

## Summary of the Fifty-ninth Session of the International Tropical Timber Council: 13-17 November 2023

The fifty-ninth session of the International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC), the governing body of the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), opened in Pattaya, Thailand, with a call from the host country for ITTO to continue promoting legal trade in tropical timber and encouraging the use of wood derived from sustainable forest management (SFM). To fulfil their mandate, ITTC member countries took some crucial decisions to navigate the challenging financial and organizational conditions that have buffeted their organization in recent years.

Most importantly, delegates took steps towards a decision, by mid-2024, to extend its founding agreement up to 2029, thus buying some time before negotiations toward a new International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) must begin. They also agreed to trial a new approach to encourage members that are in arrears with their financial contributions to “catch up” on payments, by allowing part-payment to count towards restoration of some privileges. Crucially, member countries fully supported the Secretariat’s efforts to fundraise with renewed vigor, and to position tropical timber in the context of current international interest in, and support for, action on climate change and biodiversity loss.

ITTC-59 was also a venue for debate over the new European Union Deforestation-Free Regulation (EUDR), which entered into force earlier this year. ITTO’s Trade Advisory Group and the topical timber Producer caucus made strong statements to the Council, as they anticipate smallholders and industry actors will face challenges in complying with the EUDR’s requirements for geolocation and traceability. In response, the EU asserted that the EUDR will give smallholders, women and local communities a stronger position in the supply chain, and enable them to gain a better price for their products. This debate looks set to continue in future meetings.

Despite the busy meeting, many participants took the opportunity to go on a half-day field trip on Thursday afternoon, 16 November, choosing from options to visit a teak plantation, an agarwood plantation, or to the Laem Chabang port and forest checkpoint close to Pattaya.

At the end of the week, the Council formally adopted five decisions. In addition to the most important decision to decide by 1 June 2024 on extending the ITTA, 2006 to 2029, ITTC-59 endorsed projects for SFM and related objectives, adopted its budget and work programme for 2024-25 with an annual budget of USD 7.1

million, and agreed to a four-year trial period allowing members in arrears to still submit project concept notes for possible funding, subject to certain conditions.

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At ITTC-59, Executive Director Sheam Satkuru highlighted ITTO's wealth of on-the-ground experience, its unique mandate on tropical timber, and the relevance of its work to climate change and biodiversity goals. Discussions during the week showed that delegates in attendance were eager to reposition the organization, after a decline in funding in recent years, as a serious actor in the global environment and trade arena.

### **A Brief History of the International Tropical Timber Organization**

The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) was established in 1986 over concerns about the world's tropical forests and the countries that depend on them. Originally focused on regulating trade in tropical timber as a commodity, it quickly began also to address issues of conservation and sustainable management. Today, it also works to address other challenges affecting tropical timber trade and sustainable management, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation.

The ITTO, which is headquartered in Yokohama, Japan, currently has 75 members, divided into two caucuses: 37 countries in the Producer caucus and 38 countries, including the European Union (EU), in the Consumer caucus. ITTO's membership represents about 90% of world trade in tropical timber and 80% of the world's tropical forests.

The ITTO was originally established by the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), which was negotiated under the auspices of the UN Conference on Trade and Development. The ITTA, which was adopted in November 1983, entered into force in April 1995.

**ITTA:** The ITTA was originally set up for a limited period of time. It remained in force for an initial period of five years and was extended twice for three-year periods. Since then, it has been renegotiated on two occasions.

**ITTA, 1994** was the first successor agreement. It was negotiated during 1993-1994 and adopted in January 1994, before entering into force on 1 January 1997. ITTA, 1994 contained broader provisions for information sharing, including on non-tropical timber trade data. It also allowed for consideration of non-tropical timber issues as they relate to tropical timber, and included the ITTO Objective 2000 for achieving exports of tropical timber and timber products from sustainably-managed sources by the year 2000.

**ITTA, 2006**, which is still in force, was the second successor agreement to the original ITTA. It focuses on expanding and diversifying world trade in tropical timber economy and the sustainable management of the resource base. ITTA, 2006 entered into force on 7 December 2011.

Originally, ITTA, 2006 was due to expire in 2021. This was subsequently extended to 6 December 2026. A major focus of discussions in recent years has been whether ITTA, 2006 should be extended further to December 2029, or renegotiated instead.

**The Governing Body—ITTC:** The governing body of the ITTO is the International Tropical Timber Council (ITTC). It includes all members and meets annually. Annual contributions and votes are distributed equally between Producers and Consumers.

The Council is supported by four committees. These committees, which are open to all members and provide advice and assistance to the Council, work on the following issues: Economics, Statistics and Markets (CEM); Reforestation and Forest Management (CRF); Forest Industry (CFI); and Finance and Administration (CFA).

The Council is also assisted by the Informal Advisory Group (IAG), which meets just prior to Council sessions to produce recommendations that the ITTC may wish to consider. There is also a Trade Advisory Group, a Civil Society Advisory Group, and the Expert Panel for the Technical Appraisal of Project Proposals (EP).

**Recent Events:** In the early to mid-2010s, the ITTO experienced some difficulties. First, there was disagreement over the appointment of a new Executive Director in 2014, which was only finally resolved in 2016. Secondly, an investigation was held into the loss of ITTO funds through two failed investments. These issues were eventually resolved, although it took considerable time and energy to do so.

More recently, the annual meetings of the ITTC have focused on issues such as developing a new financing architecture, securing more project funding, and streamlining project cycles. There has also been considerable work on policies for, and engagement with, key stakeholders such as women and youth. The issue of extending the ITTA, 2006, has also been a major focus over the past few years. A decision on this is expected in 2024.

### **ITTC-59 Report**

ITTC opened for its first face-to-face session since the global COVID pandemic at the bayside city of Pattaya, Thailand, on Monday, 13 November. The meeting was hosted by the Royal Forest Department, part of the Thailand's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources.

Mohammed Nurudeen Iddrisu, Chair, ITTC-59, opened the meeting, saying tropical forests are "in the eye of the storm" of current devastating natural phenomena and international conflicts. He called for consensus on a new ITTA and increased efforts to achieve ITTO's mission.

Thawatchai Srithong, Governor, Chonburi Province, Thailand, welcomed everyone, noting Chonburi hosts Thailand's Ecological Corridor Initiative, which incorporates economic goals, innovation, technology, and sustainability.

Poramet Ngampichet, Mayor, City of Pattaya, expressed hope that productive discussions at ITTC-59 would be inspirational for managing tropical timber.

Roberto Seminario Portocarrero, Peruvian Ambassador to Japan, identified ITTO's important role in forest restoration, use and competitiveness of timber products, market information, legal and sustainable supply chains, biodiversity, climate adaptation, and forest-dependent communities' livelihoods. He stressed the need for more financing.

Surachai Ajalaboon, Director-General, Royal Forest Department, Thailand, highlighted the Department's role as the national focal point in Thailand, and expressed appreciation for the cooperation of Chonburi Province and Pattaya city authorities for hosting the conference.

Chayanan Pakdeejit, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand, noted the challenge of combating illegal logging, adding that the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) regional forum had recognized this issue at its August 2022 meeting. She called for promoting legal trade in timber, cooperating with stakeholders, especially those in the private sector, and encouraging use of wood derived from sustainable forest management (SFM). She highlighted the importance of ITTO supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts and building resilience.

Ana María Prieto Abad, Colombian ambassador to Thailand, noted that ITTO has been instrumental in promoting the interests of both producer and consumer countries. She commented that extending the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA) of 2006 would not be an ideal scenario, but expressed support for the work of the preparatory group to analyze the issues and recommend possible decisions that the ITTC could take regarding improvements to operational efficiency of the institution, financial architecture, priorities for action, and regional decentralization.

Sheam Satkuru, Executive Director ITTO, urged delegates to exercise “shared and joint responsibility” among their diverse membership, and between the membership and the Secretariat, noting that the organization has gone “beyond expectations” in enhancing its relevance in the global arena.

The plenary then adjourned for the Consumer and Producer groups to meet.

**Executive Director’s statement:** On Monday afternoon, Satkuru invited participants to observe a moment of silence in observance of the deaths of former ITTO Secretariat staff members John Leigh and Hiras Sidabutar.

She then reported on activities and developments, thanking Japan, China, the US, and Germany for their voluntary financial contributions for 2023. She reported members’ concern regarding the benefits of paying assessed contributions to ITTO, given that some other funding sources do not require assessed contributions and there is a perennial shortage of voluntary funding for ITTO projects. Satkuru highlighted ITTO’s dual mandates of achieving SFM in tropical forests and diversifying the trade in legal and sustainably sourced wood products, also noting its relevance to climate change and biodiversity goals. She called on members to provide information on their efforts to nurture the Organization, stressing the value of publicizing the benefits of the ITTO’s work and the challenges remain in all three Producer regions. She stressed that ITTO cannot represent the interests of countries in arrears, especially given donors’ interest in regional projects. She also commended the example of three Producer member countries that had recently paid their assessed contributions a year in advance.

Peru, for PRODUCER CAUCUS, recognized the challenge of gaining member participation in Council meetings, and observed that external factors such as countries’ own financial crises, and lack of project financing could be leading to lack of enthusiasm among members. He committed to seek bilateral aid to support member countries’ participation.

Satkuru emphasized the important role of national focal points.

### **Organizational Matters**

**Ascertainment of the Quorum:** On Monday, the Secretariat reported 30 Consumers either present or having delegated their votes to another Consumer member, thus reaching quorum. He reported 13 Producers present, comprising 551 votes, short of the 19 members and 667 votes needed for quorum. He informed the Council that the Secretariat would continue its outreach during the week to ask members not present at ITTC-59 to likewise delegate their votes.

