

Eighth Session of the Assembly
25-26 April 2023, Seoul

Summary Record of the Eighth Session of the Assembly

Introduction

1. The Eighth Session of the Assembly of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO), as a special session, was held in Seoul, Republic of Korea from 25-26 April 2023. The Assembly was attended by Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Republic of Korea (ROK), Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam as Parties, and Singapore as an Observer Country, and the Secretariat. Parties and Observers are collectively referred to as the Member Countries.

Agenda Item 1. Opening of the Session by the President of the Assembly

2. The Session was in quorum with fourteen Parties and one Observer Country represented in the Eighth Session of the Assembly in accordance with Rule 10.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly.

3. In accordance with Rule 7.2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, the session of the Assembly was presided by Mr. Hang Suntra of Cambodia as the President and Ms. Noralinda Ibrahim of Brunei Darussalam as the Vice President. The President extended his warm welcome to the delegations from the Member Countries. He congratulated the new Executive Director and appreciated all the Member Countries for their participation. He also thanked the Secretariat for organizing the Special Session of the Assembly and congratulated AFoCO on the occasion of its 5th Anniversary. The President officially opened the Eighth Session of the Assembly and appointed Dr. Yeongjoo Lee of the Secretariat as the rapporteur for the session, in accordance with Rule 7.5.

4. Dr. Chongho Park, the Executive Director, expressed his gratitude for being elected as the new Executive Director and presented updates on the recent efforts of the Secretariat especially on the fund-raising initiatives and development of the AFoCO Climate Action Plan.

Agenda Item 2. Adoption of the Agenda

5. The Assembly discussed and adopted the agenda as contained in document **A-23-8-1**.

Agenda Item 3. Update on the Development of AFoCO Strategies

Item 3.1 Development of AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030

6. The Secretariat updated on the progress of AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030 which includes revised priority areas, and further proposed to set up a Technical Working Group (TWG) to finalize the strategic plan. The update is contained in document **A-23-8-2**.

7. Bhutan supported the formation of the TWG and requested that the TWG should adopt a holistic approach while developing the strategic plan so that the focus of the strategic plan is not just on member countries with high deforestation, but also support those Member Countries which have been able to sustainably manage and conserve their forests to further enhance their programs to ensure long-term sustainability and continue to reduce the greenhouse gas emission globally.

8. Brunei Darussalam stressed having an action-oriented plan considering that the strategic plan is for a seven-year period.

9. Indonesia suggested including an organizational evaluation system that would include a monitoring and reporting mechanism.

10. Myanmar proposed to focus on concrete objectives of priority areas and linking them to the key performance indicators.

11. Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines, the ROK, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam supported the formation of the TWG and committed to nominating national experts to finalize the AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030.

12. Singapore sought clarification on whether the TWG would consider the inclusion of cross-sectoral components such as agriculture, energy transition, and carbon credits in the priority areas.

13. The Assembly agreed that all the Member Countries will submit nominations of an expert in time for the first TWG meeting planned in end of May. The Assembly ensured to nominate competent experts for the TWG to provide the needed technical assistance to the Secretariat for the finalization of the Plan. The Assembly further reassured its full support to accomplish the targets under the new strategy in the next seven years.

Item 3.2 Promoting & Enhancing Climate-focused Cooperation

14. The Secretariat presented a new initiative of the organization, AFoCO Climate Action Plan, as contained in **A-23-8-3**.

15. Bhutan and Brunei Darussalam sought clarification on whether the Plan will help the two countries to address other conservation-related challenges that they face apart from addressing the challenges related to deforestation. Bhutan also requested clarification on the budget arrangements of the Working Capital Reserve, whether it will be a reappropriation of the current budget or surplus

from deferred activities. The Secretariat clarified that the expenses for this activity will be met from the savings from the 2022 annual budget which is reverted to the Working Capital Reserve.

16. Based on the queries made by the Member Countries, the Secretariat informed the meeting that the target fund of USD 100 million is expected in blended financing, where at least 50% will be explored from new sources. The Secretariat further highlighted that the Climate Action Plan is a new approach by the Secretariat to attract potential donors. Most of the current funding for projects is contributed by the Korean Government and it may not be sustainable in the long term. Therefore, it is high time for AFoCO to diversify funding sources to increase the funds of AFoCO so that the needs of Member Countries can be addressed.

