

Ninth Session of the Assembly  
25-26 October 2023, Seoul, Republic of Korea

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## **Summary Record of the Ninth Session of the Assembly**

### **Introduction**

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

### **Item 1. Opening of the Session by the President of the Assembly**

2. The Session was in quorum with fourteen Parties 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 President presided over the session of the Assembly. The incumbent President is Mr. Hang Suntra of Cambodia and the Vice President is Ms. Noralinda Haji Ibrahim of Brunei Darussalam.

4. The President, in his opening remarks, highlighted the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report and the role of the forest sector and AFoCO in addressing the need for action. He further noted on the important decisions to be made during the 9<sup>th</sup> Session of the Assembly, including the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and AFoCO Climate Action Plan. He extended high regard for the leadership of the Executive Director for many progress and efforts, particularly attracting more financial support from the private sector. The President officially opened the Ninth Session of the Assembly and appointed Dr. Yeongjoo Lee of the Secretariat as the rapporteur for the session.

5. Dr. Chongho Park, Executive Director, extended a warm welcome to the delegates to the Secretariat. The Executive Director highlighted changes in the organizational structure of the Secretariat and recent progress made in AFoCO activities. He is honored to hold the Assembly at the Secretariat and expressed appreciation to all Parties for support.

6. The ROK, Indonesia, and Mongolia expressed appreciation to the support rendered by the Member Countries and the Secretariat for the successful organizing of the Assembly.

7. Timor-Leste appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat to work with many developmental partners and noted that AFoCO's intervention in the forest sector, agroforestry, and watershed management in Timor-Leste contributes in terms of economic and environmental aspects.

8. Kazakhstan expressed appreciation to the Secretariat and fellow Parties for cooperation. It was noted that Kazakhstan had serious forest fires in the past few years. Further appreciation was extended to the Secretariat for its efforts to survey the forest fire-affected sites in Kazakhstan.

9. With the agreement of the Parties, Rabobank was invited to the opening session where Mr. Jelmer van de Mortel, Acorn Head of Rabobank extended appreciation to the Member Countries and the Secretariat for the invitation and reiterated Rabobank's support to AFoCO in realizing their mandates and vision in the member parties through their projects.

## **Item 2. Adoption of the Agenda**

10. The Assembly discussed and adopted the agenda as contained in document **A-23-9-1** with minor additions of reflecting Rabobank's participation as suggested by Bhutan and the inclusion of an Update on the Leader's Forum by the Secretariat, and information on the Conference and Expedition on Biodiversity/Mid-Year Conference and Exhibition (MYCE) by Brunei Darussalam as two additional agendas under agenda item E. Other Matter.

## **A. Organizational Matters**

### **Item 3. Information on the list of Parties and Observers**

11. In accordance with Article 5 of the Agreement and Decision 3-I-18R, the Secretariat updated the status of Parties and Observers to the Assembly as contained in document **A-23-9-2**. The Assembly noted that the Observer status of Singapore was granted for 5 years since 13 November 2018 and further noted that Singapore is in the process of considering its status at AFoCO.

12. The Secretariat presented the submission of the letter of intention from the Republic of Tajikistan to become a Party to AFoCO and updated on the necessary follow-up actions undertaken. The Assembly noted that all Parties expressed no-objection to the intention of Tajikistan to become Party and Observer status is granted to Tajikistan on 13 October 2023 in accordance to Decision 3-I-18R. Mr. Yusufzoda Abdujabbor Ghayratshoh, Director of the Forestry Agency of the Republic of Tajikistan, through a video message, extended appreciation for consideration and approval of the Assembly of the AFoCO.

### **Item 4. Update on Partner Countries and Partner Organization**

13. In accordance with Decision 41-V-21R, the Secretariat updated the Assembly on the intention of IUFRO to become a Partner Organization for AFoCO for consideration and endorsement of the Assembly as contained in document **A-23-9-3**.

14. Cambodia, Indonesia, Timor Leste, and the ROK expressed their expectations in the

partnership with IUFRO particularly in tapping on scientific expertise and networking opportunities that will be instrumental in fostering enhanced collaboration and cooperation. Further, Cambodia suggested developing clear partnership terms and references between AFoCO and IUFRO in order to avoid duplication of efforts that IUFRO implements in the Parties of AFoCO who are already a member of IUFRO.

15. The Assembly took note of the intention submitted by IUFRO and its complementary strengths to provide contributions and collaborative works with AFoCO, and endorsed IUFRO as a Partner Organization of AFoCO.