For future consideration, he noted some organizations only count members in good standing—those eligible to vote—as the basis for quorum, also saying Council might reconsider helping some members with travel costs to attend the ITTC.

On Wednesday and Thursday, 15-16 November, the Secretariat reported back to Council on progress. Quorum was reached on Thursday after more Producer countries delegated their votes. On

Friday, before the adoption of decisions, the Secretariat noted that quorum had been maintained.

**Agenda and Organization of Work:** Delegates adopted the agenda, [ITTC\(LIX\)/1](#), without comment.

**Report on Council Membership:** Executive Director Satkuru reported no change in membership since ITTC-58 and noted Canada’s unfulfilled intention to attend as an observer during its process of re-acceding to the ITTA, 2006.

**Proposed Distribution of Votes in the 2024-25 Biennium:** There was no comment on the agenda item.

**Admission of Observers:** All prospective observers were admitted.

**Report on Credentials:** On Monday, the Secretariat asked all parties to submit their required credentials. The Credentials Committee, chaired by Christiane Ahou (Côte d’Ivoire), reported on Wednesday and Thursday that it had examined the credentials of all delegates to ITTC-59, including those that had delegated their votes, and no issues were reported. The Credentials Committee accepted the credentials provided, including those of countries that had delegated their vote.

**Election of Officers:** On Wednesday, Anna Tyler (New Zealand) was elected Vice-Chair of ITTC-59.

### **Report of the Informal Advisory Group (IAG): Decisions 3(XXII), 5(XXVI), 2(XLIX) and 2(LI)**

On Monday afternoon, Chair Iddrisu presented the IAG’s report, [ITTC\(LIX\)/2](#), which included six draft decisions:

- Projects, pre-projects and activities;
- Administrative budget for the 2024-25 biennium;
- ITTO Biennial Work Programme for the years 2024-2025;
- Management of the administrative budget;
- Matters related to Article 44 of the ITTA, 2006; and
- Youth Advisory Group.

He proposed addressing the quorum challenge within the roadmap for renegotiating ITTA, 2006.

In response to a question about the Youth Advisory Group from NEW ZEALAND, Chair Iddrisu said this issue would be taken under the agenda item on Article 15 of the ITTA, 2006, which addresses on cooperation and coordination with other organizations.

Peru, for the PRODUCER CAUCUS, preferred to discuss the Youth Advisory Group in the context of an amendment or annex to ITTA, 2006. He questioned why the survey of member countries’ opinions and suggestions with regard to possible renegotiation of ITTA, 2006 had not been distributed, but was only posted online to the members’ section of the website.

Satkuru explained that, previously, establishment of the Trade Advisory Group (TAG) and Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) to ITTO had been taken by Council decisions. She noted that many other organizations are forming separate youth platforms, and that the proposed Youth Advisory Group would involve those undertaking practical training in forestry and wood product development.

The US urged circulating reports well in advance of Council meetings. Satkuru explained that the possibility of a Youth Advisory Group had already been raised to Council a year ago, and cautioned members to carefully consider any decision against including young people.



### **Matters related to Article 19 of the ITTA, 2006 on the Administrative Account – Decisions 3(LVII) and 3(LVIII)**

Björn Merzell (Sweden), Committee on Finance and Administration (CFA), presented the CFA's report, noting that the CFA had met twice in 2023. On behalf of the CFA, he recommended adopting a trial measure that allows members who are in arrears with their financial contributions and therefore ineligible to submit project proposals or concept notes, to submit one proposal for every two years of arrears paid, provided that a payment plan is submitted at the same time.

Peru, for the PRODUCER CAUCUS, welcomed the plan as opening up "possible conversations," while noting it was not a guarantee that members' projects would be financed. It was suggested that all interested members with the necessary technical capacity should attend the CFA meeting to help develop the draft decision.

### **Matters pertaining to Article 44 of ITTA, 2006 – Decisions 4(LVII) and 4(LVIII)**

The ITTC discussed this agenda item on Monday and Thursday.

Participants considered the work of an intersessional working group to assess the need for renegotiation or further extension of the ITTA, 2006. This working group was co-chaired by ITTC-59 Chair Mohammed Nurudeen Iddrisu and by Keiran Andrusko (Australia), who presented the working group's report ([ITTC\(LIX\)/5](#)). He explained that the working group had provided roadmaps for two alternative scenarios based on whether there would be consensus on an extension to 2029, or no consensus. He reported that a survey of members' views on this matter had been conducted and that the deadline for responses had been extended twice, ultimately eliciting feedback from 36 Consumer and 27 Producer countries. He noted consensus among Consumer countries to extend ITTA, 2006 until 2029, while the Producer group had provided mixed responses.

Andrusko drew attention to the Working Group's recommendations, including, *inter alia*, extending ITTA, 2006 from its current expiration date of 6 December 2026 until 6 December 2029; and extending and redefining the working group's mandate until ITTC-60 to undertake preparatory work toward future ITTA renegotiation.

Peru, for the PRODUCER CAUCUS, sought access to the survey. Satkuru informed participants that survey responses were available to members. Andrusko explained that the results of the survey had been reflected in the draft decision presented.

Chair Iddrisu then invited delegates to decide on a further extension. The Producer caucus proposed establishing a preparatory working group. Supported by CHINA, the Producer spokesperson suggested adopting a decision in April or May 2024. The EU said it had no mandate to join a consensus on an extension at ITTC-59.

Executive Director Satkuru reported that ITTO Rules of Procedure 35, 36, and 37, require two steps: members must agree, by a two-thirds majority, to take a special intersessional vote; and then the actual vote must provide options to agree, disagree, or abstain. She noted the first of these steps could be taken at ITTC-59 if quorum was obtained.

Delegates agreed that the Chair's upcoming drafting group would consider a timetable for taking an intersessional decision on extension.

The drafting group met on Wednesday evening.

On Thursday, Working Group Co-Chair Andrusko informed Council that, given broad support of members, progress was being made to reflect that a "decision without meeting" would be taken by April 2024 concerning extension of ITTA, 2006 and that the virtual intersessional working group would be extended until the ITTC-60 in 2024, as the Preparatory Working Group.

On Friday, Chair Andrusko informed the ITTC that, following Rule 33 of the ITTO Rules of Procedure, the decision could be taken through an intersessional ballot.

The US asked to review the ballot's language. Andrusko said it would be circulated to members, along with an explanation of the process.

### **ITTO Biennial Work Programme**

**Progress Report on the Implementation of the Biennial Work Programme 2021-2022 (extended into 2023):** On Wednesday, the Secretariat presented its progress report ([ITTC\(LIX\)/6](#)), highlighting five groups of activities: field-oriented activities involving member countries; policy-related and other strategic work; collaborative work and meetings with other organizations; communications and outreach-related work; and analytical, statistical and other recurring work. He clarified that implementation delays due to the global COVID-19 pandemic had meant the budget of US\$4.6 million for the biennium had been extended over an additional year, without any further funds being sought. He said the largest activity involved building sustainable supply chains.

ITTC Vice-Chair Anna Tyler (New Zealand) then presented an update on the ITTO Fellowship Programme 2022 and 2023 ([ITTC\(LIX\)/7](#)). She noted that more than 1,400 young people have been supported with funding of USD 9.8 million. She reported that funds of just under USD 141,000 are currently available. She noted 97 applications had been screened and 16 fellowships have been awarded, totaling USD 107,000. She urged members to address their arrears, as applicants from member countries in arrears are not eligible to receive a fellowship.

Peru, for the PRODUCER CAUCUS, questioned why youth should be penalized for a country's failings. The US highlighted its long-term support for the Fellowship Programme, stating that ITTO's contribution to the field of forestry is often underestimated.

**Draft Biennial Work Programme 2024-2025:** Chair Iddrisu noted a proposed budget of USD 4.665 million. He noted that pledges have been received for USD 1.467 million from Macao for operation and improvement of the Global Timber Index Platform, and USD 1.413 million from Germany's Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) for continuation of the Mekong teak programme. He noted that a Concept Note from the Trade Advisory Group for a project to enhance stakeholder capacity for carbon trading in tropical timber-producing countries had also been posted to the website for donors' consideration.

In response to a question from the US, Satkuru clarified that activities would be reported on Thursday, and that renegotiation activities, if agreed, will be reflected in the 2026-27 Biennial Work Programme.

The EU requested including the Global Fire Management Hub launched by FAO in May 2023. Satkuru invited funding contributions, explaining that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is in preparation, and that funding is also being sought

for collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO).

***Matters Related to Article 15 of the ITTA, 2006 on Cooperation and Coordination with Other Organizations – Decision 7(LVII)***

The Council took up this agenda item on Wednesday, 15 November. Executive Director Satkuru gave a progress report on ITTO's activities in implementing Decision 7(LVII) in 2023 with members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and others, including to advance the visibility of ITTO in Japan.

Juliette Biao, Director, UNFF Secretariat, stated that further collaboration between UNFF and ITTO will benefit both the UN Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) 2030 and the ITTO's Strategic Action Plan 2022-2026.

Sheila Wertz-Kanounnikoff, FAO, detailed key interventions of the IUCN/FAO GEF 8 Indo-Malaya Critical Forest Biome Integrated Programme being implemented in Lao PDR, Papua New Guinea, and Thailand, which is aimed at, *inter alia*, fostering sustainable use of primary forest in this region.

Jamal Annaglyjova, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariat, by video, described renewed collaboration between CBD and ITTO on implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), noting that almost all provisions are relevant to the forest agenda. She urged enhanced collaboration, for otherwise deforestation will not be halted by 2030.

ITTO Executive Director Satkuru and UNFF Secretariat Director Biao then signed an MOU for a joint ITTO-UNFF initiative. Biao noted its potential to enhance ITTO member countries' implementation of the UNSPF.

In the ensuing discussion, JAPAN confirmed its efforts to assist ITTO's accreditation to the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The EU commended Satkuru on the "good way forward."

