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## Combating forest fires in focus on Day 1 of UN forum; India shares revised National Forest Policy

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India shared its revised National Forest Policy during the 19th United Nations Forum on Forests held in New York, United States from May 6-10, 2024. The policy included a series of recommendations aimed at addressing forest fires.

At the forum, delegates began discussions on combating forest fires and developing a Model Forest Act. The event also focused on the UN's strategic plan for forests 2017-2030 and considered activities that support the thematic priorities for the biennium 2023-24.

The discussions centred around achieving the global forest goals, which encompass enhancing forest-based economic, social, and environmental benefits; significantly increasing the area of protected forests; mobilising financial resources; and promoting governance frameworks to implement sustainable forest management. Additional focus was given to fostering cooperation, coordination, and synergies as cross-cutting goals.

Zhimin Wu, director of the forestry division at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said, "How we respond to the wildfire challenge is of crucial importance. We need to shift from reactive responses to proactive measures centred on prevention and preparedness through integrated fire management."

India recommended adopting an integrated approach to forest fire prevention and management, along with post-fire landscape restoration through policy interventions. It shared its experience with technology adoption, including the use of remote sensing for near-real-time fire monitoring, online geoportals for forest fire reporting, and ecosystem-based approaches for post-fire restoration.

The nation also suggested creating universally accepted global standards for forest certification and highlighted the need to evaluate current certification programmes against universal standards.

India noted the growing role of communities in addressing forest fires and emphasised the rising scale and duration of such incidents in recent years, with significant impacts on biodiversity, ecosystem services, economies, livelihoods, and human well-being. The increased frequency and intensity of forest fires underscore the need for comprehensive long-term strategies for prevention and restoration.

The country also proposed operationalisation of the Global Fire Management Hub by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and FAO, which aims to create a platform for sharing knowledge and experience in mitigating forest fires.

During the debate, other countries shared their policy decisions and suggestions. Ukraine outlined its expanded Forest Code, detailing the impact on forests due to the Russian invasion. Costa Rica highlighted its ban on deforestation, forest cover protection, and payment for ecosystem services.

Indonesia presented its Forest and Other Land Use Net Sink 2030 strategy, and Malaysia committed to keeping at least 50 per cent of its territory under tree cover, with a plan to plant 7.9 million trees. Nepal reviewed its progress in community-managed forests, restored forests, protected areas, and tree planting policies.

Guatemala from Latin America reported a reduction in its annual deforestation rate to 0.36 per cent.

A draft declaration for the High-level Segment (HLS) was scheduled for May 9, with the Forum set to conclude on May 10.

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