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MANAGING STATE FORESTS RESPONSIBLY

9th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference
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EUSTAFOR Statement at Session No 1 – Bonn Ministerial Declaration:
"*FOREST EUROPE - Keeping Sustainable Forest Management Fit for the Future*"

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Distinguished Chairperson, Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As President of EUSTAFOR, representing 39 European State Forest Management Organizations across the continent, it is a great honor to address this esteemed assembly at the 9th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference, organized by the Federal Minister of Food and Agriculture of Germany.

In recent years, the crucial role of forests and the forest-based sector has been increasingly recognized within both EU and global sustainable development policy frameworks. Key policies, such as the EU Green Deal, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and international climate and biodiversity agreements, have all acknowledged forests as central to achieving sustainability and climate-related objectives. Alongside this, we have witnessed a profound shift in public perception and societal attitudes towards forests and their stewardship.

One-third of Europe's forests are owned by member states, which means that they belong to the citizens of Europe. These forests are managed by State Forest Management Organizations (SFMOs), members of EUSTAFOR, which are committed to practicing sustainable and multifunctional forest management to the highest standards, with a long-term vision for the future. Today, Europe's forests are not only sources of raw materials but also providers of a rich array of ecosystem services, contributing to a fossil-free Europe and supporting the transition to a bio-based, circular economy.

Forests are valued not just for their biodiversity but as spaces of recreation, cultural heritage, and employment, particularly in rural areas. However, European forests are under increasing pressure. Changing climatic conditions, growing demands from various sectors, and societal expectations pose significant challenges. Addressing these requires well-informed, adaptable policies that set realistic, balanced objectives and offer effective tools to safeguard that forests will remain a growing and resilient resource across Europe also in the future.

This Ministerial Conference comes at a pivotal moment to discuss how sustainable and multifunctional forest management can address these emerging challenges and serve as a part of the solution. On behalf of state forest managers, I would like to make the following appeals to the Ministers responsible for forests across Europe:

1. **Europe needs resilient multifunctional forests, under management, supported by adaptable policies to effectively combat climate change**
   Proactive forest management must be prioritized to help forests adapt to changing conditions and to mitigate damage caused by storms, pests, draughts and wildfires. Sustainable forest management should be recognized as a key tool in building resilience to these threats.

2. **Europe must seize the benefits of the bioeconomy, innovation and growth**
   Healthy, resilient, and multifunctional forests depend on a viable forest economy. European forests are sources of both wood and non-wood products.

Wood, in particular, provides a sustainable alternative to fossil-based materials and should be at the heart of Europe's future bioeconomy. Increased investment in research and innovation will be essential to unlock new uses for wood and drive the transition to a low-carbon economy.

3. **Biodiversity and nature are embedded in the long-term sustainable forest management**
   European forests are unique sources of amenity and natural habitats enjoyed by citizens across the continent. State forestry organizations have long embraced nature-driven practices, working closely with local communities to ensure that forests are managed sustainably. We stand ready to spearhead initiatives that protect biodiversity while promoting the multifunctional use of forests.

4. **Sound policymaking requires solid expertise at its core**
   Forest-related policies must be based on scientific research and the expertise of forest professionals. Long-term forest management plans, supported by research in areas such as climate adaptation, resilience, biodiversity, and economic viability, are essential for addressing the challenges ahead. Policymakers should support sustainable forest management practices that are grounded in this expertise.

Distinguished Chairperson, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The future of European forests – given their long-life cycles – hinges on the political and managerial decisions we make today. We fully support the ministerial commitments of this conference. With our collective knowledge and expertise, we will actively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how Europe's forests can continue to play a pivotal role in achieving the multiple ambitions of sustainable development and creating a future-fit Europe.

Thank you for your attention.

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