On Thursday, discussions on this agenda item resumed, with consideration of a proposed Youth Advisory Group.

PERU supported increased participation of young people in ITTO, for example, on issues of climate change. He suggested following up the recipients of past fellowships through a survey to investigate how they might become involved in ITTO.

COSTA RICA agreed that the impact of ITTO's Fellowship Programme should be reviewed, and noted that active participation of young people would be important, not only for ITTO, but also for the health of the planet.

NEW ZEALAND sought to clarify if the intention was for youth to be involved in ITTO's decision-making processes.

The US, supported by AUSTRALIA, the EU and JAPAN, welcomed enhanced interaction with fellowship recipients and proposed that young people be further involved in ITTO through the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG), and perhaps present at future meetings. He drew attention to the US contribution of USD 20,000 to enable travel and participation. JAPAN cautioned against over-burdening the Secretariat when the task of ITTA extension needs to be prioritized.

Satkuru recalled that Council sessions in the past had included funding of at least five Fellows to present their work, but the practice had declined due to lack of resources. She noted that currently only USD 57,000 is available for Fellowships in 2024. She highlighted the Fellowship Programme's value in generating advocacy for tropical forests and good relationships for ITTO.

Responding to NEW ZEALAND, she noted that the proposed Youth Advisory Group would operate in the same manner as the TAG and CSAG. She cautioned that young people's perspectives would not be fully captured through the CSAG's focus, and that youth involvement should also take place through the TAG, as many may be engaged in the timber industry.

Emphasizing the need to focus on the urgent matters of arrears and the extension of ITTA, 2006, the US proposed that a draft decision be prepared for ITTC-60, inviting both the CSAG and TAG to engage more deeply with youth, and a separate decision be prepared encouraging the participation of former Fellows. Delegates agreed to this.

***Special Account and Bali Partnership Fund***

**Pledges to the Special Account and the Bali Partnership**

**Fund:** On Thursday, Chair Iddrisu opened the floor for pledges to the Special Account. JAPAN announced a pledge of USD 250,000 from its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and USD 530,000 from its Forestry Agency for several specific projects and activities under the Biennial Work Programme 2024-2025. The US pledged USD 520,000 for several country-specific projects and numerous Biennial Work Programme 2024-2025 activities, calling on everyone to access the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* online for information the ITTC process. INDIA, PERU, CÔTE D'IVOIRE, MALAYSIA, and TOGO expressed thanks to JAPAN and the US for funding projects benefiting them. Chair Iddrisu thanked them on behalf of the Council, humorously interjecting, "To quote *Oliver Twist*, 'We need more!'"

**Report of the Panel on Sub-Account B of the Bali Partnership**

**Fund (BPF):** The Chair recalled that the amount remaining in the Bali Partnership Account is around USD 6,000, and invited further pledges, noting the Panel would not meet due to the low funds remaining.

***Implementation of ITTO's New Financing Architecture, Phase II - Decisions 4(LVI) and 8(LVII)***

On Thursday, Chair Iddrisu introduced the relevant agenda item ([ITTC\(LIX/11\)](#)).

Satkuru noted that implementation of this decision, which began in 2019, is reported to Council annually with respect to Decision 8/VII, which sets out the Advisory Board's role. She recalled that at ITTC-58 it was agreed there was insufficient evidence for a review of the pilot programmatic approach, and the task had been deferred to ITTC-60 in 2024.

She highlighted that programme funding of USD 3.8 million for the year 2023 had been raised, and that the programmatic lines attracting the most funding were on legal and sustainable supply chains, and on forest landscape restoration. This included funding from China and Macao for a Global Timber Index platform, and from Germany for a teak project. She further reported that the approach had raised a total of USD 12.1 million over five years, since its introduction, in comparison to ITTO's average project funding of around USD 10 million a year in earlier times. With regard to funding needs, she noted that projects pending finance required around USD 11 million and that about USD 6.2 million of this amount is set to "sunset."

PERU expressed support for the new financing architecture, saying ITTO should not depend exclusively on Consumer country contributions. He noted that the global pandemic, financial crises

and ITTO's own financial problems can still only partially explain the current funding situation, and encouraged ITTO to ally with CITES, FAO and others.

GERMANY requested the Secretariat to further explain the opportunities available through the Indo-Malayan Forest Biome Programme.

AUSTRALIA noted that official development assistance (ODA) for forests has doubled in recent years, but that much of it is going through multilateral funds. He suggested ITTO may more easily receive funds through the CPF.

The US noted that the concept notes have enabled saving of time and effort through this streamlined process, and requested further information regarding outreach to new donors.

Satkuru explained her approaches to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and GCF, noting that ITTO is not a GEF implementing partner and that cooperating with the GEF's implementing partners, such as the FAO and IUCN, will require ITTO to bring in co-funding. She noted the potential for ITTO to offer capacity building to partners. She also described the Secretariat's current efforts toward GCF accreditation, expressing hope for success in 2024. She urged member countries with board positions on funding bodies such as the GEF and the multilateral development banks (MDBs), to garner support for ITTO's work through their own contacts.

JAPAN welcomed the positive results of the programmatic approach, and advised approaching the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund, which will be operational from 2024 and has USD 200 million available for projects. She encouraged diversifying ITTO's sources of financing.

### *Joint Session of the Committees*

The Committees met in a joint session on Tuesday, 14 November, to consider shared agenda items and discuss trade and market issues.

**Report of the Expert Panel for the Technical Appraisal of Project Proposals:** On Tuesday, Akiko Tabata (Japan), Chair of the Expert Panel, presented the panel's report ([ITTC/EP-58](#)), noting that, of seven proposals submitted—from Honduras, India, Thailand, Togo, and Viet Nam—five were recommended for approval, one must be revised, and one requires complete reformulation. She noted a continuing decrease in the number of proposals submitted, from 30 in 2019 to seven in 2023.

**Ex-Post Evaluation Reports:** Delegates then heard about outcomes from the evaluation of several projects under the **Committee on Economics, Statistics and Markets (CESM)**, which addressed:

- Development and Testing of National Forest Stock Monitoring System (NFSMS) with Improved Governance Capabilities at All Levels of Forest Administration, which had taken 88 months rather than the 18 that were anticipated and approved;
- Strengthening of Panama's Management Capacity to Reduce Illegal Logging and Trade in the Eastern Region of Panama through Monitoring and Control Mechanisms, the third in a series of four projects on this topic in Panama; and
- Implementing a DNA Timber Tracking System in Indonesia, to address inefficient tree species identification and illegal timber trade by controlling timber origin.

General recommendations emanating from the presentations stressed: active engagement with stakeholders, such as through establishing an inclusive roundtable for discussion of issues or involving project collaborators and beneficiaries in problem

identification and analysis; developing a comprehensive baseline and regular review of projects against it; routine and rigorous review of long-delayed projects before commencing operations to ensure validity of the original assumptions, risks, planned activities, and outputs; and ITTO scrutiny and approval of any realignment affecting an approved project's logical framework matrix.

On projects under the **Committee on Forest Industry (CFI)**, Gan Kee Seng presented two reports on:

- Capacity Building for Efficient and Sustainable Utilization of Bamboo Resources in Indonesia, which has resulted in increased use of bamboo and local processing, as well as involvement of women groups in propagation; and
- Developing Supply Capacity of Wood-based Biomass Energy in North Sumatra, Indonesia, which has been successfully implemented, but was limited by the need for concurrent energy policy reform.

Finally, under the **Committee on Reforestation and Forest Management (CRF)**, delegates heard the outcomes of a thematic group evaluation of 14 forest landscape restoration (FLR) projects. Suneetha Subramaniam, United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS), reported that all projects had embraced participatory and inclusive approaches, but had given less attention to gender issues. She encouraged greater integration of peer learning approaches, and implementing systems of reward, recognition and incentives to encourage good practice.

In response to a question from the US, Patrick Durst noted that implementation delays of the Philippines project were predictable, and urged attention to the prevailing bureaucratic environment and country conditions when formulating projects and timelines.

INDONESIA noted the bamboo project's activities had continued in partnership with World Agroforestry (ICRAF), the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) and several domestic agencies. She praised the strategic nature of the timber DNA project and agreed with the essential need for policy reform, in addition to capacity building.

**Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG):** Chen Hin Keong, from the not-for-profit organization TRAFFIC, which addresses trade in wild species, moderated a CSAG panel discussion on "SME-Community Forest—Timber Governance and Trade Issues, Challenges, and Way Forward to Meet the Requirements of the EUDR."

Laurent Lourdais, EU, reported on the EUDR, noting the EUDR requires: due diligence for all operators in the EU market or exporters from the EU; a due diligence statement that a commodity is deforestation-free and legal; and traceability linking the commodity to its source. He urged all relevant players to prepare for its application before 2025.

Chandra Shekhar Silori, RECOFTC Thailand, presented on "Navigating timber governance and trade issues: Perspectives from small-scale commodity producers in Indonesia and Thailand." He said smallholders may be asked for increased information, undergo scrutiny of compliance with national legislation, and the EUDR and will need greater awareness of regulations' potential impacts on operations. He recommended strengthening farmers' organizations, engagement in certification schemes and legal reform, and increasing capacity in geolocation technologies.

Christine Wulandari, CSAG Indonesia, spoke on the "Role of wood certification to support community forestry: Experience from Indonesia." She highlighted sales of logs to factories requiring



Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified wood and, since 2019, training for all forest farmer groups, in Indonesia's certification standards.

Rose Pélagie, African Women's Network for Community Forest Management (REFACOF), Cameroon, presented experiences from Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo regarding challenges of access to direct financing by women for their contribution to forest restoration. She called for the funding promised at the 26th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change (COP-26) in Glasgow, UK, to reach Indigenous and Afro-descendant women in local communities.

