

Seventh Session of the Assembly
26-27 October 2022, Almaty (Hybrid)

Summary Record of the Seventh Session of the Assembly

Introduction

1. The Seventh Session of the Assembly of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO), as a regular session, was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan in hybrid from 26-27 October 2022. The Assembly was virtually attended by Brunei Darussalam and the Philippines, and physically attended by Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, 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.

2. Mr. Kylyshbayev Nurlan, Chairman of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of Kazakhstan welcomed the delegates of AFoCO Member Countries. He further highlighted the significance of the forest sector in Kazakhstan and the Central Asian region, expounding on the many efforts of Kazakhstan, including the national program for planting 2 billion trees until 2025. He also extended high expectations from activities under AFoCO. He looked forward to the success of the Seventh Session of the Assembly and wished all delegates a pleasant stay in Kazakhstan.

A. Organizational Matters

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

3. In accordance with Rule 10.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, the Session is in quorum with fourteen Parties and one Observer Country represented in the Seventh Session of the Assembly.

4. In accordance with Rule 7.2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, the President presides over the session of the Assembly. The incumbent Presidency is with Myanmar however the Assembly Representative of Myanmar was unable to attend the session. Rule 7.3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly provides that if the President is absent from a session or any part thereof, or whenever the President deems that for the proper fulfillment of the responsibilities of the office of President that he or she should not preside over the Assembly during the consideration of a particular agenda item, the Vice-President shall act as President with the same powers and duties as the President. In this regard, the current Vice President, Cambodia acted as the Acting President.

5. The Acting President, Mr. Hang Suntra, officially opened the Seventh Session of the Assembly. He extended his welcome and appreciation to the Member Countries for participating in the Seventh Session

of the Assembly, physically and virtually. The Acting President extended appreciation for the generosity and warm welcome of Kazakhstan, particularly the Forestry and Wildlife Committee. The accomplishments of AFoCO despite the obvious challenges of the prolonged COVID-19 were highlighted acknowledging the tremendous efforts of all Member Countries.

6. The Assembly adopted four decisions. The list of Decisions adopted is contained in document **A-22-7-INF.1**.

Agenda Item 2. Adoption of the Agenda

7. The Assembly, after deliberation, agreed to add the review of Staff Regulations and Financial Regulations under Item E Other Matters, as proposed by Bhutan.

8. The Republic of Korea, in reference to the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, advised the Secretariat to carry-out timely preparation and circulation of the Agenda and meeting documents of the Assembly. The Republic of Korea further proposed to include the contact information of the staff in charge in the Secretariat for respective agenda items as practiced in other international organizations. The timely circulation of the documents and contact information will enhance the communication and exchange of feedback among the Member Countries and the Secretariat. The Secretariat took note of the points raised.

9. The Assembly adopted its agenda as contained in document **A-22-7-1**.

Agenda Item 3. Report of the Executive Director on the work of the Organization

10. In accordance with Paragraph 4(d) of Article 9 of the Agreement on the Establishment of AFoCO, the Executive Director presented the highlights and major areas of activities on the work of AFoCO. Following the recommendation and guidance of the Assembly during its Fifth Session, the updates focused on the decisions adopted at the immediate past session of the Assembly as contained in document **A-22-7-2**.

11. The Assembly extended words of encouragement and appreciation for the hard work and accomplishments of the Secretariat and the leadership of the Executive Director. The Assembly looks forward to continued active engagement of AFoCO in relevant global processes and expanding the organizational presence on the international level.

Agenda Item 4. Information on the list of Parties and Observers (Update on Kyrgyz Republic)

12. In reference to the updated list of Parties and Observers, the Assembly warmly welcomed the Kyrgyz Republic as a Party to the Agreement on the Establishment of AFoCO. The Assembly further noted that 14 countries are now on board as Parties to AFoCO. The list of Parties and Observers is in document **A-22-7-3**.

