



**International Forum on Payments for
Environmental Services of Tropical Forests**
7-10 April 2014, San José, Costa Rica

**Opening Statement by
Mr. Emmanuel Ze Meka, Executive Director of the
International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)**

Your Excellency, René Castro Salazar, Minister of Environment, Energy and Oceans of Costa Rica

Mr. Eduardo Rojas Briales, Assistant Director-General, Forestry Department, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Mr. Jorge Mario Rodriguez, Director of the National Forest Financing Fund (FONAFIFO) of Costa Rica

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure to warmly greet you on the occasion of the opening of this International Forum on Payments for Environmental Services of Tropical Forests, jointly organized by ITTO, FAO and the Government of Costa Rica.

First, allow me to express my sincere and profound gratitude to Your Excellency, Minister René Castro Salazar, for agreeing to open this forum. Your Excellency, please permit me to extend a hearty congratulations to you and your government on the accession of Costa Rica to the International Tropical Timber Agreement, 2006. It was indeed a great honour for the International Tropical Timber Council to receive Costa Rica as a new member of the Organization last November.

The important role of Costa Rica in pioneering the development of payments for environmental (or ecosystem) services (PES) is widely recognized and, indeed, Costa Rica has become one of the great champions of PES in the world. I am certain that Costa Rica's PES experience will provide not only a valuable source of information but also inspiration for many countries that are represented here today and are interested in exploring PES programmes. Your Excellency, I have no doubt that your vision and insights will inspire our discussions at this forum.

Special words of thanks also go to FONAFIFO of Costa Rica for the support it has provided in the convening of this

forum. I am very happy to see participants from so many countries and many other international and regional organizations. I wish to express my sincere thanks in advance to the keynote speakers, panelists and chairpersons for their contributions.

Permit me, Your Excellency, to express my deep gratitude to the ITTO donors, especially the governments of Switzerland and the United States of America, for financing this forum. The FAO Forestry Department deserves special thanks for its support and contributions to the organization of the forum – it is yet another excellent example of the strong collaboration between ITTO and FAO. I am indeed very hopeful that our joint efforts, in cooperation with other partners, including the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility, will help increase payments for environmental services in the tropics.

In addition, Your Excellency, permit me to acknowledge and express my gratitude to the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet), the

ASEAN-Korea Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO) and other partners for sponsoring participants to this forum.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

ITTO has always recognized the importance of maintaining a continuous supply of goods and services from forests to ensure their optimal contribution to socio-economic development through sustainable forest management (SFM), with due consideration of social and environmental safeguards and biodiversity conservation.

Achieving SFM in the long term requires sufficient financial resources as well as positive incentives that promote and support it. Payments for forest environmental services such as carbon sequestration and storage, biodiversity conservation, watershed protection, and the maintenance of landscape values can help finance SFM and tropical forest conservation.

In 2008, ITTO began implementing thematic programmes on issues crucial to the attainment of SFM. One of these is known as “Reducing Deforestation and Forest Degradation

and Enhancing Environmental Services in Tropical Forests”, or REDDES.

I am pleased to inform you that more than 20 countries have received funding from ITTO under the REDDES Thematic Programme, thanks to the generous contributions of the governments of Norway, Switzerland, USA and Japan. REDDES promotes the capacity of ITTO developing member countries and their stakeholders to maintain and enhance the environmental services provided by tropical forests.

We will hear about some of ITTO’s projects funded under REDDES during the forum. Collectively, they have shown that, although situations vary, reductions in the quality and quantity of forest environmental services have a number of common underlying causes. These are: insecure land and forest tenure; inadequate financing mechanisms; inappropriate policies and legislations; and ineffective institutional arrangements. In addition, many forest-dependent communities live in poverty and have limited options for generating income. If such communities are to support the provision of environmental services, they must

be able to pursue credible livelihood opportunities and be involved in decisions on the management of the resource.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have no doubt that this forum will canvass many of the challenges facing PES, a concept that is expanding in tropical countries as interest grows in developing green economies.

PES programmes can provide a mechanism for compensating forest communities, owners and managers who maintain environmental services, and they can help engage indigenous peoples and local communities in conservation and sustainable development opportunities. PES programmes can also help improve forest law enforcement and governance because the services being paid for need to be monitored.

PES programmes can also provide a medium by which tropical countries can secure payments from the international community for the environmental services their

forests provide. For all these reasons, and others, PES is an important mechanism whose time has come.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This forum will serve many purposes. It will showcase the excellent existing examples of PES and provide information for policy development related to PES. For instance, Costa Rica's innovative Environmental Services Payment Program, which was established in 1997, will provide valuable lessons on how to create political consensus on decisions that affect environmental services and encourage payments for them.

Based on the examples presented during the Forum, we will learn about the wide variety and the challenges facing PES of tropical forests and the mechanisms and conditions that need to be put in place to make PES effective.

The outcomes of this forum will be of great value in various upcoming international meetings, not least the 22nd session of the FAO Committee on Forestry in Rome in June, and the Fiftieth Session of the International Tropical Timber Council in Yokohama, Japan, in November. The outcomes of this

forum will provide important inputs to discussions on the achievement of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, in which enhanced PES can play a crucial role.

This forum has brought together policymakers, researchers, academicians, practitioners, civil society, the private sector, and regional and international organizations engaged in developing and implementing PES programmes. I hope and expect that the diverse partnerships and networks that will be reinforced here in San Jose will help advance PES programmes across the tropics. In this regard, I would like participants in this forum to consider the merits of establishing a platform for promoting PES in the tropics. The purpose of such a platform will be to take concrete actions in the field to make the payment of environmental services a reality in tropical countries. This could be done by:

- promoting policy reforms in tropical countries aimed at incorporating PES in forest laws and regulations;
- compiling and disseminating successful experiences on PES in tropical forests;
- building capacity and support programs and projects directed at PES; and

- analyzing, establishing and promoting linkages between PES and such global issues as biodiversity conservation, climate-change mitigation and adaptation, water regulation, food security and energy production.

The aim of such a platform would be to build awareness of the importance of environmental services provided by tropical forests and to support field programs focused on the above agreed international global policies. ITTO would be more than willing to work with FAO and other partners gathered here to make such a platform a reality.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by wishing you all well in your efforts to enhance PES, at this forum and beyond, as a key strategy in accelerating efforts to conserve and sustainably manage forests in the tropics.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.