Alison Castilho, International Institute of Education of Brazil (IEB), presented by video on community and family forest management in the Brazilian Amazon. He noted challenges, including the need for governance arrangements for forestry activities in public community forest territories, and the adoption of effective strategies such as minimum price and traceability.

Chen Hin Keong then presented the CSAG statement. He noted that community forestry currently faces many challenges, including demands for strict traceability and documentation, insecurity of land tenure, low skill levels for sustainable harvesting and trade, weaknesses in value chain governance, and financing that is removed from the actual needs of women users of forest resources, who are rarely involved at the decision-making level.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA, BRAZIL and PERU presented on their national actions to promote sustainable timber, including legal and policy reforms, enforcement, confiscation of illegal products and demarcation of conservation forest areas. BRAZIL noted that combating deforestation is "not something you can do with a pen. It requires financing, policy and political will."

The US said the EUDR affects many smallholders, who face challenges in complying with requirements for geolocation and traceability, especially with regard to products that are packaged in bulk.

PERU argued that deforestation is primarily an agricultural problem, noting that his country already recognizes sustainably-managed forests from which wood can be legally harvested under license.

INDONESIA expressed support for the Independent Market Monitoring (IMM) study.

NEW ZEALAND expressed deep concern about the impacts of EUDR on costs for exporters and the prescriptive nature of the policy. She affirmed the value of ITTO's role in advancing this discussion.

In response, the EU asserted that the EUDR will place smallholders, women and local communities in a stronger position in the supply chain, and enable them to gain a better price for their products. He argued that geolocation tagging is simple and free, with the only issue being its transmission all along the supply chain.

**Policy Work under the Committee on Economics, Statistics and Markets (CEM) and the Committee on Forest Industry (CFI):** The Secretariat detailed several areas of the Committees' policy work in market access, forest and timber certification, cooperation with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Expert Group on Illegal Logging and Associated Trade (APEC EGILAT) on trade and distribution of legally harvested timber, and Independent Market Monitoring (IMM). He noted that the EUDR is superseding the EU Timber Regulation on harvested wood from 2023, and that

ITTO Producers mainly implement the FSC and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) accredited certification schemes, with PEFC comprising 64%.

On IMM undertaken under the Biennial Work Programme for 2021-2022, the Secretariat presented the final report, noting that project had been formulated to enhance the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs). He reported that, to date, only Indonesia has obtained an EU Timber Regulation timber license, and that discerning the impacts of licensing timber is difficult. Nevertheless, he noted that the project had increased ITTO's capacity to undertake such market information services.

Sarah Stork, consultant, reported that IMM was integral to the Indonesia-EU VPA. She recommended addressing confusion about regulations on FLEGT licensing versus voluntary forest certification; ensuring consistent enforcement; and more private sector buy-in.

On VPAs, Rupert Oliver, consultant, stressed the importance of:

- a balanced organizational structure;
- continuous funding for collection and analysis of data;
- strong links between supply and demand sides; and
- willingness to adapt in light of the IMM.

In the ensuing discussion, a UNFF representative requested more information from REFACOF on women's situations and roles, urging policy improvements. INDIA lamented that forest certification is dominated by two private companies globally. He urged ITTO to play a role in setting global standards for certification schemes and enhancing Producer-Consumer cooperation, which, he noted, could potentially accept other appropriate certification schemes.

**Annual Market Discussion:** Rupert Oliver moderated this discussion on Tuesday afternoon, in which government, private-sector and civil society presenters highlighted challenges and opportunities within the tropical timber industry. Oliver noted the unprecedented situation of multiple shocks to the global economy and a large rise in the world's population in the next 20 to 30 years.

Preecha Ongprasert, Royal Forest Department, Thailand, said Thailand is competing with China and Viet Nam as a regional forest product manufacturing hub that relies on plantation timber from acacia and eucalyptus, including woodchips and sawn timber. He noted current vulnerability under EUDR requirements for proof of legal origin of timber and wood products, as there is overall low awareness of this issue. Oliver concurred that, where supply chains are complex, it becomes particularly difficult to track low-value products.

Lyndall Bull, FAO, highlighted the anticipated steep rise in timber demand in her presentation on the role of forests and forest products in a bioeconomy transition. She cited UNEP figures from 2023 suggesting that substituting conventional materials with mass timber—thick, compressed layers of wood that can be used as structural load-bearing elements—could reduce global carbon emissions by 14 to 31%.

Stephen Midgley, Salwood Asia Pacific, anticipated that demand for fuelwood will decrease as people become more prosperous, while demand for wood panels, packaging, and sawn wood will increase; however, expansion of conventional plantations will be difficult where landscapes are already crowded. He highlighted the potential for smallholders to benefit by growing commercial timber, based on clear ownership of land and trees, and in attractive and reliable markets. He agreed that the EUDR increases the cost and complexity of doing business.

Nobutaka Isoda, Sumitomo Forestry, described using “mass timber” in the building industry, noting its safe, proven performance, low environmental footprint, and speed of construction. He urged addressing challenges to using tropical timber in its manufacture.

Richard Eba’a Atyi, CIFOR-ICRAF, Cameroon, spoke about smallholder timber’s importance for domestic and regional markets in central Africa. He acknowledged difficulty in monitoring but said “illegal,” “illegitimate,” and “non-sustainable” are not synonymous.

Franz-Xaver Kraft, GD Holz Service GmbH and European Timber Trade Federation (ETTF), reported on the EUDR’s implications for producers, consumers, and importers. He urged traders to start collecting information for their Due Diligence Statements so their products can be imported into Europe. He listed types of evidence available, various elements of legality, information required from producers, and possible penalties for noncompliance.

Nils Olaf Petersen, GD Holz/ETTF, Germany, acknowledged fears of public blacklisting of companies in violation, differences in countries’ market situations, lack of adequate preparation or communication with stakeholders, and difficulties in compliance.

In the ensuing discussion, delegates raised other issues, including:

- fear that planting a tree plantation in a fire-damaged area would constitute noncompliance;
- lack of differentiation between plantations and natural forests requirements;
- whether to pursue a FLEGT license now the EU Timber Regulation is being superseded;
- lack of exemptions for FLEGT, CITES, or certification compliance;
- capacity of smallholders to collect geo-coordinates;
- the short timescale for preparing for the EUDR;
- difficulty of assessing compliance with labor regulations or human rights;
- possible distortion of trade flows to less sensitive markets;
- costs of creating a sufficient due diligence system;
- questions over who has authority to determine level of risk;
- non-inclusion of extractive industries in the EUDR;
- agricultural conversion as a bigger driver than illegal logging;
- lack of consultation with tropical timber producers;
- prohibition on imports from plantations established post-2020 even on highly degraded forest land;
- the requirement to use scientific names of species rather than names more common in the trade; and
- the problem of geo-locating all materials in composite products.

The EC asserted that small- and medium-sized enterprises generally support the EUDR, including its transparency. He offered EU documentation to assist countries, and stated that geo-location should be manageable. Noting that the EUDR cannot be changed now, he urged everyone’s cooperation on compliance.

The Trade Advisory Group confirmed the timber trade’s support regarding sustainable tropical forest use, but noted that deforestation’s major driver is agricultural expansion, stressing timber as a commodity whose production and consumption promotes forest conservation. He urged more dialogue, asking if the EU “will accept the trade’s hand of cooperation?”

### **Committee on Finance and Administration (CFA)**

On Monday afternoon, Executive Director Satkuru announced that the Producers’ nominee for CFA Chair for ITTF-59 was unable to attend and no nominations for Vice-Chair were received. As a consequence, Björn Merckell, CFA Chair for ITTC-58, was

serving for ITTC-59. Delegates then adopted the CFA agenda ([CFA\(XXXVIII\)/1](#)) without comments. They also agreed to follow Council’s line on admission of observers.

**Draft Biennial Administrative Budget for 2024 and 2025:** The Secretariat introduced this agenda item ([CFA\(XXXVIII\)/2](#)), noting decreases of around USD 100,000 for 2024 and for 2025, with no contingency for fluctuations in currency or member arrears. He said the Working Capital Reserve would partially fund two proposed new staff positions.

The CFA approved the budget.

**Review of members’ contributions to the Administrative Budget:** On this item, ([CFA\(XXVIII\)/3](#)), the Secretariat reported that Producer contributions totaled USD 1,459,511, of a total USD 3,407,635 assessment, while Consumer contributions totaled USD 3,801,791, of a total USD 3,889,433 assessment.

In response to the EU, Satkuru noted that the advance payments of Peru, Honduras, and Malaysia must be used for 2024, not 2023.

Satkuru noted that the USD 7,104,295 budget for 2023 was approved but contributions are almost USD 2 million short every year. She said expenditures are generally based on contributions received.

COSTA RICA noted that Producers must meet increasing restrictions in some Consumer countries, and therefore require financial support for their projects. Chair Merckell lamented the decreasing trend in voluntary contributions.

**Status of the Administrative Account for Financial Year 2023:** Chair Merckell presented the report [CFA\(XXXVIII\)/4](#). He said collection of assessed contributions equaled 71.32% of the 2023 assessment of USD 7,173,648, but that outstanding arrears equal USD 12,345,673. He said the Working Capital Reserve is estimated at USD 8,330,768.99 and that savings had been made in administrative costs.

The Secretariat reported that the Special Account and the Bali Partnership Fund ([CFA\(XXXVIII\)/5](#)) represent voluntary contributions totaling USD 15,788,581.08, of which USD 11,635,879.64 is already committed to specific projects and activities. He reported that, that of USD 4 million in voluntary contributions pledged in 2022, USD 1.8 million was not received. He further reported that the independent auditors had reported a satisfactory opinion, with no specific comments.

