80 per cent of people rely on medicines derived from forests as their primary form of health care.

Not only do forests provide essential economic safety nets for a significant number of the world's poor, they underpin economies at all levels. Round wood production, wood processing and the pulp and paper industries account for nearly 1 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product. Non-monetary benefits from forests, such as water, energy, shelter and medicine, are estimated to be two to three times as great. Forested catchments supply three-quarters of freshwater, which is essential for agriculture, industry, energy supply and domestic use.

The International Day of Forests is dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of all types of forests and trees to our economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. However awareness must be coupled with concrete action. As we deliberate on the post-2015 development agenda, let us acknowledge the vital role of forests and pledge to work together to protect and sustainably manage these vital ecosystems.