## **B. Matters on Strategic Plan**

### **Item 5. Adoption of AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030 (for Decision)**

16. Pursuant to the Decision 43-V-21R, the Secretariat has developed AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030 and the final text of the AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030 was presented to the Assembly for consideration and adoption by the Assembly

17. Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the ROK, Timor Leste, and Vietnam, extended appreciation to the Secretariat for the development of the Strategic Plan and suggested the development of specific goals and key interventions with detailed indicators that would ensure effective monitoring of the action in the long run. Further, the ROK requested the Secretariat to actively pursue rigorous fund mobilization initiatives to identify private sector donors for the implementation and achievement of the activities and outcomes of the AFoCO Strategic Plan.

18. The Assembly adopted AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030 as in **Decision 51-IX-23R**.

### **Item 6. Adoption of AFoCO 10-year Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) (for Decision)**

19. Pursuant to Decision 49-VIII-23S, the Secretariat developed the AFoCO 10-year Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) and accordingly updated the Assembly with the final text of the AFoCO 10-year Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) for consideration and adoption.

20. Brunei Darussalam, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Kyrgyzstan, Timor Leste, and Vietnam extended appreciation to the Secretariat for developing the 10-year Climate Action Plan and support for the endorsement of the plan.

21. Bhutan pointed out that the time period of the two action plans needs to be linked to each other for effective resource mobilization and implementation and suggested that the Climate Action Plan should be used as a proposal document that is developed based on the Strategic Plan. The ROK shared common views and recommended splitting the period of the Climate Action Plan into two parts so as to provide a clear linkage with the Strategic Plan which is the mother document for the Climate Action Plan. Further, the ROK committed to making efforts to mobilize funds for the implementation of the AFoCO Strategic Plan (2024-2030) and the 10-year AFoCO Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) while also requesting the Secretariat to put in efforts to mobilize and diversify funding sources from the private sector and other entities.

22. Kazakhstan proposed the inclusion of Saxaul forest in the forest cover data.
23. Cambodia and Lao PDR requested for harmonization of the two plans along with the time period to avoid the double accounting and reporting for the two action plans.
24. Upon clarification from the Secretariat, the Assembly noted that time is needed in identifying funding partners, organizational prepositioning, and realizing climate-oriented goals. The Assembly agreed on the 10-year period for the AFoCO Climate Action Plan. Further, the Assembly tasked the Secretariat to mobilize the funds to support the implementation of the two important plans of AFoCO.
25. The Assembly adopted the AFoCO 10-year Climate Action Plan (2025-2034) as in **Decision 52-IX-23R**.

### **Item 7. Updates on the implementation and evaluation of projects**

26. The Secretariat shared information and updates on the ongoing projects, country-specific and regional/multi-country, as contained in **A-23-9-6**. Further, the Secretariat requested cooperation from the Parties to ensure the timely signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) related to the Project so that the projects can be implemented on the ground.
27. ROK informed the Assembly that the Korea Forest Service is delighted to have contributed to so many cooperation projects in the member countries and with the completion of 10 projects in the member parties, requested the Secretariat to work on developing Best Practices and Impact stories for the projects in the Asian regions to increase the visibility of these cooperation projects and share the finding in the global society. Further ROK suggested that these publications can be used as an essential tool to convince the Ministry of Economy and Finance for future fund allocation to AFoCO.
28. The Assembly took note of the updates and information provided by the Secretariat.

### **Item 8. New Projects**

#### **Item 8.1 Approval of new projects (for Decision)**

29. The Secretariat informed the Assembly about the four new project proposals submitted by the Parties and requested consideration and approval of the projects by the Assembly.
30. The ROK informed that the Korea Forest Service will endeavor to secure the funds for these four projects for inception in 2024.
31. The Assembly approved the four new projects and tasked the Secretariat to facilitate the necessary follow-up actions for project inception in due course as contained in **Decision 53-IX-23R**.

## **Item 8.2 Introduction to the Acorn Platform of the Rabobank**

32. Upon the approval of the Assembly, the Secretariat invited the Rabobank team to make a presentation about the Acorn Platform of Rabobank to the Assembly as contained in **A-23-9-8**.

33. Cambodia extended appreciation to the useful information shared by Rabobank and requested further clarification on the usage of the platform for selling carbon credit and to elaborate on how the transaction happens between the farmers and the buyers. The Rabobank team clarified that Acorn sells the carbon credits to Microsoft and retains 10% of the amount for Acorn, 10% for the local partner and the remaining 80% goes directly to the farmers' bank account in terms of cash.

34. The Secretariat highlighted Rabobank's coverage in Asia and Africa and earnestly requested the Member Countries to consider the Acorn platform to help in realizing the commitment made by the Member Countries in their fight against mitigating the impacts of climate change.

## **Item 8.3 Updates on the new projects and programs under the Climate Action Plan**

35. The Secretariat updated the Assembly with information on new project developments including AFoCO-Rabobank Agroforestry in Cambodia and Viet Nam, Woori Bank REDD+ project in Cambodia, proposals to World Bank, KOICA, and collaboration with international partners such as LPA and IUCN as contained in **A-23-9-9**.