The CFA reconvened on Wednesday, when Chair Merckell opened discussion on a draft decision proposed by the virtual intersessional working group, established under Decision 3(LVII), on Matters related to Article 19 of the ITTA, 2006 on the Administrative Account. He noted that the draft decision contained a proposal to adopt a trial measure allowing members to submit one proposal for every two years of arrears paid. He reported that Producers had expressed a preference for prioritizing countries not in arrears. NEW ZEALAND agreed.

PERU proposed allowing 50% of arrears payments to be reinvested in financing projects in the country. JAPAN and the US objected, on the basis that these payments for the administration of ITTO are obligatory and not voluntary, as are project contributions. The US reasoned that the arrears payments are for elements that benefit everyone, not a specific country.

The EU expressed support for the working group’s draft decision.

INDIA suggested the Secretariat explore the possibility of support from other agencies for countries in arrears. Merckell added that some ITTO donor countries might be willing to provide voluntary contributions to pay off arrears for some countries.



Merkell established a contact group to make recommendations to the Chair's drafting group. Its recommendation was reported to the Committee on Thursday morning.

**Updates to the Project Audit Framework:** The Secretariat reported on proposed updates to the ITTO Project Audit Framework ([CFA\(XXXVIII\)/7](#)) to modify and simplify the reporting format, enhance compatibility with International Public Sector Auditing Standards (IPSAS), and change the rules on timing of project audits.

There were no objections to Chair Merkell's recommendation to adopt the updated framework for implementation in all future project audits.

**Election of Chair and Vice-Chair for 2024:** Chair Merkell called for nominations for 2024 for a Chair from the Consumer caucus and a Vice-Chair from the Producer caucus. Peru, for the PRODUCER CAUCUS, nominated Pyoabalo Alaba (Togo) for Vice-Chair. There were no nominations for the Chair.

**Recommendations to the ITTC:** On Thursday, Chair Merkell proposed to recommend that the Council approve:

- the Draft Administrative Budget for the 2024 and 2025 Financial Biennium (CFA(XXXVIII)/2), allocating USD 7,104,000 for each year;
- the Financial Reports Prepared in Accordance with ITTO Financial Rules and Procedures (CFA(XXXVIII)/6), taking note of the required disclosures;
- the recommended banks and institutions; and
- the Update to the Project Audit Framework ([CFA\(XXXVIII\)/7](#)) to be put to immediate use for all future projects.

Based on the contact group's outcome, he proposed that the CFA recommend that Council "take note of the deliberations held regarding Article 19 of the ITTA, 2006 on the Administrative Account." There were no objections.

**Report of the CFA session:** The CFA convened briefly on Friday morning to review and approve the report of its meeting. Chair Merkell presented the CFA report ([CFA\(XXXVII\)/2 Rev.1](#)).

On matters related to Article 19 on the ITTA, the US, with the EU, suggested that future reports be kept more general, without country attributions, and to treat CFA sessions more like "brainstorming sessions."

INDIA asked to amend the report of his statements on incentives for arrears, saying he mentioned the EUDR only as an example of the issues that ITTO has to address.

The Committee approved the report with the requested changes.

### ***Committee on Economics, Statistics and Markets and Committee on the Forest Industry (CEM-CFI)***

The jointly-held 57th session of the CEM-CFI, chaired by Samuel Doe (Ghana), met on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

On Monday delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work ([CEM-CFI\(LVII\)/1 Rev.1](#)). They agreed to the admission of observers as approved by the Council.

**New projects and pre projects:** The CEM-CFI approved two new projects under the time-bound electronic no-objection procedure, namely: a proposal by India for the 5th World Teak Conference: Sustainable Development of the Global Teak Sector—Adapting to Future Markets and Environments; and a proposal by Malaysia for Promoting Sustainable Wood Use for the Domestic Market in Malaysia.

With regard to projects and pre-projects in progress, the Secretariat noted that some had experienced delays.

**Projects Pending Financing:** The CEM-CFI approved a project for Strengthening Technical and Business Management in the Timber Forest Industry of Peru, which was approaching the "sunset" clause limit in May 2024.

JAPAN stressed the importance of financial accountability and timely reporting.

**Projects and Pre-Projects in Progress:** The Secretariat reported that some projects had experienced delays. The CEM/CFI also heard progress reports on three CFI projects:

- Promotion of Sustainable Domestic Wood Consumption in Viet Nam;
- Promotion of Sustainable Domestic Consumption of Wood Products in Thailand; and
- Development of Sustainable Domestic Market for Wood Products in Indonesia.

The Trade Advisory Group suggested consideration of funding for long-term development of capacity for regular periodic research into domestic markets in tropical countries.

**Completed Projects and Pre-Projects:** GHANA presented the achievements of its completed project for Enhancing the Capacity of Forest Communities in Forest Governance, Monitoring and Community Development Projects in Mankraso Forest, highlighting that the project had built the capacity of local communities to participate in discussions of FLEGT between Ghana and the EU, and enabled some to obtain social accountability agreements with timber companies.

The Secretariat further noted completion of two other projects on:

- Promotion and Sustainable Management of Lesser-Used Timber Species (LUTS) in the Moist Forests of the Departments of Atlantida, Colon and Northern Olancho in Honduras; and
- Improved Forest Governance in Mozambique.

The CEM-CFI declared the three projects complete.

Delegates discussed possible projects for *ex-post* evaluation. They recognized the challenge of evaluating projects for which the implementing agency may no longer exist. This was left for discussion under the meeting of the Joint Committees.

### **Biennial Work Programme of the Committees for 2024-25:**

The Secretariat reported on the draft work programme for 2024-2025 ([ITTC\(LIX\)/8](#)). He said increased funding was being sought to continue activities being implemented under the current work programme, listing those that come under the mandate of CEM-CFI as:

- building legal and sustainable forest product supply chains;
- strengthening participation of the private sector in the work of ITTO, with regard to industry-led legality compliance and training in due care; and
- promoting quality timber production from smallholder and local community-established plantations.

He also noted new work programme activities, including statistical capacity building and statistics collection and dissemination. He proposed continuing work on sustainable wood utilization and EGILAT-ITTO collaboration on market access, and possibly on the Trade Advisory Group's proposal regarding extending research into domestic wood use.

**Recommendations to the ITTC:** The CEM-CFI agreed to recommend funding for the three new projects in India, Malaysia, and Peru.

**Report of the Session:** On Friday, the Committees reviewed its draft report to Council ([CEM-CFI\(LVII\)/5](#)). The Secretariat noted that the CSAG report from the Joint Committees session had not

been included in the CEM-CFI report because historically CSAG has been more aligned with CRF for discussion of community forestry. He suggested that as the Joint Committee session was not on the agenda of any of the individual committees, it could be in the main ITTC report. Supported by the EU, he said ITTC could consider having a report from the joint CEM-CFI and CRF session in each committee report in future.

In response to the US and Indonesia, the Secretariat said the report would note the results of the Indonesian DNA Timber Tracking System project have yet to be shared with the host government.

JAPAN noted its funding of the Malaysian project on Promoting Sustainable Wood Use for the Domestic Market.

The US asked if the Guidebook resulting from the successful Ghanaian project could serve as a model for other projects in future. The project leader expressed hope that the concept would be replicated across the country and become “the backbone for community resource development.”

The EU requested referring to positive discussions on the EUDR with smallholders “notably within the EUDR’s Multi-stakeholder Platform,” noting that in FLEGT negotiations “some partners are far from reaching the license stage” and adding that guidance documents on the EUDR are “regularly updated.”

The Secretariat confirmed that the CEM-CFI report would be revised accordingly and appended to the final adopted report of Council to be distributed to everyone after ITTC-59.

The report, with those amendments to be reflected, was adopted.

**Election of Chair and Vice-Chair:** On Friday, the CEM-CFI elected Catherine Karr-Colque (US) as Chair for 2024. The Secretariat informed the Committees that the Producer caucus would provide a nomination for Vice-Chair at a later time.

### ***Committee on Reforestation and Forest Management (CRF)***

The CRF met on Wednesday and Friday.

On Wednesday, CRF Chair Jorge Mario Rodríguez Zúñiga (Costa Rica) opened the session, and invited delegates to adopt the meeting agenda ([CRF\(LVII\)/1 Rev. 1](#)). He noted that the agenda items regarding admission of observers, the Annual Market Discussion, the Report of the Expert Panel for Technical Appraisal of Project Proposals and *Ex-Post* Evaluations had already been addressed in the joint sessions. Delegates adopted the agenda without further comment.

**Policy Work:** The Secretariat drew attention to activities related to dissemination of the ITTO Guidelines for Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) in the Tropics, in the form of a policy report published in partnership with the United Nations University and related capacity-building activities including International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) learning modules. He drew particular attention to the FLR activities in the draft Biennial Work Programme 2024-25, including plans for three regional capacity building workshops in hybrid format, to be conducted in the three Producer regions.

MALAYSIA welcomed delegates to the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on FLR, which is due to take place in 2024 in Sarawak, and invited additional funding contributions.

GERMANY questioned how ITTO can play a role in reconciling increased wood demand from industry with the need for multiple stakeholder demands within a forest landscape. The Secretariat affirmed that a sustainable supply chain will continue to be key to the CEM-CFI’s agenda, and explained that the CRF is working with

partners, including smallholders who, in some countries, provide 80% of timber supply.

INDIA emphasized his country’s commitment to ecosystem restoration, and stressed that its domestic policy and practice support SFM do not allow monoculture plantations to replace forested areas.

On the ITTO-CBD Collaborative Initiative for Tropical Forest Biodiversity/Programme Document for 2024-25 ([CRF\(LVII\)/4](#)), the Secretariat advised that the initiative, first launched in 2011 and renewed under an MOU with the CBD Secretariat in 2021, has undertaken 16 projects in 23 tropical forest countries to date, with total project funding exceeding USD 13 million. The Secretariat further advised that the initiatives have produced many outputs, including the ITTO-IUCN Guidelines for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in Tropical Timber Production Forests.

