



17th
Commonwealth Forestry Conference
2005 - Colombo , Sri Lanka

Foreword

Tim Rollinson
Chair, Standing Committee on Commonwealth Forestry
and Director General, Forestry Commission, UK

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Commonwealth Forestry I am very pleased to present the Proceedings of the 17th Commonwealth Forestry Conference. The Conference took place against the backdrop of the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004. With eradication of poverty and hunger at the top of the global agenda, the theme of the Conference *Forestry's Contribution to Poverty Reduction* could not have been more important.

In opening the Conference, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapakse, drew our attention to the need for a balance between satisfying development needs and ensuring the sustainable use of the world's natural resources. He also noted how the removal of coastal trees had contributed to the destructive power of last year's tsunami. This theme was picked up in a special session of the Conference devoted to the lessons that had been learned and the importance of conserving coastal habitats.

In a keynote presentation, Hosny El-Lakany, Head of the Forestry Department of FAO, noted that a large part of the world's poor live in and around forests. The forests provide the fundamental necessities of life – shelter, fuelwood, food and medicines. He noted that, while there is a global agenda for action agreed by governments around the world, there is no global action plan.

In my role representing the UK Government at International meetings on forests I am frequently struck by the good intentions and aspirations of governments, agencies and others in their efforts to ensure that our forest resources are managed sustainably. Forests have an important part to play in helping to alleviate poverty. But no amount of good intentions or words on paper will make a difference unless we are able to translate the dialogue into action. There is a real need to focus attention on strategic and co-ordinated implementation on the ground.

Drawing on the excellent papers, presentations and discussions, the Conference identified actions that need to be taken by Commonwealth Governments so that forests can improve the welfare and livelihoods of the poorest in society. These are set out in the Resolutions that are part of these Conference proceedings. The final Resolution calls on the Commonwealth Heads of Government to give political commitment to these actions.

The Standing Committee on Commonwealth Forestry would like to thank the many sponsors of the Conference, particularly those who provided assistance for delegates to attend from developing countries, including the Commonwealth Foundation, the UK Department for International Development, and the New Zealand Government. We also thank the Commonwealth Forestry Association for their continuing support throughout the preparations, for example in administering sponsorship, reviewing papers and providing valuable advice.

Despite the tragic events of December 2004, the Government of Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the staff of the Forest Service worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the Conference. On behalf of the Standing Committee and all the participants I would like to express my sincere thanks to them for their efforts and achievement in making the Conference such a success.