



NEWS RELEASE

50th Session of the International Tropical Timber Council opens

YOKOHAMA, JAPAN 3 November 2014: The International Tropical Timber Council¹ (ITTC) opened its 50th Session here today, a milestone that will have a major impact on the future of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO). Key items on the agenda include the election of a new Executive Director to take office in November 2015 and the approval of a new Biennial work programme for the years 2015-2016. The Council will also review the international tropical timber situation for the 2013-2014 biennium and undertake its annual market discussion under the theme *'Domestic and emerging international markets – a changing market landscape'*.

During the Session the Council, will also carry out its regular oversight of ITTO's many programs, activities and projects, including:

- the ITTO-CITES programme,
- the ITTO-CBD Collaborative Initiative for Tropical Forest Biodiversity,
- the ITTO thematic programmes, etc.

The session was officially opened by Council Chair, Mr. Robert Busink (the Netherlands), who highlighted: the recent accession of Suriname and Vietnam to the International Tropical Timber Agreement, 2006. ITTO's membership now stands at 69, the largest it has ever been. The Chair noted the importance of the 50th session, not only because of the significance of reaching this milestone, but also because of the evolving challenges facing forests in the international arena, including the review of the international arrangement on forests to be undertaken in 2016. Mr. Busink also stressed that sustainable forest management (SFM) is not only "for people" but also needs to be "with people", an important reason for the existence of capacity building initiatives like the ITTO Fellowship Programme.

Other dignitaries who participated at the opening ceremony included Mr. Satoshi Imai, Director General of the Japanese Forestry Agency; Mr. Katsunori Watanabe, Deputy-Mayor of ITTO's host City of Yokohama; H.E. Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, former President of Guyana; H.E. Mr. Steven Relyved, Minister of Physical Planning, Land and Forestry Management of Suriname; H.E. Mathieu Babaud Darret, Minister of Water and Forest of Cote d'Ivoire; H.E. Mr. Ngole Philip Ngwese, Minister of Forest and Wildlife of Cameroon; H.E. Henri Djombo, Minister of Forest Economy and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Congo; and Mr. Basile Mboumba, Minister Delegate of the Ministry of Forest Environment and Protection of Natural Resources of Gabon.

In his opening statement, Mr. Emmanuel Ze Meka, Executive Director of ITTO stressed that the 50th ITTC Session is a milestone in the evolution of the Organization. He noted the important role of the ITTC in policy formulation and its field-level impacts, including the groundbreaking guidelines for the sustainable management of tropical forests, and the pioneering work on criteria and indicators (C&I). He also noted other groundbreaking Council Decisions on certification, forest law enforcement and cooperation with CITES, all of which had significantly impacted the way tropical forests are managed and conserved around the world.

Mr. Ze Meka also highlighted the work carried out by ITTO in 2014, including the adoption of Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests; the International Forum on Payments for Environmental Services of Tropical Forests convened in Costa Rica; the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Convention on Biological Diversity to extend the cooperation to 2020; the establishment of the Independent Market Monitoring (IMM) system for FLEGT-licensed timber entering the EU market; and the development of a project search feature on the ITTO website.

During the course of the Session, side events to be organized by various partners are scheduled. These include promoting payments for environmental services from tropical forests; cooperation among the three tropical forest basins of the Amazon, Congo and Southeast Asian regions; and the use of electronic tools to improve legality and traceability of timber in Guatemala.

For more information on ITTO and/or the 50th Council Session go to www.itto.int.

Daily coverage of the 50th Council Session by the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) is available at <http://www.iisd.ca/forestry/itto/itct50/>

¹ The Council is the governing body of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO). It meets at least once a year to discuss a wide-ranging agenda aimed at promoting sustainable tropical forest management (SFM) and the trade of sustainably produced tropical timber.