

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

**Opening Remarks by the Head of Trade Cooperation  
Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (seco)**

**Mr. Hans-Peter Egler**

Distinguished Chairman of the International Tropical Timber Council, Mr. Alhassan Attah

Distinguished Executive Director of the ITTO, Dr. Manoel Sobral,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish you a warm welcome in our cosy and quite handsome capital of the Swiss Confederation. I hope you will pass an interesting stay here in Bern and in the ITTO International Workshop on Phased Approaches to Certification!

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to salute and welcome all of you on behalf of the Swiss Secretariat of State for Economic Affairs (**seco**) and our partners of Intercooperation, to this opening ceremony of the *ITTO International Workshop on Phased Approaches to Certification*. We appreciate your presence, because we consider that one of the important roles that the International Tropical Timber Organization plays is assisting a wide range of groups interested in tropical timber trade and sustainable forest management to meet and discuss important issues like forest certification.

I therefore feel gratified to see you in such big number, especially as many of you have travelled long distances. This is obviously an indication of the interest you have in the theme of the workshop. There are indeed 85 participants from over 25 countries and several organizations here today, plus the ITTO staff. Furthermore, you represent a diversity of interest groups, in the private and the public sectors and the civil society.

We thank ITTO for having taken the decision to organize this workshop and chosen our country to host it. I therefore also extend a special welcome to Dr. Sobral, the Executive Director and the representatives of ITTO, and I look forward to continue our close cooperation in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all realize the importance of the topic of this Workshop. There is indeed a global challenge to address the issues relating to forest resource sustainability, and in particular to preserve the environmental services and the economic wealth provided by tropical forests. This challenge is at the heart of sustainable development. Hence it is a matter of global concern to address issues relating to use and protection of tropical forests, and in particular issues relating to unsustainable uses and illegality. At the same time it is very important for sustainable development of the nations and regions concerned to propose lasting solutions and to bring full confidence to the international trade of tropical timber and timber products.

Forest Certification, as a means to verify forest management practices for market and trade purposes, represents therefore an excellent tool to improve trust in forest management practices. We believe that voluntary market-based forest certification is a good incentive for sustainable forest management, and can eventually contribute to halt forest degradation and undue deforestation. It is in view of this that since ITTO exists and that my country, Switzerland, has made a considerable effort to assist tropical timber exporting member countries to achieve progress towards the objective of sustainable management of their timber producing forest. It is also in this framework that assistance is provided to promote forest certification, because we also believe that it is an incentive to reach that objective.

We recognize that considerable progress has been made around the world in recent years in raising the awareness of stakeholders in forest management, conservation and timber trade on the importance of forest certification. At national levels, progress has also been made in land use planning, resource mapping and inventory, improvement in policy and legal frameworks in which forest management and utilization is conducted. In spite of this progress, tropical deforestation rates are still alarmingly high. This is because forest law enforcement remains critically weak in many of the regions concerned, and forest certification has made very little progress. It is reported that most certified forests are by far those of big companies in temperate and boreal regions. There is therefore still little evidence of the impact of the awareness of the importance of forest certification in addressing tropical deforestation and alleviating poverty of the people who depend on forest resources.

We are convinced that many tropical timber producers will reach the level of certifying the management of their forests if they had access to information and technology, and markets. We recognize the need to step-up the effort to assist in capacity building in order to develop the skills and the technologies to the public and private sectors and to the civil society, particularly in the fields of forest management planning and implementation, land use control, timber flow control, forest management auditing and certification.

In this context, we do share the view that a phased approach to certification can provide a framework and an incentive for forest managers to reach the conditions of full compliance with the requirements of sustainable forest management.

Seco will therefore continue supporting the efforts aiming at:

- Assisting tropical timber producing countries to develop the capability of meeting the SFM standards,
- Promoting partnerships between the private sector and NGOs in order to achieve forest certification,
- Facilitating consultations on mutual recognition of forest certification systems.

On this theme of forest and timber certification, we have chosen to cooperate [mainly] through ITTO which has demonstrated the ability in facilitating dialogue between its producer and consumer members, and to keep them abreast with the issues involved. ITTO has indeed conducted several studies and catalyzed a rich debate on the challenges and opportunities of forest and timber certification, and the holding of this Workshop is yet another step forward in this effort. I hope this Workshop I am so delighted to open, will give a new impetus to a far reaching, well-informed and constructive debate on the opportunities and the requirements of a phased approach to forest certification.

I thank you all, and I now have the honor to declare open the *“ITTO International Workshop on Phased Approaches to Certification”*. Good luck in your deliberations.