He reported the outcomes of its 2021 evaluation highlighted the need to work with local communities and Indigenous groups and ensure that they derive benefits, the importance of enabling traditional land rights and practices, and the need for clear indicators to measure the effectiveness of such projects in addressing long-term livelihoods, sustainability and biodiversity conservation.

He highlighted achievements of the initiative, including:

- expansion of a mangrove protected area in Peru by more than 700,000 hectares;
- better understanding of animal movements and habitat conservation in the Emerald Triangle Forest Complex, through transboundary cooperation between Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Thailand;
- planting of more than 120 hectares of mangrove forest in Fiji, through the participation of women’s groups;
- training of more than 400 foresters in Central Africa in SFM; and
- organizing an ITTO side event at UNFF-18 on Enriching Biodiversity in Tropical Production Landscapes through Sustainable Forest Management.

He further noted that the initiative is contributing to GBF targets, which correlate with ITTO’s forest-related goals, including ecosystem restoration and establishment of protected areas.

Yongyut Trisurat, Kasetsart University, presented on achievements of this initiative, including establishing a transboundary conservation partnership in the Emerald Triangle Forest Complex, involving Thailand, Cambodia and Lao PDR, which aimed to protect iconic animal species such as Sarus crane, Eld’s deer, and the lesser adjutant stork.

CAMBODIA, JAPAN, THAILAND and the US affirmed the value of the project, and CAMBODIA noted its political as well as ecological benefits, in view of the history of conflict and land mines in the Emerald Triangle area.

The Secretariat informed the CRF that, following a comment period, the draft ITTO Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainable Management of African Tropical Forests were approved and will be part of the Biennial Work Programme 2024-25, with additional funds sought to hold two regional workshops to disseminate the guidelines.

Delegates discussed revision of ITTO’s existing guidelines on the prevention and management of forest fires, drawing on the experiences of Indonesia and Peru. Thailand’s space agency, the Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency (GISTDA), reported on its use of space technology to survey remote and fire-prone forest areas, noting that Chiang Mai had recently suffered the world’s worst air quality due to fires. The US and

EU called on ITTO to engage with the Global Fire Management Hub launched by FAO, and AUSTRALIA noted the role of fire management in promoting ecological benefits.

INDIA underscored the detrimental impacts of increased wildfires globally, and expressed commitment to minimizing their impacts through integrated approaches, post-fire management, and policy interventions; technology and digital solutions; strengthening involvement of civil society and youth; on-the-ground implementation of wildfire strategies; and attention to transboundary wildfires.

The US urged ITTO to be involved in the Global Fire Management Hub, noting that tropical forest areas must be sufficiently addressed in this forum. AUSTRALIA welcomed recognition of the forest fire issue in the ITTO guidelines, adding that, while attention is often given to fire suppression, fire also has a role in promoting good ecological outcomes.

The Secretariat expressed commitment to supporting the work of the Global Fire Management Hub through capacity building, noting that the new 2024-25 work programme includes fire management activities.

**New Projects and Pre-Projects:** The Secretariat presented the report of the Expert Panel, commending three new projects for approval by the Committee:

- Support to Local Communities of the Mono Plain for the Promotion and Sustainable Management of Community Forests in Togo;
- Strengthening the Conservation of the Critically Endangered Rosewood (*dalbergia spp.*) in Dakrong Nature Reserve and Dong Nai Conservation Landscape in Viet Nam; and
- Support for the Promotion and Sustainable Management of Community Forests in the Oti Plain, Togo.

The CRF approved the projects without further comment.

**Report of Completed Projects:** With reference to document [CRF\(LVII\)/2](#), the CRF declared the Study for Capacity Building of Private and Community Tree Farmers in Benin complete.

**Completed Biennial Work Programme-Based Activities:** The Secretariat noted that two projects had been completed:

- Enhancing Conservation and Sustainable Management of Teak Forests and Legal and Sustainable Wood Supply Chains in the Greater Mekong Subregion; and
- Support for Women's Groups with the Restoration of Forest Landscapes in the Prefectures of Blitta and Lacs, Togo, Phase 2.

Yongyut Trisurat, Kasetsart University, detailed the achievements of the Mekong teak project, including the conservation of teak genetic resources, strengthening of community-based and smallholder team forest management, and improved supply chains for agro-forestry systems.

Rose Pélégie, REFACOF, highlighted that the project in Togo had provided food for households while restoring landscapes, promoting social cohesion, and building women's skills to produce seedlings in their own nurseries.

The CRF took note of the completed projects.

**Ex-Post Evaluation:** The Secretariat informed the CRF that the FLR evaluation outcome has been published as a policy report by ITTO and UNU-IAS.

TOGO questioned whether the quality of short-rotation teak could compare with teak that is grown over its natural life cycle. INDIA shared his own country's experiences, noting that the shorter growing cycle can still produce wood suitable for many purposes, including furniture and house construction. He encouraged ITTO to

promote fast-growing varieties and cloning. GERMANY noted that high-quality teak is required for some purposes, such as in timber decking on boats, but recognized the value of short-rotation teak for smallholders to earn income more quickly. CAMBODIA noted that the shorter cycles have more chance of securing loans from financial institutions.

UNFF cautioned that speculation in commodities can result in "unfortunate experiments" that displace local species without delivering the desired results. CÔTE D'IVOIRE and REFACOF responded that interventions must benefit women's livelihoods.

**Review of Projects, Pre-Projects and Biennial Work Programme-Based Activities in Progress:** The Secretariat presented an overview of projects ([CRF\(LVII\)/4](#)).

The Secretariat presented a video on achievements of a community forest management project in Belem, Para State, Brazil. CAMBODIA offered remarks on a community forestry management project in the provinces of Kratie and Monduliri.

On the project for Management of Upper Baram Forest Area for Conservation and Sustainable Development with Involvement of Local Communities in Upper Baram, Sarawak, MALAYSIA complained of donor interference from the Bruno Manser Fund. She requested the Secretariat's assistance, adding that the project could potentially provide a model multi-stakeholder platform.

The Secretariat noted delays in a project to Pilot Sustainable Management Systems for Secondary Natural Forests in the Collective Afro-descendant Community Territory of the Bajo Calima Community Council, Municipality of Buenaventura, Colombia. COLOMBIA explained that the project deals with many issues, including the ongoing peace agreement with the FARC guerrillas. He stressed that the project potentially offers multiple benefits, if implemented. Chair Rodriguez expressed hope that the project agreement can be signed and implemented.

Regarding the project for Promoting Sustainable Forest Management and Local Wood Consumption through Capacity Building and improvement Regulation in the North Zone, Costa Rica, Rodriguez, speaking as COSTA RICA, noted that his country's President had visited the area and had personally signed the project agreement. He anticipated great impact from the project investment for Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the area.

The CRF noted progress on several other projects, including for Conservation and Plantation of Caoba in Peru, and on Rosewood Conservation in Viet Nam.

**Biennial Work Programme-Related Activities:** The Secretariat noted five CRF activities under the work programme that are experiencing challenges, including lack of financial support for smallholders, premature harvesting of plantation teak, and a complicated timber certification process with high transaction costs in some countries.

**Date and Venue:** The CRF agreed the timing and venue will be in line with ITTC-60.

**Recommendations to ITTC:** The CRF agreed to request the ITTC to allocate sufficient funds for the two Togo projects and the Viet Nam rosewood project.

**Report of the Session:** The CRF reconvened briefly on Friday morning to review and approve the report (CRF(LVII)/6).

MALAYSIA asked to note that successful implementation of its Upper Baram project will require all partners' full collaboration.

The CRF forwarded the report to the plenary for adoption.

**Election of Chair and Vice-Chair:** PAPUA NEW GUINEA, BRAZIL, and CAMBODIA supported the appointment of former



Vice-Chair Jorge Mario Rodríguez (Costa Rica) to be Chair of the CRF, consequent to the unavailability of former Chair Alicia Grimes (US). The Secretariat informed the Committee that, with this change, the Consumer caucus would provide a nomination for the Vice-Chair.

### Reports of the Committees

On Friday, the Committees reported back to the Council plenary.

Samuel Doe (Ghana), Chair, CEM-CFI, presented the CEM-CFI's report ([CEM-CFI/LVII/5](#)).

Jorge Maria Rodríguez (Costa Rica), Chair, CRF, presented the CRF report (CRF (LVII)/6).

Björn Merckell (Sweden), CFA Chair, presented the Biennial Administrative Budget for 2024-25 ([CFA\(XXXVIII\)/2 Rev.1](#)) in the amounts of USD 7,104,228 and USD 7,104,278, respectively;

The Council adopted the Committee reports and budget document.

### Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Council for 2024

In the final ITTC-59 plenary on Friday, Council Chair Iddrisu welcomed Jorge Mario Rodríguez Zúñiga (Costa Rica), as incoming CRF Chair, and Catherine Karr-Colque (US), as incoming CEM-CFI Chair. He noted that nominations have not yet been received for the CFA Chair position.

Outgoing ITTC-59 Chair Iddrisu welcomed Anna Tyler (New Zealand), as the incoming Chair of the ITTC. In her statement, Tyler emphasized the importance of "hearing all voices" in the process to extend, then potentially renegotiate, ITTA, 2006. She expressed special thanks to the outgoing Producer spokesperson, Jorge Malleux (Peru), and welcomed the incoming spokesperson, Muhammad Zahrul Muttaqin (Indonesia).

### Venue and Dates of ITTC-60 and ITTC-61 and the Associated Sessions of the Committees

At the closing plenary on Friday, JAPAN announced that ITTC-60 will take place in Yokohama from 1-6 December 2024.

### Decisions and Report of the Session

ITTC-59 adopted five decisions.

