

**ITTO INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON
PHASED APPROACHES TO CERTIFICATION
Hotel Allegro-Kursaal, Berne, Switzerland, 19-21 April 2005**

**Message from the Executive Director of ITTO
Dr. Manoel Sobral Filho**

Mr. Hans-Peter Egler, Head of Trade Cooperation, the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (Seco),

Mr. Alhassan Attah, Chairman of the International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC),

Distinguished guests and participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to extend to you all a very warm welcome to the ITTO International Workshop on Phased Approaches to Certification being convened in this stunning city of Berne, the capital of Switzerland. We are extremely honoured by the presence of Mr. Hans-Peter Egler, the representative of the Government of Switzerland and Mr. Alhassan Attah, the current Chairman of the ITTC who have both consented to address this Workshop at its opening. I wish to also express my deepest appreciation to all distinguished guests and participants who have come from all parts of the world to deliberate on the development and promotion of phased approaches to certification as a means to addressing the problem of developing tropical countries lagging behind in the field of forest and timber certification.

Specifically, the objectives of this Workshop are to promote a better understanding of phased approaches to certification among relevant groups and parties; to raise their awareness of the merits and benefits of phased approaches to certification and the possibilities of encouraging the implementation of these approaches; and to facilitate understanding of procurement policies of buyers and public agencies relating to certification and the implications of such policies for tropical timber producers. Towards this end, the Workshop will be dealing with a wide range of issues covering market requirements of certification and the implications of these requirements for tropical timber producers; public procurement policies on tropical timber and the attendant implications for tropical timber producers; market requirements for certification and phased approaches; implementation of phased approaches within existing certification schemes; implications of legal origin and compliance as baseline requirements; status of regional initiatives on certification; and the way forward particularly in terms of support needs and cooperation.

This ITTO International Workshop is the final component of ITTO's on-going work on phased approaches to certification as mandated by the ITTC through its Decision 10(XXXIV). The two other components relating to the development of procedures for the implementation of phased approaches to certification in tropical timber producing countries and the study on financial cost-benefit analysis of forest certification and implementation of phased approaches have been successfully completed and the reports on these components as adopted by the ITTC will be utilized as reference during the Workshop. The outcomes and recommendations of this Workshop will be reported to and considered by the ITTC at its Thirty-eighth Session to be held in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo in June this year. Prior to this on-going work, ITTO's initiative on phased approaches to certification began in 2003 with the conduct of three regional workshops in Jakarta, Libreville and Panama City covering the three tropical producing regions of Asia-Pacific, Africa and Latin America respectively, to examine the potential role of phased approaches to certification as a tool to promote sustainable forest management in tropical timber producing countries.

The basic problem which this ITTO Workshop is addressing is that developing tropical countries continue to lag far behind the developed temperate countries in forest and timber certification. Presently, less than ten percent of the certified forests in the world are located in developing tropical countries. That certification is having an insignificant impact on forests in these countries is a reality that has been widely acknowledged in relevant international deliberations including The Second Forest Dialogue on Forest Certification held in Maidenhead, United Kingdom in October last year.

Two principal factors have contributed to this lingering situation. Firstly, virtually all these tropical countries are developing countries facing competing demands for scarce and inadequate resources in meeting national needs of the highest priority such as poverty alleviation, food security, employment opportunities, public health, education, and housing. In this overall national context, forests seldom make it to the priority list. Secondly, these countries are dealing with natural tropical forests whose economic, environmental and social requirements for sustainable management are much more complex and demanding than those for non-tropical forests. As a result of these constraining factors, there exists in developing tropical countries a considerable gap between the actual level of management and what is required by certification. It would, therefore, be grossly unrealistic for these countries to be subjected to the full requirements of certification at one go. In addressing this basic problem, the concept of phased approaches to certification has been advanced with the rationale of providing an acceptable arrangement under which full compliance with a particular standard is divided into a series of phases to enable tropical timber producers to gain recognition of their efforts to implement and achieve certification.

The outcome of ITTO's work thus far shows a clear support for phased approaches as an urgently needed, pragmatic and practical means of addressing the obstacles faced by developing tropical countries in attempting to gain access to certification. Encouraging interest in phased approaches has also been shown by relevant groups in importing countries including buyers groups, forest owners, managers, industry, governments, financing institutions and certification systems and bodies. It is our hope that the convening of this ITTO International Workshop in the environmentally sensitive consuming market of Western Europe would facilitate greater awareness, understanding and acceptance of phased approaches to certification among buyers and consumers of tropical timber. Surely, this could pave the way for bridging the formidable gap between developed temperate countries and developing tropical countries in their progress towards achieving sustainable forest management and certification.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ITTO has been undertaking policy work and activities of relevance to forest and timber certification since 1991, making it one of the first international organizations to address this evolving issue. These policy work and activities include the commissioning of studies, development of ITTO Guidelines, Criteria and Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management for Tropical Forests, development of auditing systems of sustainable forest management, convening of ITTO workshops on certification as well as participation in international conferences and seminars on the subject, and supporting efforts by developing member countries wishing to be engaged in certification through capacity-building, project activities and the development of phased approaches to certification. ITTO stands ready to continue its role of supporting producing and developing member countries to gain access to certification beside facilitating dialogues, discussions and understanding on the outstanding and emerging issues of certification at the international and regional levels.

In organizing this ITTO International Workshop, we have received valuable support, inputs, and contributions from many quarters. I should like to take this opportunity to put on record my sincere appreciation to the Governments of Japan, Switzerland, USA and Norway for their generous contributions in funding the Workshop; to Mr. Hans-Peter Egler, the representative of the Government of Switzerland and Mr. Alhassan Attah, Chairman of the ITTC for addressing the opening of this Workshop; to the Government of Switzerland for extending valuable logistic and other support under the able leadership of Mr. Daniel Birchmeier; to distinguished guests and participants for their active participation and contribution; to the Workshop moderators, Dr. Markku Simula and Mr. José Augusto A.K. Pinto de Abreu; and to all others who have in one way or another contributed to the convening of this Workshop. I wish you all every success in your deliberations and look forward to receiving some constructive recommendations for the consideration of the ITTC at its Thirty-eighth Session to be held in June 2005.

Thank you.