13. The Kyrgyz Republic appreciated the Parties of AFoCO for the warm welcome. The Kyrgyz Republic looked forward to the significant roles of AFoCO and extended its commitment for active participation to contribute to the works of the organization.

Agenda Item 5. Promotion and Enhancement of Partnership (Update on Partners)

14. The Secretariat updated the Assembly on the organizations/entities that granted observer status to AFoCO, existing partners which has partnership arrangements or MOU and intention from new prospective partners for consideration and endorsement of the Assembly. The information is contained in document A-22-7-4.

15. In reference to Decision 41-V-21R on Promotion and Enhancement of Partnership, Partner Countries and Partner Organizations provided a new category of participation and engagement for AFoCO. The Sixth Session of the Assembly subsequently endorsed the Rules of Procedures for Partner Countries and Partner Organizations of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization. The Assembly considered and endorsed existing partnerships to be enlisted as Partner Organizations.

16. Regarding new intentions received from potential partners, the Assembly noted the intentions and strengths of the potential Partners that could contribute to the works of AFoCO and bring good influence and impacts in the forest and forestry sector and biodiversity and climate change in Asia. The Assembly, however, proposed to further review the submitted intentions. The Assembly further tasked the Secretariat to provide additional information including the institutional backgrounds and key areas of work of the respective organization for further consideration by the Assembly.

B. Implementation of Strategic Plan 2019-2023 and Development of Strategic Plan 2024-2030

Agenda Item 6. Updates on the implementation of on-going programs/projects and evaluation of projects

Item 6.1 Updates on the On-going AFoCO Programs and Projects

17. The Secretariat highlighted the significant progress, issues and concerns as well as way forward, actions taken relative to the on-going projects and those under inception arrangements including country-specific projects and regional/multi-country projects as contained in document A-22-7-5.

6.1.1 Country-specific projects

- As of October 2022, a total of 32 approved projects are on-going with total fund requirement of USD 44.6 million.
- In reference to the commitment of the 4th Donors' Meeting held on 21 December 2021 for the Special Fund (project fund) for FY 2022, 64.3% has been executed as of October 2022.
- Three projects have been newly launched in 2022, and three projects are still under inception arrangements.

6.1.2 Regional/multi-country projects

- For the regional program "Improved local community livelihoods through increased income from non-timber forest products (NTFP): Modeling scalable community-based enterprises in

Asia,” all participating countries have completed respective nomination of the Implementing Agency, In-country Project Manager, and NTFP commodity.

- For the regional program “Capacity Building on Enhancing Resilience to Forest Fire and Local Livelihood in CLMV Countries”, the ASEAN Secretariat approved all documentary requirements for fund transfer.
- For the project inception arrangements, series of the pre-project inception meetings and technical meetings have been arranged with CLMV countries, ASEAN-ROK Programme Management Team (AKPMT) and ASEAN-Secretariat since January 2022

18. The Assembly took note of the information on the ongoing programs and projects. The Assembly expressed appreciation to the Member Countries and the Secretariat for making efforts in project implementation despite the pandemic over the past two years. The Assembly further welcomed the progress of the regional programs. Particularly, the Republic of Korea highlighted the significance of these regional programs as they are funded from resources other than funding from the Korea Forest Service. The Assembly noted that these regional programs started preparation in 2018 and the Assembly took note of the long process needed. The Assembly requested the Secretariat to take note of these experiences for future program development.

19. Regarding the project funds, the Republic of Korea explained the requirements of the Government to report the status of the project funds to the relevant Ministries and offices, such as the National Assembly, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Finance. The Republic of Korea requested the Secretariat to provide detailed documents on carry-over budgets and implemented funds to the Korea Forest Service before the 5th Donor Meeting for their review. The Secretariat expressed that the mentioned topics are also a priority for the Secretariat and agreed to provide the requested documents and additional information to facilitate more in-depth discussions at the upcoming Donors’ Meeting.