17. The Secretariat further assured that the requirements of each Member Country will be respected and shall be integrated into the Climate Action Plan. Community livelihood for the forest-dependent community needs to be addressed and therefore the Plan will be designed to have a strong focus on community-based solutions. Digital innovation for AFoCO will serve as a platform for the compilation and analysis of forest and climate-related data, so that scientific data can be generated to inform the targeted donors about the challenges the member countries face due to climate change and encourage them to invest in addressing these challenges.

18. Upon the request of the ROK regarding AFoCO's accreditation process for the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Secretariat informed the Assembly that the GCF accreditation progress is at Stage-I and the Secretariat is currently consolidating the additional information requested by GCF which is expected to be completed by the end of May 2023.

19. Myanmar proposed to adopt an innovative approach to integrate the specific requirements and country-specific plans of the Member Countries into the Climate Action Plan.

20. Timor-Leste suggested having the Climate Action Plan period until 2050 so that sustained actions to address climate change can be ensured. Timor-Leste further added that there should be a mechanism whereby the efforts and contribution of AFoCO to the global objective of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius can be measured.

21. Cambodia stressed having an action plan which will encompass the climate action requirements of all the Member Countries.

22. The Philippines and Indonesia had reservations about the plan period of the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and the Climate Action Plan (2025-2034), and suggested that the Secretariat should consider having the same time period for both plans. The Parties further requested the Secretariat to clarify the difference in time frame between AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and the 10-year AFoCO Climate Action Plan (2025-2034).

23. On this matter, the Secretariat informed the Assembly that a substantial amount of effort is required for raising the targeted amount of USD 100 million. Hence the Secretariat would like to sustain the 10-year plan proposed for the Climate Action Plan (2025-2034). However, the Secretariat

may consider incorporating the Climate Action Plan and the Strategic Plan into an integrated plan in the future after the target funding for the Climate Action Plan is achieved.

24. The Assembly supported the Secretariat's initiative on the Climate Action Plan to promote and enhance climate-focused cooperation. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to develop the 10-year AFoCO Climate Action Plan and adopted **Decision 49-VIII-23S**.

Agenda Item 4. Update on Partner Countries and Partner Organization

25. The Secretariat updated the meeting on Partners Countries and Partner Organizations, including the information on the institutions that have submitted intentions to be Partners.

26. The ROK stressed that AFoCO must take a strategic approach while approaching the Partners to make sure that their proposed collaboration works are in line with AFoCO's strategies.

27. The Assembly expressed gratitude for the Secretariat's continued efforts to strengthen and establish collaborations with various partners. The Assembly further endorsed the partnership and collaboration with four institutions *viz.* Ojeong Resilience Institute, Chamber of Forest Engineers of Turkiye, Peace Forest Work, and GIZ, as Partner Organizations as contained in document **A-23-8-4**.

Agenda Item 5. Operationalization of the Regional Office

28. As a follow-up action from the Fifth Session of the Assembly, the Secretariat presented the plan for the establishment of the Regional Offices in the Member Countries as contained in document **A-23-8-5**, which is aimed at strengthening project performance through enhanced project monitoring and evaluation at the project site level. Further, the regional offices will also enhance the funding capacity of the Organization to finance the long-term strategic initiatives of AFoCO such as the Climate Action Plan.

29. The Secretariat proposed to establish one Regional Office within 2023. One proposal from the member countries, that best meets the pre-established selection criteria will be selected for hosting the Regional Office.

30. Brunei Darussalam inquired about the timeline for the selection of the host country. The Assembly was informed that the Secretariat is tentatively planning to send notification regarding the Regional Office to the Member Countries by the end of June 2023. The Member Countries are expected to submit their proposal by the end of July 2023. The Secretariat will then complete the selection process by September and report the selection results during the 9th Session of the Assembly in October 2023.

31. Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Thailand, and Viet Nam supported the proposal for the establishment of the Regional Office. Bhutan further suggested revisiting the provisional selection criteria proposed by the Secretariat to accommodate proposals for hosting Regional Office from all the Member Countries.

32. ROK also supported the proposal to establish the Regional Office but requested the Secretariat to report at the upcoming Session of the Assembly the results of the cost analysis for the operation of the Regional Office with target funds identified as available. The ROK further proposed that the Secretariat conduct a performance evaluation of the Regional Office and also establish evaluation standards so that the Assembly can make a decision on whether to continue or terminate its operations.

33. In support of the ROK's proposal on the cost analysis, Bhutan further suggested that the Secretariat should present the budget estimates required for running the Regional Offices to the Assembly. The Philippines also suggested having an operationalization plan for the Regional Office for sustainability.

