

NEWS RELEASE



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Forests: Icon for Korea towards the World

In August 2010, the XXIII IUFRO World Congress will be held in Korea, one of the most forested countries worldwide. IUFRO is an international network established in 1892 to disseminate scientific knowledge and promote research cooperation among forest scientists. As of today, IUFRO unites more than 650 Member Organizations (e.g. research institutes and universities) in over 110 countries. The IUFRO World Congress is the world's largest academic conference in the forestry sector, which is held every five years.. Some 3,000 people from 95 countries are expected to join the XXIII IUFRO Congress in Seoul.

The Congress title in Seoul is "Forests for the Future: Sustaining Society and the Environment." Forests are home to two thirds of the flora and fauna on the planet. On top of that, forests are playing a pivotal role as a carbon sink that captures one trillion tons in mitigating climate change. Globally, forests make economic sense as well. According to the World Bank, about 1.6 billion people worldwide make a living from forests and the global trade of forest products reaches USD 270 billion. Unfortunately, forests across the world are being devastated rapidly to the extent that rain forests as big as a soccer field are disappearing in the world every minute. If the deterioration continues, the future generations will lose sustainable ground for living. Now is the time to act. The 2010 World Congress title reflects the strong commitment of forest scientists to tackle the global challenge. The United Nations (UN), for its part, designated next year (2011) as the Year of World Forests. The UN effectively illuminates the role and importance of forests for conservation of the environment and sustainable development as an integral part of the global efforts.

Korea has long coexisted with forests on its soil. Sixty-five percent of the Korean territory is covered with forests along the "Baekdu-daegan" (the major mountain range of Korea). Koreans lived with forests from cradle to grave. When a baby was born, the house was decorated with a gold string and Korean pine leaves. When a person died, he or she was buried in the casket made of Korean pine. We cannot imagine Korean history without sustainable forest management (SFM) as all the top Korean leaders have emphasized wise management of forest and water resources. Half a century ago, however, the Korean forests were extremely devastated in the rubble of the Korean War. The strenuous efforts of the Korean people in the past 30 years successfully re-greened the land. For example, Koreans did not hesitate to use a rope and break rocks in the steep valley to plant trees: in numbers, more than 10 billion trees have been planted during that period. Ahead of the XXIII IUFRO World Congress, we as a nation are in a move to disseminate the know-how and policies of the world's unprecedented success of reforestation in Korea. We aspire to promote the Korean brand with forests, a key player for the best practice conducted in the shortest period of time and the vibrant economic growth called "Miracle of Han River."

It was reforestation that lifted Korea to what it is today as the world's 10th largest economy beyond breath-taking industrialization. Forests lay the cornerstone for better quality of life, economic growth and protection from possible natural disasters for the Korean people. We look forward to the memorable XXIII IUFRO World Congress in Seoul, the largest gathering of its kind for afforestation, forest tending and forest conservation. Our hope is that the Congress will serve as a venue to showcase Korea as the future leader of low-carbon green growth and stimulate the "Higher National Prestige Project."