20. Considering that the COVID-19 situation has stabilized globally, the Assembly looks forward to promoting and proceeding with project implementation as was done in pre-COVID-19 times.

Item 6.2 Guidelines in the Identification and Generation of Project Savings and Carry-Over Budget

21. The Secretariat informed the Assembly that the project activities are resuming back to normal in terms of convening meetings, traveling, and implementing activities. The Secretariat further noted the recommendations of the Member Countries to continuously consider online platform in project implementation as deemed practical and efficient.

22. The Secretariat recalled the circulation of Guidelines in the Identification and Generation of Project Savings and Carry-Over Budget which was developed in accordance to Decision 17-II-19S based on the recommendations and discussions in relevant project meetings and the 2022 Annual Technical Workshop for Project Management and Performance Review. The information note is contained in document **A-22-7-6**. The General Guidelines on COVID-19 Coping-up Measures in AFoCO Projects (as of

March 2021) is attached as **G-6-22R**, and the Guidelines in the Identification and Generation of Project Savings and Carry-Over Budget is attached as **G-7-22R**. The Secretariat highlighted the definition of the carry-over budget and project savings, and further informed the Assembly on the guidelines for the utilization of such funds. The Assembly noted the suggestion from Cambodia to have further discussion on projects going over budget and consider including such cases, if applicable, in the guideline.

23. The Assembly took note of the information provided.

Agenda Item 7. Project development and project proposals

Item 7.1 Approval of new projects

24. The Assembly approved the three projects from Cambodia, Mongolia and the Philippines which is captured as contained in **Decision 45-VII-22R**.

25. The Assembly welcomed three new projects which are aligned with AFoCO's objectives and priorities. The Assembly recommended keeping a balance among the priority areas of AFoCO Strategy in terms of project development.

Item 7.2 Information on Annual Project Development Schedule

26. The Secretariat updated the project development schedule for 2022-2023 as contained in document **A-22-7-8**. The updates included information on the project concept notes of Cambodia, Thailand, Viet Nam, and a regional project in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

27. As requested by Indonesia, the Secretariat considered the extension of the deadline for submission of project concept notes with consideration on the requirements under the Program Approach and consistency with Landscape Partnership Asia (LPA) on the restoration of drylands and drought-prone areas.

28. Kazakhstan stressed the urgency and importance of the proposed regional project. Late launching of the project will affect its impact and efficiency. Kazakhstan requested to expedite the process and further highlighted its readiness to work with AFoCO and the Republic of Korea to start the project in January 2023. The Secretariat took note of the concerns of Kazakhstan for further internal review and consultation with the National Focal Point and project donors.

29. The Assembly, in principle approved the Central Asia regional project. The Assembly further tasked the Secretariat to facilitate follow-up actions which will include, but not limited to the following:

- conduct FS in Central Asia as basis in the approval of the Project in the immediate Session of the Assembly and in implementing initial capacity building activities within CY 2023; and
- develop regional projects and conduct similar FS in other regions in consultation with respective NFPs in consideration of the outcomes of the FS in Central Asia.

Item 7.3 Updates on the new and potential projects and programs

30. The Secretariat updated the Assembly on its continuous efforts to find relevant opportunities to maximize the available resources. The information on the project development in response to call for proposals, collaboration with partners, and donor-driven projects is contained in document **A-22-7-9**.

31. Taking note of the information, the Assembly tasked the Secretariat to sustain initiatives and further consult with the Parties on project development in accordance with potential donors' requirements and timeliness.

Agenda Item 8. Updates on Capacity Development Activities and Future Plan

32. Following the prolonged COVID-19 since early 2020, the Secretariat made rigorous efforts to cope with the pandemic and normalize the operations of the capacity-building programs by taking advantage of the online platforms. The Secretariat updated the Assembly on the capacity development activities and future plan. The Assembly took note of the updates as contained in document **A-22-7-10**.