34. The Assembly noted that the Secretariat should consider the sustainability of the existing projects for the continuity of the Regional Office.

35. Kazakhstan requested some updates from the Secretariat regarding the establishment of a regional training center in Kazakhstan which was agreed based on the MoU signed between AFoCO and Kazakhstan. The Secretariat informed the meeting that the proposal is under consideration and the Secretariat is in the process of materializing the matter with enough funds to operate the center. In addition, the Secretariat clarified that it would also consider the balance of the institutional arrangements among the Member Countries when selecting the location of the Regional Office.

36. The Assembly acknowledged the importance of the establishment of the Regional Office and approved the proposal of the Secretariat. The Assembly further tasked the Secretariat to elaborate the selection criteria based on the suggestion of the Assembly and tasked the Secretariat to proceed with the selection process.

Agenda Item 6. Terms and Tenure of the Executive Director

37. The Secretariat reported to the Assembly about the proposal of the Philippines regarding the Executive Director's tenure to be a fixed term of three years as contained in document [A-23-8-6](#), as submitted to the 7th Meeting of the Executive Director Selection Committee (EDSC) held in 2022.

38. Timor-Leste suggested that instead of extending the tenure of the Executive Director, the incumbent Executive Director may be considered for the next Executive Director selection based on the performance from his/her previous term.

39. Bhutan noted that the renewal terms stipulated in the Agreement on the Establishment of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (Agreement) should be understood as 2 years. Myanmar also pointed out that the Agreement clearly indicates the tenure of the Executive Director.

40. The ROK sought clarification from the Secretariat whether the Assembly is requested to consider the amendment of the AFoCO Agreement for the tenure of the Executive Director or the interpretation of the renewable term stipulated in the Agreement.

41. Brunei Darussalam, Bhutan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, and Thailand explicitly expressed to maintain the Agreement and not consider amendment of the Agreement.

42. The Secretariat clarified that it is conveying the discussion of the EDSC and is not seeking any consideration on the amendment of the Agreement but seeking consensus on the interpretation of the renewable term of the Executive Director.

43. The Assembly agreed that the renewable term of the Executive Director shall be defined as 2 years, and further adopted **Decision 50-VIII-23S**.

Agenda Item 7. Other Matters

44. The Secretariat updated the Assembly on the proposal of Bhutan regarding the amendment of the Staff Regulations and Financial Regulations as contained in document **A-23-8-7**. Taking note of the information provided, the Assembly further noted that the proposal for amendment was withdrawn.

45. The ROK highlighted that Member Countries have a lot of expertise and it could be an asset for the Organization and therefore proposed to the Secretariat to promote or reinforce knowledge exchange and sharing programs where experts from the Member Countries can engage or be invited to assist the works of the Secretariat through operationalization of the senior fellowship program at the Secretariat. The Secretariat welcomed the suggestion made by the ROK to promote the senior fellowship program.

46. The ROK informed the Assembly of its bid to host the World Expo 2030 and requested support from the Member Countries in the selection of the host country in November 2023.

Agenda Item 8. Date and venue of the Sessions of the Assembly

47. In reference to Decision 16-I-18R, the Secretariat informed the Assembly that the Decision provides the regular session of the Assembly to be convened in the Republic of Korea in the last week of October, unless otherwise decided. The Assembly discussed the indicative dates and venue of the next session of the Assembly which will be organized in a regular session. The Kyrgyz Republic extended the intention to host a special session of the Assembly possibly in 2024, to which the Assembly agreed to deliberate further during the upcoming session of the Assembly. The Assembly agreed that the 9th Session of the Assembly will be held in the Republic of Korea tentatively from 24-26 October 2023.

Agenda Item 9. Summary Record of the Session

48. The Assembly considered and adopted the Summary Record of the Eighth Session of the Assembly.

Agenda Item 10. Closing of the Session

49. All delegates from the Parties and Observer Country extended their appreciation to the President for the excellent management of the Session, and further appreciated the arrangements made by the Secretariat in organizing the Assembly. All delegates appreciated the solidarity and friendship among the Member Countries.

50. As a closing remark, the President extended appreciation to all delegates from the Parties and Observer. The President also highlighted the significance of AFoCO in the region. The Eighth Session of the Assembly was held in the spirit of cooperation.

Adopted on 26 April 2023, Seoul.