**Projects, Pre-Projects and Activities:** In decision 1(LIX), the Council endorses the approval obtained through its time-bound electronic no-objection procedure for these projects and pre-projects:

- Support for the Promotion and Sustainable Management of Community Forests in the Oti Plain, Togo;
- Development of an Information System on the Potential of Wood and Carbon to Support Sustainable Forest Management in South Kalimantan, Indonesia;
- Support to the Local Communities of the Mono Plain for the Promotion and Sustainable Management of Community Forests;
- Promoting SFM and Local Wood Consumption through Capacity Building and Improvement Regulation in the North Zone, Costa Rica;
- Assessment and Dissemination of Knowledge and Experience for Ex-Situ Conservation and Plantation of Caoba in Northern Coastal Area, Peru;
- 5th World Teak Conference: Development Sustainable Development of the Global Teak Sector—Adapting to Future Markets and Environments (India);

- Strengthening the Conservation of the Critically Endangered Rosewood (*Dalbergia spp.*) in Dakrong Nature Reserve and Dong Nai Conservation Landscape, Viet Nam; and
- Promoting Sustainable Wood Use for Domestic Market in Malaysia.

The Council urges members to consider financing any projects for which funds are not immediately available and also requests the Executive Director to continue consulting with potential donors. The decision includes an annex listing previously-approved projects and work programme activities, with donor expressions of interest and pledges, amounting to over USD 6.1 million.

**Administrative Budget for the 2024 and 2025 Financial Biennium:** In decision 2(LIX), the Council approves and adopts the Biennial Administrative Budget for the financial years 2024 and 2025, as contained in document [CFA\(XXXVIII\)/2 Rev.1](#), in the amount of USD 7,104,228 and USD 7,104,278 in 2025, respectively.

**ITTO Biennial Work Programme for the Years 2024-2025:** In decision 3(LIX), the Council adopts the Biennial Work Programme for 2024-25. The decision authorizes the Executive Director to seek voluntary contributions from Member Countries and other funding sources to finance implementation; implement activities in the approved work programme, and ensure that future activities to be funded outside the core budget are formulated as Concept Notes, so that member priorities and donor interest and financing can be assessed. The Secretariat is to report back on progress at ITTC-60 and ITTC-61.

**Management of the Administrative Budget:** In view of insufficient contributions from ITTO Members to the 2023 administrative budget, decision 4(LIX) adopts a trial measure that allows members that are ineligible to submit project proposals or concept notes, in accordance with ITTA, 2006, Art. 19.8, to be allowed to submit one proposal for every two years of arrears paid, provided that a payment plan for the total arrears is submitted at the same time. This trial measure will commence on 1 January 2024 for a four-year period until 1 January 2028.

**Matters Related to Article 44 of the ITTA, 2006:** Decision 5(LIX), recognizes that, while broad support was indicated at ITTC-59 to extend the ITTA, 2006 for an additional three years, some members require further time to complete their formal processes to support that decision. The Council decides to, *inter alia*:

- take a decision without meeting by 1 June 2024 on whether the ITTA, 2006 should be extended for a period of three years from 7 December 2026 until 6 December 2029;
- request members to submit their votes no later than 27 May 2024;
- use the indicative Roadmap Scenario 2 in ITTC(LIX)/5 as the basis to guide consultations in the review process;
- extend the virtual intersessional working group established under decision 4(LVII) until ITTC-60 in 2024, making it open-ended and renaming it as the Preparatory Working Group (PWG);
- request that the PWG advances the identification of elements to consider for future renegotiation through gathering views from members and external entities, in collaboration with the Secretariat and independent consultants;
- further request the PWG to report to ITTC-60 on the modalities of the review process; and
- authorize the Executive Director to seek voluntary contributions of up to USD 120,000 to meet the financial requirements of this decision, or to use funds from the Working Capital Reserve.

**Closure of the Meeting**

Sheam Satkuru, Executive Director, ITTO, delivered a statement on behalf of Ewald Rametsteiner, Forestry Division, FAO. Rametsteiner commended ITTO's role as a leading partner of the CPF Joint Initiative on "Sustainable Wood for a Sustainable World" and other endeavors, noting the importance of forest-based solutions to address many of today's global challenges. His message highlighted examples of ITTO-FAO cooperation.

Indonesia, for the PRODUCER CAUCUS, delivered a statement regarding the EUDR. He noted that the main objective of ITTA, 2006, is the free, legal and sustainable timber market, which, he said, has been reflected in cooperation on FLEGT. He concurred with the Trade Advisory Group's statement anticipating that the EUDR will have serious implications in tropical timber-producing countries. He said the EUDR is a "unilateral discriminatory action" that creates trade barriers, especially for developing countries; lacks definitions of "forests" and "deforestation"; and ignores the huge investment made by Producer countries in adopting strict legal measures on logging. He warned that applying a one-size-fits-all approach will lead to further forest degradation. He requested that the EU reconsider the implementation of EUDR, through practical approaches and measures to meet the needs of countries and smallholders.

In response, the EU acknowledged that the EUDR raises some questions for ITTO member countries. He referred to "some misperceptions and factual errors" regarding the EUDR, and committed to ensuring that consumption of timber products in the EU does not drive further decline in forest resources.

Regarding Tuesday's Joint Session of the Committees, which featured panel and plenary discussions of trade and market-related issues, the EU strongly encouraged ITTO and its committees to "get a broad, up-to-date picture of SFM" and invite stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, to future occasions of this kind.

Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo, Director, UNFF Secretariat, welcomed the MOU signed during the week between ITTO and UNFF as an expression of the two organizations' "natural relationship."

Incoming ITTC-60 Chair Anna Tyler (New Zealand) bade farewell to Producer countries' spokesperson Jorge Malleux and welcomed Muhammad Zahrul Muttaqin into the role. Delegates also paid tribute to two of the Secretariat's longstanding officers, Steven Johnson and Hwan-ok Ma, who will retire before the next Council session. Thanking the two officers for their service through some of ITTO's most challenging times, the US said, "It's easy to stay when things are good. It's not so easy to stay when things are tough. You stayed and ensured the Secretariat regained a strong footing."

Speakers expressed appreciation to the Secretariat and the Government of Thailand for the excellent hosting and meeting arrangements. Chair Iddrisu gaveled the meeting to a close at exactly 1:00 pm.

**A Brief Analysis of ITTC-59**

Tropical forests are "in the eye of the storm" amid the world's current devastating natural disasters and multiple conflicts. These were the words of Mohammed Nurudeen Iddrisu (Ghana), Chair of the International Tropical Timber Council, as he opened its fifty-ninth session (ITTC-59) in Pattaya, Thailand. These stormy conditions have exacerbated the organization's difficulties, as it

seeks to scale the steep slope of organizational rebuilding and renewal.

The International Tropical Timber Organization's (ITTO) impairment crisis of 2015 had a serious impact on both the organization's finances and its reputation. Since that time, like many other organizations and countries, the ITTO has been buffeted by further storms. The effects of that financial crisis on its relationship with donors, economic crises in some member countries, new and ongoing international conflicts, and, of course, the global COVID-19 pandemic, have all created serious challenges.

ITTC-59 highlighted the extent to which ITTO has been battered by multiple crises, even as it awaits decisions on its future after the ITTA, 2006 expires. As an organization seriously weakened by its reputational crisis, even minor squalls, in the form of procedural issues, can become existential ones. Will ITTO be able to rise above the storm clouds into the sunlit peaks of engagement with key global challenges—such as climate change and biodiversity loss—or will it remain vulnerable?

This analysis considers the discussions and accomplishments at ITTC-59 in light of three themes that arguably framed the session and its work: the sense of ownership by member countries; relevance to members' needs, and leadership to overcome its current drift.

**Ownership**

ITTO's continued existence will depend on whether its members want it. ITTC-59 highlighted certain worrying trends.

First, few member countries were actually present at the meeting, and many of the absent countries had not prepared to exercise their votes in absentia, through delegation to others. At the opening, only 13 Producer countries were present, representing 551 votes, short of the 19 members and 667 votes needed for quorum. Consumer countries did achieve quorum, but many delegated their vote rather than attending in person. Producer countries only achieved quorum on Thursday, after urgent efforts by the Secretariat and some members, to encourage absent members to delegate their votes.

Second, several committee officers were noticeably absent. Of perhaps most concern was the absence of both the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee on Financial Administration. This meant the former Chair, from ITTC-58, was obliged to step back into the role so its sessions could progress. Another noticeable gap was that the Consumer Vice-Chair for ITTC-59, who should have been chosen a year ago, was only elected at the beginning of the session. The same will be true for ITTC-60's Vice-Chair, as Producers were unable to reach consensus on a nomination.

Third, numerous Producer countries are in arrears with their assessed contributions to the ITTO's Administration Account. This suggests they may have given up their stake or sense of ownership in the organization, given that falling into arrears makes them ineligible to submit concept notes or proposals for project funding.

And fourth, members were also silent at ITTC-59 on the question of renegotiating the ITTA, 2006 by 2029. In effect, they took only "a decision to decide" by June 2024 on whether to extend the current ITTA from 2026 to 2029 as some countries claimed a need for further internal consultation before taking that decision.

**Relevance: Does ITTO Meet Members' Needs?**

The situation of the ITTO at ITTC-59 reflects the question of its usefulness to members. Producers and Consumers of tropical timber naturally see this through different lenses. For Producers, who want

project funding, the trend in financing has been decreasing for many years, particularly after the ITTO's financial impairment. This crisis caused a loss of donor countries' trust. In this respect, ITTC-59 showed signs of recovery, as voluntary funding for Concept Notes under its "new" financial architecture, reached USD 3.7 million in 2023, up from 2.6 million in 2022. Producer countries may submit Concept Notes for projects, with ITTO acting as a "matchmaker" between country needs and donor interest. While potentially being attractive in being targeted to countries' specific priorities, ITTO project budgets are often in the low hundreds of thousands, not millions, of US dollars. Indeed, Producer countries' seeming lack of interest in the ITTO, delegates noted, could be explained by their need to chase bigger "fish" in the form of larger funds, such as those administered by the multilateral development banks. Furthermore, due to the lack of voluntary financing for ITTO projects, many projects approved by the Expert Panel and then by the relevant committees never get funded at all.