36. The Assembly took note of the information provided by the Secretariat.

## **Item 9. Update on Operationalization of the Regional Office**

37. As the follow-up of the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Assembly, the Secretariat updated the Assembly about the selection result of the operationalization of the Regional Office for endorsement, as contained in **A-23-9-10**. Viet Nam was selected from the four proposed sites.

38. Bhutan supported the establishment of the regional office however requested clarification on how critical are the regional offices for AFoCO and how will the regional office operate upon the winding up of the projects. The Secretariat clarified that the Regional Office will be operated through the project fund and once the project is completed it may resort to the closure of the Regional Office so that there is no operational burden on the Secretariat. Subsequently, another Party may be selected to host the Regional Office which will be subjected to endorsement by the Assembly.

39. Cambodia also appreciated the effort of the Secretariat in coming up with the establishment of the Regional Offices and committed their support in rendering any support required by the Regional Office. The ROK expressed gratitude to the Secretariat for the effort put in for conducting the site validation.

40. Vietnam thanked the Secretariat and the Parties for being selected to host the Regional Office and reiterated its support and cooperation in the operationalization of the Regional Office and

committed to make a meaningful contribution to the successful operation of the Regional Office and assisting AFoCO in achieving the vision and mission of AFoCO and the Member Countries.

41. The Assembly endorsed the selection result of the Regional Office to be hosted in Viet Nam and tasked the Secretariat to develop the operational guidelines of the Regional Office which shall be circulated for endorsement of the Assembly before opening the Regional Office.

#### **Item 10. Updates on Capacity Development Activities and Future Plan**

42. The Secretariat presented an update on the capacity-building program organized by AFoCO including the Fellowship Program, and other ongoing capacity-building activities as contained in **A-23-9-11**.

43. Kazakhstan expressed its deep appreciation to the Assembly for the approval of the new project in Kazakhstan. Further, the impacts of the current project were also highlighted as bringing more impacts to the country's efforts towards sustainable forest management practices in the region. Further, Kazakhstan requested the Secretariat to reconsider the MoU signed regarding the establishment of the regional office which will be instrumental in implementing AFoCO projects in Central Asia. Myanmar provided an update on the operation and online/ physical training courses conducted at the RETC.

44. The ROK appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat in contributing to the capacity building of the Member Countries and commended the recent collaboration with the French Government in forest fire management. Further ROK suggested that the Capacity Building Roadmap and the Strategic Action Plan should have clear linkages and the Secretariat should focus on in-house capacity building.

45. The Assembly took note of the information.

#### **C. Administrative, financial, and institutional matters**

##### **Item 11. Work Plan of the Executive Director Selection Committee in 2024**

46. In reference to Decision 4-I-18R and Paragraph 1 of Article 9 of the Agreement, the Secretariat informed the Assembly on the follow-through activities of the Executive Director Selection Committee as detailed in **A-23-9-12**.

47. The Assembly took note of the information and tasked the Secretariat to facilitate the activity based on the existing practices, particularly, to facilitate reconstitution of the Executive Director Selection Committee and the works of the Committee. The Assembly further tasked the Committee, once reconstituted, to resume its works; to review its rules of procedure; to undertake the process needed; and to report the final recommendations to the Assembly for consideration and decision.

**Item 12. Work plan and budget 2024**

**(for Decision)**

48. In accordance with Paragraph 6 of Article 8 of the Agreement, the work plan and budget for the year 2024 and the indicative budget for the year 2025 was presented to the Assembly by the Secretariat.

49. ROK thanked the Secretariat for presenting the work plan and budget for 2024. Bhutan and the ROK pointed out that the Secretariat should independently carry out the supplementation of the Strategic Plan and Climate Action Plan, rather than relying on consultancies. Bhutan and the ROK also emphasized the need for in-house capacity building within the Secretariat and suggested that this should be reflected in the 2024 work plan. The Secretariat took note of the comments and clarified that the fund allocated for consultancies mostly includes the honorarium to be paid to the experts who will work with the Secretariat staffs to implement some of the activities in the work plan.

50. The Republic of Korea strongly requested the lowering of the Korean government's mandatory contribution rate, which is currently 80% of operating costs according to the Agreement on the Establishment of AFoCO, explaining that AFoCO need to consider financial independence from the Korean government as five years have passed since its establishment in line with the recommendation of the Korean National Assembly.

51. In response to the request from the Republic of Korea, Parties, including Bhutan, Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam expressed their gratitude to the Korean government for its generous support for the AFoCO, and also emphasized that AFoCO has made many achievements even though it has been only five years since it was established. However, as only five years have passed since the international organization was launched, AFoCO is still in its infancy, and it was emphasized that more support from the Korean government is needed, reminding that the organization was established with strong commitment and noble intentions from the Korean government. The Parties shared common concerns that the change of the mandatory contribution ratio requires amendment of the Agreement on the Establishment of AFoCO which is a time-consuming and intricate endeavor. The Assembly noted that the Agreement is a treaty that was ratified, accepted, or acceded by the Parties, in which the amendment requires consensus of the Parties and need to undergo respective domestic procedures with the relevant ministries for ratification, acceptance, or accession of each Party's National Assembly or Congress. The Assembly explicitly expressed reservations on the amendment of the Agreement.

