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,

Before I begin my speech, I greet you with my most heartfelt feelings.

I want to congratulate Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF) for their kind invitation and the Dubai Expo host country, the United Arab Emirates, for this beautiful EXPO organization.

I am İsmail Belen, a Forest Engineer by training and a citizen of the Republic of Turkey. Currently, I am serving as the Vice-Chair of the Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Questions (Silva Med).

SilvaMed, founded in 1911, came under the umbrella of FAO in 1948. Currently, it has 27 member countries, including the European Union. 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, the United Nations declared 21 March as the "International Day of Forests," with a General Assembly decision of 2012. Since this date, Mediterranean Forest Week, SilvaMed and International Day of Forests are being celebrated together.

In line with the global context, Mediterranean Forest Week and SilvaMed s 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"
- In 2017, the Agadir Commitment, a "Regional Initiative on Forest and Landscape Restoration" was adopted in Morocco, with a commitment endorsed by ten countries - Algeria, France, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, and Turkey
- In 2019, the Brummana Declaration was adopted in Lebanon, focusing on "The role of Mediterranean forests to fulfill the Nationally Determined Contributions"

In addition to these declarations;

- In 2011, the Position Paper on "Wildfire Prevention in the Mediterranean" was announced in France.
- In 2013, the "Strategic Framework for Mediterranean Forests" was adopted in Algeria.
- In 2015, the opinion paper "Mitigation and adaptation potential of Mediterranean forests to climate change" was announced in Spain.

Moreover; two publications were published on "the "The State of Mediterranean Forests" in 2013 and 2018.

Distinguished Guests,
The sessions of "Mediterranean Forest Week" and "SilvaMed" being organized currently in Turkey touch on the dynamics, threats and opportunities of the region.

In this context, the main theme was determined as "Forest and ecosystem restoration for future Mediterranean generations".

The restoration 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 on Ecosystem Restoration ".

Forest fires, which are one of the most critical threats to Mediterranean forests and ecosystems, 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 SilvaMed;

- The new "Wildfire Position Paper "will be discussed,
- 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 events such as; The World Forestry Congress in Korea, the UN Forest Forum in New York, and FAO Forestry Committee in Rome. These conferences are of great importance and provide opportunities to share the functions and importance of Mediterranean forests in the international arena.

Dear Guests,
As said by 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.