

INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL TIMBER ORGANIZATION



NEWS RELEASE

51st session of International Tropical Timber Council begins in Kuala Lumpur

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA, 17 November 2015: The 51st session of the International Tropical Timber Council, which opened here yesterday, could have a major impact on the future of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) as it addresses, among other things, the election of a new Executive Director. The election process began at the 50th session of the Council in November 2014, and the incumbent Executive Director, Emmanuel Ze Meka, retired earlier this month.

Speaking at the opening of the 51st session, Mr Steve Johnson, ITTO Officer in Charge, urged members to appoint an Executive Director who would be seen both within the Organization and internationally to command the support and respect of the entire membership. He noted that retirements would see almost one-quarter of the Secretariat staff depart within one year, representing an opportunity for the appointee to shape the make-up of the Secretariat. Council Chair, Dr B.C.Y. Freezailah, invited members to build on the process commenced last year and elect a new Executive Director by consensus.

H.E. Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas, Malaysia's Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities, opened the 51st Council session, noting that his country was a founding member of ITTO and expressing appreciation for ITTO's role in enhancing expertise in tropical forestry through its programmes and projects. Datuk Embas pointed out some of the challenges faced by member countries in implementing sustainable forest management and said that overcoming these will require further work by ITTO.

Also speaking at the opening ceremony were H.E. Ngole Philip Ngwese, Cameroon's Minister of Forests and Wildlife, who remarked on how Cameroon had benefited from ITTO projects on biodiversity conservation and capacity building, and H.E. Barbara Serwah Asamoah, Ghana's Deputy Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, who noted the importance of electing an Executive Director at the session.

Dr Manoel Sobral Filho, Director of the UN Forum on Forests, reported in his address that world leaders met recently in New York to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the aim of which is to end poverty while protecting the environment. Dr Sobral said that ITTO could play a leading role in the post-2015 International Arrangement on Forests and the new Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network.

During the 51st session, which will end on Saturday, the Council will receive progress reports on the implementation of the Biennial Work Programme for 2015–2016 and the ITTO Thematic Programmes, and it will review the status of cooperation between ITTO and CITES and the Joint ITTO–Convention on Biological Diversity Collaborative Initiative for Tropical Forest Biodiversity. This year's annual discussion on the tropical timber market situation will address the theme, "Raising the profile of tropical timber in the market place". ITTO publications to be presented at the session include the *Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainable Management of Natural Tropical Forests*, *Europe's Changing Tropical Timber Trade*, and *The Impact of Timber Procurement Policies*.

Side-events will be convened during the session on topics such as land conversion and tree plantations in the permanent forest estate, organized by the Civil Society Advisory Group, and the Independent Market Monitoring mechanism for legal timber, organized by the European Union and ITTO.

The International Tropical Timber Council meets at least once a year to discuss a wide-ranging agenda aimed at promoting sustainable tropical forest management and the trade of sustainably produced tropical timber. Go to www.itto.int for more information on ITTO and the 51st session of the Council.

Daily coverage of the session by the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* is available at <http://www.iisd.ca/forestry/itto/itc51/>