Updates on progress of Capacity Building Roadmap 2030

33. The Roadmap identified four strategic target areas and suggested nine expected outputs. The proposal and suggestions of the Roadmap will be the ingredients for the development of the Strategic Plan 2024-2030 regarding capacity building strategy in due course.

Report on Internal Evaluation of Fellowship Program

34. Based on the findings of the evaluation, the Member Countries recognize that the Fellowship Program supports respective national capacity building in the forestry sector. The Secretariat views that relevance needs to be enhanced.

Update of RETC operation and achievements

35. The RETC is ready to accommodate training courses from 2023 in cooperation with the Forest Department of Myanmar.

36. Myanmar updated the Assembly on the progress of the domestic procedures in terms of the Host Country Agreement for the RETC. Relevant Ministries have provided comments on the Host Country Agreement and this has been in communication with the Secretariat.

37. Bhutan requested clarification on the schedule of training programs to be organized at RETC, the themes and level of participation for the High-Level Workshop. The Secretariat clarified that schedule of training will be circulated in early 2023. The themes for the High-Level Workshop are selected in consultation with the Member Countries and the desired level of participation is Director General level and higher.

Update of ongoing activities regarding capacity building

38. The Secretariat updated on the education and training programs, the Science and Technology Exchange Partnership (STEP) Program in 2022, Landmark Scholarship Program in 2022, AFoCO Fellowship Program in 2022, and the consultative Workshop on Capacity Building for Central Asian Region.

39. As of September 2022, the RETC conducted six training courses online and in hybrid. Following the requests at the fifth Session of the Assembly, RETC explored venues to organize in-person training in Member Countries that the COVID-19 travel restrictions had lifted. Accordingly, the Secretariat organized two off-site training in Cambodia and the Philippines.

40. The Assembly requested for early circulation of invitation letters for the training programs in order to provide enough time for respective domestic travel clearance and visa issuance necessary.

41. As a partner organization for STEP Program, the Baekdu Daegan National Arboretum and Baekdu Daegan Global Seed Vault (BGSV) in the Republic of Korea proposed a seed conservation promotion program entitled “Keep Eternally Your Seeds for Future (KEYS for Future)”. The detailed information is included in the document.

42. Responding to higher demands on the expansion of the scholarship program, including all Member Parties, the Secretariat will identify potential donors for the next phase of the Landmark Scholarship Program. The Secretariat will closely consult with the Korea Forest Service to improve AFoCO’s scholarship program, including further fund source, before completion of the current Landmark Program in due course.

43. In accordance with Decision 43-V-21R and the Guidelines on the Expanded Fellowship Program newly endorsed at the 6th Session of the Assembly (G-5-22S), the Fellowship Officers selected under the Expanded Fellowship Program will start their program at the Secretariat in 2023.

Agenda Item 9. Update on the Development of AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030

44. The Secretariat updated the ongoing progress of the development of AFoCO Strategy 2024-2030 and follow-up action, including the draft text of the strategic framework. The Secretariat further presented on the follow-up action. The information note is contained in document **A-22-7-11**.

45. The Secretariat shared the interim findings from the development process of the AFoCO Strategy. Through the series of diagnoses and analysis, nine strategic approaches were identified. An initial set of mission and vision statements were drafted, and keywords based on the global megatrend and forest agenda were identified. The Secretariat will further align these findings and prepare a draft AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030 which will include the climate action partnership platform. The Secretariat will communicate the draft AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030 to the Parties for consideration and finalization in early 2023. The AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030 will be submitted to the next Assembly for consideration and approval.

46. The Assembly took note and supported the progress made and the plan ahead for the development of the AFoCO Strategic Plan 2024-2030.

C. Administrative, financial, and institutional matters

Agenda Item 10. Appointment of the Executive Director

47. Taking note of the work and recommendation of the Executive Director Selection Committee, the Assembly considered and appointed Dr. Park Chongho as the succeeding Executive Director. See **Decision 46-VII-22R**.

