Statement by H.E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, at the 16th Session of the UN Forum on Forests 26-29 April 2021

Madam Chair,

The Holy See is pleased to participate in this sixteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests. We welcome its practical focus and hope that it will result in concrete steps to translate the goals of forest protection into reality.

Forests are a critically important dimension of the natural world. They play a key role in sustaining fragile ecosystems, enhancing the environment, and contributing to climate change mitigation. Reversing the loss of forest cover and addressing what is causing this loss globally must stay high on the Forum's agenda. At the same time, the Holy See urges the Forum to remain particularly aware of the human toll that forest degradation takes. So many of our sisters and brothers depend on forests for their homes, livelihoods, food security, forest-based enterprises, and the preservation of their spiritual and cultural heritage. The degradation of forests and wanton disregard for the impact of human activity on the health of forests have had profound and concrete consequences for the human family, especially for the poor and for those in the most vulnerable situations.

In our work and the work of the Forum, the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests is "a reference framework for ambitious and transformational actions."[1] These actions should address both the urgent needs of the natural world and those of the human family – needs made even clearer during this past year as we have all struggled together from a global pandemic and its aftermath. As Pope Francis has said, "The health of humanity cannot be

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[1] E/CN.18/2021/3 at page 2.

separated from that of the environment in which we live."[2] This clear recognition of the interconnectedness between the health of forests and that of humanity is further echoing the theme of this year's *International Day of Forests*, "Forest restoration: a path to recovery and well-being,". Our common home is our common heritage. We should share it not in a competitive scramble, but in a spirit of mutual fraternity and responsible stewardship, supporting and protecting one another.

Madam Chair,

Pope Francis has noted, "The pandemic has brought us to a crossroads. We must use this decisive moment to end our superfluous and destructive goals and activities, and to cultivate values, connections and activities that are life-giving."[3] The Forum on Forests' thematic priorities 16 and 17 attempt to do just that, giving attention to a broad range of natural, economic, social, environmental, scientific, technical and governance issues that must be addressed if we are to tackle in a comprehensive way the complex issues we face.

In 2019, Pope Francis convened a Synod, an advisory meeting of bishops, with the participation of experts and representatives of indigenous peoples, on the Pan-Amazon region, which is home to the world's largest forest. It brought attention to the ecological, environmental, and human concerns of the region, and voiced goals for the preservation and flourishing of both its natural ecosystems and human ecology. As the Forum works toward concrete solutions in that region and beyond, let us take into account the voices of those most directly impacted by forest degradation, so that we may both restore our forests on firm roots and together progress on the path of integral recovery and well-being. Please be assured of the Holy See's further support and interest for the work of the Forum.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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[2] Pope Francis, *Address to the Participants in the Meeting of the Laudato Si' Communities* (September 12, 2020) http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/september/documents/papa-francesco_20200912_comunita-laudatosi.html

[3] Pope Francis, *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*, September 1, 2020 http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200901_messaggio-giornata-cura-creato.html