

Opening speech
Of the Deputy Prime Minister HOÀNG TRUNG HẢI
At the Asia-Pacific Forestry Week and the 22nd Session of the Asia-
Pacific Forestry Commission
Ha Noi, 21 to 26 April 2008

Dear Excellencies Leaders of the forestry sector of Asia-Pacific countries,

His Excellency Mr. Jan Heino, Assistant Director-General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),

Dear distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Viet Nam as the host country, it is my great honour to welcome you all to Ha Noi to participate in the Asia-Pacific Forestry Week and the 22nd Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC). I would also like to express my appreciation and thanks to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) for its initiatives in facilitating the Asia-Pacific Forestry Week in conjunction with the 22nd Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission, and selecting Viet Nam to host this important event.

With full participation of leaders of the forestry sector from 33 countries of the Asia-Pacific region, UN organizations and agencies, international organizations working in the forestry sector as well as representatives from the media in the region, it is apparent that this is indeed the most important event for the forestry sector in the Asia-Pacific region in 2008. The Asia-Pacific region is known for its diversity with a wide variety of cultures and dynamic economic development. Nevertheless, we share common forest-related concerns and interests, in particular how to achieve sustainable management of forests locally and throughout the region; and how to increase the contribution of forests to national economic development, helping to alleviate poverty and eliminate hunger amongst

rural and mountainous people, while ensuring that the important environmental protection function of forests is maximized.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Viet Nam, the forestry sector is considered to be a special economic and technical sector which plays important roles in the national economy, environment protection, bio-diversity conservation, and livelihood improvement and poverty reduction for the rural and mountainous people.

Talking about forestry is to talk about the role of forests within the national economy through the provision of timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs), materials for industry and construction and precious medicinal herbs for healthcare and well-being. Forestry also makes a significant contribution to the economy when taking forest product processing and export industries into account. In Viet Nam, turnovers from export of timber and timber products dramatically increased from US\$ 1,057 million in 2004 to US\$ 2,350 million in 2007. Importantly, forests also provide environmental functions: Sequestering carbon, protecting watersheds and providing attractive landscapes which offer opportunities for tourism.

At present, we estimate that about 25 million Vietnamese people live in and near forests, particularly in the mountainous regions of the country, where ethnic minority groups predominate. Many of these people are poor with limited education and inefficient cultivation practices. Forests provide major income sources for ethnic people and help to reduce poverty and eliminate hunger. In recent years, the Government of Viet Nam has made a significant effort to provide use rights over forest resources for local communities. This has resulted in more jobs and generated more income for local people, particularly the ethnic minorities. It has also helped address the demand for timber to produce furniture for households and fuelwood for domestic consumption.

Forests in Viet Nam also play an important role in securing national environmental sustainability, especially in terms of protecting the watersheds of big rivers and hydropower and irrigation reservoirs, helping to prevent floods and droughts, they also stabilise sand helping to protect and shield coastal areas. With a slopping and hilly topography together with long coastal lines, Viet Nam is considered to be one of 5 countries in the world most vulnerable to climate change. In fact, the livelihoods of dozens of millions of Vietnamese people are at risk from climate change. The affects

are felt most amongst the poor and marginalized groups living in the mountainous, coastal and delta areas, where livelihoods are particularly susceptible to the negative impacts of climate change. With special biological features, forests can play a very important role in mitigating the impacts of climate change: Development of fast growing plantations can act as effective carbon sinks; Maintenance of natural forest corridors can provide for species migration; and development and protection of mangrove can minimize coastal erosion. With sustainable management and development of forest resources all these benefits are possible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In recent decades, the Government of Viet Nam has made great efforts to improve effective management of forests and to promote sustainable forest management. In the early 1990s, forest cover had declined to 27.2% from 43% in 1943. To address this, the Government has implemented strong and drastic measures to reduce the rate of deforestation and improve the forest cover. Various programs and projects have been implemented for forest protection and development, e.g. Program 327 for greening barren land and denuded hills and 5 Million Hectares Reforestation Project from 1998 to 2010. Also our forest policies and legislation have recently been revised: The Forest Protection and Development Law was revised by the National Assembly in 2004; and the Viet Nam Forestry Development Strategy 2006-2020 was approved by the Prime Minister. This new strategy aims to provide comprehensive targets and orientation for overall forestry development in order to address the new requirements resulting from increasing international economic integration and the challenges of climate change.

With such comprehensive measures implemented by the Government together with strong support of the people, we are proud and glad to inform you that the period of degradation of Viet Nam's forests has passed: we have increased the forest area from 9.30 million ha in 1995 to 12.87 million ha in 2006 - an average increase of about 0.3 million ha per year - and forest cover is now back to 38%.

Despite these achievements, the Viet Nam's forest sector is still facing challenges: Rapid socio-economic development is increasing pressures on forests; The area of forests is increasing but quality and bio-diversity of natural forests have degraded in some areas; Land availability for development of protection forests is farer while land for development of

production forests is fragmented and the competitiveness of production of the forestry sector is insufficient, and will be a particular challenge as Viet Nam now is a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Government of Viet Nam strongly commits itself to further implement comprehensive measures to achieve sustainable forest management goal. Viet Nam is willing to share lessons from its achievements and successes and looks forward to learning from the experiences of others, and cooperating with regional countries and international organizations in forest management and development. I hope that, during the forestry week, delegates of 33 Asia-Pacific countries, international organizations and agencies and interested parties will work actively, share experiences, discuss openly, and agree on tangible measures to effectively address the challenges and obstacles to the sustainable management of forests that we all face in the Asia-Pacific region.

On behalf of the Government of Viet Nam, I solemnly declare the opening of the First Asia-Pacific Forestry Week and the 22nd Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission.

I wish all distinguished delegations, guests and participants to have full and fruitful discussions, and that the Asia-Pacific Forestry Week and the 22nd Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission will be a big success.

I hope you will also take time to enjoy the attractions of Ha Noi with its charm and beauty, friendly people and multi-cultural cuisine.

Thank you,