48. The Assembly congratulated and welcomed the incoming Executive Director. The Assembly further decided to invite the incoming Executive Director before the closing of this Session to address the Assembly.

Agenda Item 11. Reallocation of Budget of FY 2022

49. Noting the relevance of budget reallocation for operational expenditures in order to accommodate the requirements for increased physical meetings and travels, the Assembly considered and adopted the Decision. See **Decision 47-VII-22R**.

Agenda Item 12. Work plan and budget 2023

50. The Secretariat presented the proposed Work Plan and Budget 2023. In support of the proposed Work Plan and Budget 2023, the Republic of Korea raised concerns in the fluctuation of the currency exchange rate as the national government budget for the Republic of Korea is in Korean Won. The Republic of Korea advised the Secretariat to consider this matter in the operations in 2023. The Republic of Korea requested clarification on funds to be raised outside of mandatory contributions from the Parties as it will affect the total budget.

51. The Secretariat took note of the concerns raised. The Secretariat, with an appreciation for the contribution from the Parties, clarified that the Secretariat will build strategic partnerships for collaboration with other international organizations and also capitalize on the private sector partnership to cover the external funds to be raised. The Secretariat committed to be judicious in the operations and financial utilization.

52. The Assembly considered and adopted the work plan and budget for the year 2023 and indicative budget for the year 2024. See **Decision 48-VII-22R**.

D. Procedural Matters of the Assembly

Agenda Item 13. Election of Succeeding Officers

53. Upon consideration of the information provided in document **A-22-7-15**, the Assembly, in accordance with Rule 7 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, elected the Kingdom of Cambodia and Brunei Darussalam as the incoming President and Vice President. The Assembly congratulated and welcomed the newly elected officers.

54. The incoming President expressed appreciation to the Assembly for the opportunity to serve as the Acting President for this Session and further committed to work hard as the incoming President. He further committed to stay open and actively communicate with all Member Countries for fruitful results. The incoming Vice President, Brunei Darussalam, also extended appreciation and looks forward to supporting the Assembly and the President.

Agenda Item 14. Date and venue of the Sessions of the Assembly

55. The Assembly endorsed organizing two sessions of the Assembly in 2023, one as a regular session and the other one as a special session. The Special Session may be organized at the occasion of the Gangwon World Forestry Exhibition scheduled in May 2023. In planning the date, venue, and arrangement 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 24-26 October 2023. Unless otherwise decided by the Assembly, the venue will be in Seoul, Korea.

E. Other matters: Review of Staff Regulations and Financial Regulations

56. The Assembly took note of the proposal from Bhutan to review the Staff Regulation, particularly on the recruitment procedure, panelist, and selection along with the term of the Directors; and the Financial Regulation, particularly on the authority of the Executive Director and the Vice Executive Director. The Assembly tasked the Secretariat to identify the relevant provisions and their related regulations for further consideration and inputs from the Parties and discuss during the upcoming special session.

G. Summary Record of the Session

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

Agenda Item 15. Closing of the Session

58. Prior to the closing of the Seventh Session of the Assembly, the incoming Executive Director, Dr. Park Chongho, was invited to deliver a statement. With great appreciation to the Assembly and respective Member Countries, he accepted the duties and committed to serve the organization as the incoming

Executive Director. He further extended congratulations and appreciation for the leadership and many accomplishments of Mr. Ricardo L. Calderon.

59. The Assembly, in appreciation and honor of the contributions and leadership, presented the appreciation plaque to Mr. Ricardo L. Calderon, as the Executive Director. Mr. Ricardo L. Calderon appreciated the full support from all Member Countries and the Secretariat. He stressed that it had been an honor and privilege to serve the organization and that he looks forward to the growth of AFoCO.

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

Adopted on 29 December 2022 by circulation.