For Consumer countries, the process of funding projects through the ITTO feels multilayered, inefficient, and relatively expensive. There is growing competition for donor funds, not only for addressing other increasingly urgent environmental crises such as climate change and biodiversity loss—which have their own funding mechanisms and receive far more funding—but also for funding the kinds of smaller projects ITTO has historically engaged in. For instance, funding for forest projects in some countries is increasingly provided bilaterally by Consumer countries, such as China and the Republic of Korea and others. Meanwhile, many other donors have steadily moved towards larger programmes to reduce their transaction costs, but ITTO projects are still relatively small. While this can often provide positive outcomes, small projects carry proportionately higher transaction costs.

What about the common good? ITTO has historically undertaken activities and provided an institutional framework for activities that serve mutual interests. Examples of this include the Tropical Forest Update, the Tropical Market Report, and the many guidelines it has produced to further capacity in various aspects of sustainable management of tropical timber-producing forests, such as on forest landscape restoration in the tropics and on gender equality and empowering women.

But the dual mission of ITTO—to expand the tropical timber industry while sustaining its resource base—has inevitably led to tensions over the years, and this remained true at ITTC-59. Producers' anger over the new EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) requirements led to strongly-worded statements by the Producer caucus in the closing session, and in equally-strong language in the Trade Advisory Group's statement during ITTC-59's Annual Market Discussion. The concern about the EUDR is that these regulations will act as a barrier to Producers' tropical timber exports but go even further than the now-superseded EU Timber Regulation in its requirements on sourcing disclosures for many more commodities. It was noted that there was no ITTC-59 agenda item on the EUDR, suggesting to some that the EU is unwilling to engage in formal dialogue on it within this forum. It was noted that this again raises a question about members' views of ITTO's relevance.

### ***Leadership: Can the Band of Mountaineers Reach the Peak?***

For all the squalls and crosswinds buffeting the ITTO in recent years, however, ITTC-59 did show some signs of hope.

First, a trial plan to incentivize Producers' payment of arrears was agreed. What's more, some ideas offered during "brainstorming"

on assisting countries with difficulty in paying arrears garnered some interest. These included the possibility of assistance from other agencies or perhaps even voluntary contributions from any potentially willing donor countries.

Another good sign was that cooperation between ITTO and other multilateral environmental agreements and international organizations is moving in a positive direction, with new memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and other cooperation agreements. For instance, the new MOU signed by ITTO and the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) at ITTC-59 represented a bright spot.

Finally, the "new" financing architecture, now beginning its sixth year, is having a positive impact. While funding is still lacking, more funding was obtained in 2023 for approved "Concept Notes," as detailed in this trial financing structure, than in its previous years.

Is ITTO successfully scaling the steep and rocky terrain of organizational reform and renewal, to the open sunlit skies above? According to numerous delegates on both sides of the Producer-Consumer aisle, much of this progress is owed, in the words of one delegate, to the "energetic and enthusiastic" leadership of ITTO Executive Director Sheam Satkuru since her appointment in 2021, and the recognized competence and dedication of several longstanding Secretariat officers. Together they are vigorously pursuing the Council's mandate to pursue funding from new and innovative sources and to recoup assessed contributions that some members owe from previous years. In other, related positive news, Satkuru reported that ITTO accreditation as a Green Climate Fund implementing partner appears to be on the horizon. According to one observer, ITTO's challenge is to offer a project implementation service that is both highly cost-effective and reaches places other funding agencies cannot reach.

This meeting indicated general support to extend ITTA, 2006, for another three years, but the undertones made it clear that everyone also believes it needs major reform. This leaves the question of whether consensus can be reached during renegotiation on the direction such reforms should take. At ITTC-59, different ideas were voiced in the corridors, regarding the need not only to streamline the process of handling project funding but also to restructure the decision-making process, and indeed the institution itself. With these differences percolating in the background, the issue of ITTA renegotiation was not even discussed. Even a decision on extending the sunset of ITTA, 2006 from 2026 to 2029 was deferred to the intersessional period.

Members who attended ITTC-59 generally showed an emerging common interest to make it up the difficult slopes of organizational renewal to a sunlit destination above the current clouds, recognizing more than ever that it is in their interests to keep going. If not, there is a genuine risk of being lost forever on the gloomy mountainside of irrelevance. If countries can step up to help guide and provision it, such as by increasing ITTO's visibility as a highly expert and credible implementing project partner, its future will look brighter. But "crunch time" is coming when countries begin their efforts—as they generally seem inclined to do—to renegotiate the Agreement. Above all, as one delegate put it, an ITTO is needed that is "fit to meet the challenges that lie ahead." What will that ultimately require if it is to gain its members' support?

### ***Conclusion: What Does the Future Look Like for ITTO?***

Given differing interests such as those manifested at ITTC-59, renegotiation of ITTA will be costly and time-consuming, and it is not assured of success. ITTO's survival depends on members'



ownership. It must be relevant to Producers and Consumers—all of them—if it is to generate buy-in and interest in its survival. For this, the ITTO must be capable of efficiently pursuing useful goals.

This requires leadership. ITTC-59 showed positive signs that the ITTO expedition, after wandering for a while on the side of the mountain, is managing to find its footing towards an upward path. It remains to be seen whether its journey will be successful. However, ITTC-59 gave those in attendance some optimism that there just might be sunny skies ahead.

### Upcoming Meetings

**Global Legal and Sustainable Timber Forum 2023:** This forum, co-hosted by ITTO and the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute, aims to increase networking, collaboration and business exchange among timber industry stakeholders, with a view to “promoting sustainable forest management, creating legal and sustainable wood product supply chains, facilitating the legal and sustainable use and trade of wood products in a stable, transparent and predictable business environment, and contributing to sustainable development and climate-change mitigation.”

**dates:** 21-22 November 2023 **location:** Macao, China **www:** [itto.int/events/2023/11/22/global\\_legal\\_sustainable\\_timber\\_forum\\_glstf\\_2023/](https://itto.int/events/2023/11/22/global_legal_sustainable_timber_forum_glstf_2023/)

**2023 Climate Change Conference:** The 28th meeting of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP 28), the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 18), and the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 5) will convene in late 2023. ITTO will host a side event on advancing sustainable forest management (5 December) and staff an information booth. **dates:** 30 November – 12 December 2023 **location:** Dubai, United Arab Emirates **www:** [unfccc.int/cop28](https://unfccc.int/cop28) and [itto.int/events](https://itto.int/events)

**66th GEF Council:** The GEF Council will continue its work developing, adopting, and evaluating the operational policies for GEF-financed activities. It will also: review and approve the work program (projects submitted for approval); focus on relations with environmental conventions; address monitoring and evaluation; and approve criteria, standards, and priorities for programmatic approaches. **dates:** 5-9 February 2024 **location:** Washington D.C., US **www:** [thegef.org](https://thegef.org)

**6th meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6):** UNEA-6 convenes under the theme “Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.” It will be preceded by the sixth meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, which will take place from 19-23 February 2024. **dates:** 26 February – 1 March 2024 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** [unep.org/environmentassembly/unea6](https://unep.org/environmentassembly/unea6)

**ITTO-FAO Meso-American workshop on Forest Products Statistics:** This regional statistical workshop, with attendance by invitation only, aims at assisting member countries in the region to strengthen their statistical collection, analysis and reporting abilities. **dates:** 19-21 March 2024 **location:** Zapopan, Mexico **www:** [itto.int/events](https://itto.int/events)

**UNFF19:** The UN Forum on Forests will review progress in implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests and preparations for the midterm review. UNFF19 will also consider its inputs to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable

Development (HLPF), and other international forest-related developments. **dates:** 6-10 May 2024 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** [un.org/esa/forests](https://un.org/esa/forests)

**CBD SBSTTA 26:** The twenty-sixth meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice will continue preparations for the next meeting of the CBD Conference of the Parties (COP). **dates:** 13-18 May 2024 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** [cbd.int/meetings](https://cbd.int/meetings)

**4th Meeting of the CBD SBI:** This meeting will review implementation of the CBD in advance of the next COP. **dates:** 21-29 May 2024 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** [cbd.int/meetings](https://cbd.int/meetings)

**IUFRO World Congress 2024:** The International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) holds its World Congress every five years. The Congress provides an opportunity to share and examine the latest science and research. The outcome will seek to set the future research agenda and is focused on the theme, “Forests and Society Towards 2050.” **dates:** 23-29 June 2024; **location:** Stockholm, Sweden **www:** [iufro2024.com](https://iufro2024.com)

**ITTC-60:** The next meeting of the ITTC and its associated committees will continue the work of the Organization and the possible renegotiation of the ITTA. **dates:** 1-6 December 2024 **location:** Yokohama, Japan **www:** [itto.int](https://itto.int)

For additional meetings, see [sdg.iisd.org](https://sdg.iisd.org)

### Glossary

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEM	Committee on Economics, Statistics, and Markets
CFA	Committee on Finance and Administration
CFI	Committee on Forest Industry
CRF	Committee on Reforestation and Forest Management
CSAG	Civil Society Advisory Group
FLR	Forest Landscape Restoration
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IMM	Independent Market Monitoring
ITTA	International Tropical Timber Agreement
ITTC	International Tropical Timber Council
ITTO	International Tropical Timber Organization
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
TAG	Trade Advisory Group