Israel Celebrates International Forest Day: *Sustainable Forests for People and Planet*

Monday, 21 March 2022

Challenges and Opportunities in Mediterranean Forestry

15:00-15:15 (GMT+4) Opening Remarks

Speech Text (Virtual)

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Dear Guests,

Dear children, ladies and gentlemen, who participated in Dubai Expo in person and online from all over the world,

Before I begin my speech, personally and on behalf of the FAO Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions-Silva Mediterranea, <https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/en/> I greet you with my most heartfelt feelings.

I want to congratulate Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF), <https://www.kkl-jnf.org/forestry-and-ecology/>, who organized this program on the occasion of 21 March International Day of Forests <https://www.fao.org/international-day-of-forests/en/> and I thank them for their kind invitation that allowed me to address you. I want to congratulate the Dubai Expo host country, the United Arab Emirates, for this beautiful EXPO organization. <https://www.expo2020dubai.com/>

I am İsmail Belen, a Forest Engineer by training and a citizen of the Republic of Turkey. I am still working as a "Chief Inspector" in the General Directorate of Forestry in Turkey. At the same time, I am serving as the Vice-Chair of the Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions- Silva Mediterranea), one of the technical advisory bodies on forestry of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) <https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/en/>. I am participating in this event on behalf of FAO.

Silva Mediterranea, founded in 1911, came under the umbrella of FAO in 1948. Currently, it has 27 member countries, including the European Union. <https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/89589/en/> Along with the countries with coast and contact with the Mediterranean Sea such as Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain and Morocco, regions and countries that are similar in terms of climate, such as California and Australia, operate under the roof of Silva Mediterranea.

In addition to Silva Mediterranea, on the occasion of the "Mediterranean Forest Weeks" started to be organized in Turkey for the first time in 2010, Mediterranean Countries came together and created joint policy documents on forestry. Following the events in France, Algeria, Spain, Morocco and Lebanon, the 7th Mediterranean Forest Week is being held in Turkey currently.

Because of my responsibilities here in Turkey, even though I want it so much, I could not be able to participate in Dubai Expo psychically.

In addition to regional initiatives, as a result of initiatives that Turkey has supported since 2010, the United Nations General Assembly started to celebrate 21 March as the "International Day of Forests," with a decision taken on 21 December 2012. Since this date, Mediterranean Forest Week, Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions and International Day of Forests are being celebrated together.

The agenda of the "International Day of Forests" is determined and announced based on the proposals of all relevant international institutions and countries under the leadership of FAO and it is recommended that countries carry out activities in accordance with this agenda.

In this context; the past agenda were determined as follows:

• In 2014, "our forests, our future"-

• In 2015, "Forests and climate change"-

• In 2016, "forests and water"

• In 2017, "forests and energy"

• In 2018, "forests and sustainable cities" –

• In 2019, "forests and education"

• In 2020, "Forests and biodiversity"

• In 2021, "Forest Restoration"

In this context, the theme for 2022 has been determined as "Forests and Sustainable Production and Consumption". The slogan for 2022 is "Choose sustainable wood for people and the planet."

In line with the global context, Mediterranean Forest Week and the Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions emphasize regional priorities.

In this context;

* In 2013, the "Tlemcen Declaration" was published in Algeria focusing on "Mediterranean forests for sustainable development of Mediterranean landscapes: adaptation and mitigation strategies to face with global changes?".<https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/89605/en/>
* In 2017, the Agadir Commitment, a "Regional Initiative on Forest and Landscape Restoration," was adopted, with a commitment endorsed by ten countries - Algeria, France, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, and Turkey – and strongly supported by several international organizations.<https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/93061/en/>
* In 2019, the Brummana Declaration was adopted in Lebanon, focusing on the "The role of Mediterranean forests to fulfill the Nationally Determined Contributions." <https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/95903/en/>

In addition to these declarations;

* In 2011, the Position Paper on "Wildfire Prevention in the Mediterranean: A key issue to reduce the increasing risks of Mediterranean wildfires in the context of Climate Changes" was accepted in France. <https://www.fao.org/forestry/49223-06791969d1427714a896b8faeee2aa501.pdf>
* In 2013, the "Strategic Framework for Mediterranean Forests" was adopted in Algeria. <https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/89602/en/>
* In 2015, the opinion paper "Mitigation and adaptation potential of Mediterranean forests to climate change" represents a synthesis of results and discussions presented by participants during the Fourth Mediterranean Forest Week (IV MFW) held in Barcelona, Spain. <https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/90770/en/>
* In 2019, a Regional Statement of the Mediterranean Region was submitted to "7th International Wildland Fire Conference" held in Brasil.<https://www.fao.org/forestry/49225-04bbbed8173ac2cddc5d4cb8add93990c.pdf>

Moreover;

* Unasylva, which is a multilingual international journal of forestry and forest industries published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published in 1999, focused on "Mediterranean Forests" .<https://www.fao.org/3/x1880e/x1880e00.htm>
* Unasylvia published in 2014, has the title "A new dynamic for Mediterranean forests". <https://www.fao.org/3/i3837e/i3837e.pdf>
* "The State of Mediterranean Forests 2013" ​​was published in 2013,<https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/89603/en/>
* In 2018, "State of Mediterranean Forests 2018" was prepared.<https://www.fao.org/forestry/silva-mediterranea/95904/en/>

Distinguished Guests,

"Mediterranean Forest Week" and "the Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions- Silva Mediterranea" being organized in Turkey in 2022, touch on the dynamics, threats and opportunities of the region.

In this context, the "Mediterranean Forest Week" theme was determined as "Forest and ecosystem restoration for future Mediterranean generations". The rehabilitation of Mediterranean ecosystems, which have been in the service of humanity for thousands of years and play a vital role in shaping social and cultural life, is directly related to the "UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration". <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/>

Forest fires, which are one of the most critical threats to Mediterranean forests, are undoubtedly an issue related to the health of the forests. Healthy forests are resistant to threats such as fire, insects, and drought and healthy forests quickly regain their former state after disasters.

Within the scope of the Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions- Silva Mediterranea;

* the new and updated "Wildfire Position Paper "will be evaluated.,
* Preparations for "The State of Mediterranean Forests 2023" will be started,
* ANTALYA DECLARATION on the "Role of Forest and Ecosystem Restoration for Future Mediterranean Generations" will be accepted.

The year 2022 emerges as a critical year in terms of forestry with the following events:

* The World Forestry Congress in Korea on 2-6 May 2022<https://wfc2021korea.org/index.html>
* UN Forest Forum on 9-13 May 2022 in New York <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html>,
* Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in Ivory Coast, 9-20 May 2022 <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/forum/index.html>,
* FAO Forestry Committee on 3-7 October 2022 in Rome, <https://www.fao.org/forestry/en/>
* The Conference of the Parties to the UN Climate Change Convention in Egypt on 7-18 November 2022;

These meetings and conferences are of great importance and provide opportunities to share the functions and importance of Mediterranean forests in the international arena and carry out activities accordingly.

Dear Guests,

As said by Ibn Khaldun, <https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ibn_Khaldun> , a North African historian, "geography is destiny."

The geography, the soil, and the forests determine what we eat, what we drink, how we think, and define our souls. To protect our souls, let's protect our forests.

With these feelings, I would like to congratulate KKL-JNF for this beautiful and timely event and thank my dear colleagues for the excellent organization.

My special thanks to all of you for being with me.