52. All Parties requested the ROK to continue the generous support for its noble intentions like in the past while giving some time to allow the Secretariat to continue its efforts for resource mobilization. The Parties also agreed to compile and submit the best practices and impact stories developed from the AFoCO projects to prove the positive impacts made and convince the ROK to retain the 80% contribution to the operating cost.

53. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to implement in-house capacity building proposed by Bhutan and the ROK in 2024 activities and thanked the ROK for their continuous support in achieving AFoCO's vision and mission. Further, the Assembly endorsed the proposed Work plan and Budget for 2024 as contained in **Decision 54-IX-23R**.

## **D. Procedural Matters of the Assembly**

### **Item 13. Election of Succeeding Officers**

54. Upon consideration of the information provided in **A-23-9-14**, the Assembly, in accordance with Rule 7 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, elected Brunei Darussalam and the Philippines as the incoming President and Vice President. The Assembly congratulated and welcomed the newly elected officers.

55. As the incoming President, Brunei Darussalam, represented by Ms. Noralinda Ibrahim, expressed appreciation to the Assembly for the opportunity and further committed to serve the Assembly. She further committed to staying open and actively communicating with all Member Countries for fruitful results.

### **Item 14. Date and Venue of the next Sessions of the Assembly**

56. The Assembly endorsed organizing two sessions of the Assembly in 2024, one as a regular session and the other one as a special session. The Special Session may be organized in late April or early May 2024. The Kyrgyz Republic indicated the intention to host a session of the Assembly. In planning the date, venue, and entry arrangements of the Special Session, the Assembly recommended the Secretariat to closely work with the Member Countries and tasked the Secretariat to communicate the plan accordingly. In accordance with Decision 16-I-18R, the Assembly agreed the Regular Session to be scheduled on 22-24 October 2024. Unless otherwise decided by the Assembly, the venue will be in Seoul, Korea.

## **E. Other Matters**

### **Information on AFoCO Leader's Forum**

57. The Secretariat updated the progress of the AFoCO Leaders Forum, including purpose, importance, functions, composition of members, and timeline. The Forum will be a high-level meeting of business leaders in the private sector to discuss collaborative efforts and to mobilize resources and leverage private sector engagement to support the 10-year AFoCO Climate Action Plan to benefit the member countries. The Forum is expected to have around ten business leaders or representatives from the private sector as members, and a few political figures as observers. The inaugural meeting of the AFoCO Leaders Forum is expected to convene in January or February 2024.

58. The Secretariat is identifying potential members for the Forum that includes CEOs of companies and financial groups in the Republic of Korea, and representatives of international organizations and AFoCO Partners such as the Global EverGreening Alliance, the Rabobank, and IUCN, including Mr. Ban Ki Moon, the 8<sup>th</sup> Secretary-General of the United Nations, as observers.

59. The Secretariat further updated the meeting that, out of four members of the Advisory



Roundtable, Mr. Changbum Kim and Mr. Kook Hyun Moon agreed to join the AFoCO Leaders Forum. In this regard, the Executive Director has the view that Professor Don Koo Lee and Mr. Kook Hyun Moon will remain as the advisors for the Executive Director and the Secretariat, and the members to complete the position as advisors at their age of over eighty. The Assembly noted that the Advisory Roundtable will not continue operation upon successful establishment of the AFoCO Leaders Forum.

### **Information on Conference and Expedition on Biodiversity in conjunction with Brunei Darussalam Mid-Year Conference and Exhibition (MYCE)**

60. Brunei Darussalam informed the Assembly on the schedule and program of the Conference and Expedition on Biodiversity in conjunction with Brunei Darussalam Mid-Year Conference and Exhibition (MYCE) to be organized tentatively in May 2024 as contained in **A-23-9-15**, Brunei Darussalam invited all AFoCO Member Countries, policy officers and researchers, to the Conference and Expedition on Biodiversity in conjunction with Brunei Darussalam Mid-Year Conference and Exhibition (MYCE).

### **G. Summary Record of the Session**

61. The Assembly considered and adopted the Summary Record by circulation.

### **Item 15. Closing of the Session**

62. In closing, the President extended appreciation to all delegates from the Parties and Observer Country who joined both physically and virtually. The President highlighted the significance of AFoCO in the region. The Ninth Session of the Assembly was held in the spirit of cooperation.

Adopted on 14 November 2023 by circulation.

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