

Marc Palahí: Speech for 125st IUFRO Anniversary Congress - September 19th 2017

On behalf of the European Forest Institute I would like to wish IUFRO, our unique forest research network, a very happy 125th anniversary. 125 years is not a short period of time, especially in a time of history, the industrial era, where the world has changed faster than ever. Just remember that when IUFRO was founded 125 years ago it was the time of the start of the **second Industrial revolution** characterised by the rise of **electricity, oil industry and mass production...**

But you don't need look back 125 years to see a very different world. Just look back to the times of the IUFRO 100 anniversary in 1992, and you will already see great changes. In fact, in the last 25 years the world has experienced the greatest socio-economic and technological acceleration ever. Such acceleration is for instance exemplify by the fact that poverty has been reduced from 40% to less than 10% of the global population and at the same time the global GDP and global middle class have tripled. In addition, during the last three decades a new industrial revolution has taken place, **the digital revolution characterised by the rise of internet. A revolution that is disrupting the way we produce and consume goods and the politics of jobs. A revolution by the way that is having profound effects in the forest sector.**

So IUFRO in its life time has already witnessed two industrial revolutions, not bad... But there is something that did not change for the last two centuries and is the fact that we rely on a fossil-based economy. A fossil-based economy that has been the growth engine of our Industrial era delivering unprecedented population and economic growth as well as social and technological progress. But the fossil based economy has another side too... as it has resulted in the greatest environmental externalities of our history. We have basically changed the climate of our planet and we are crossing its resilience boundaries due to the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of our land resources.

And now we have arrived to a tipping point where the world has become too big for our planet and will not be possible to meet the increasing needs of a growing population and middle class in terms of water, food, energy and materials and at the same address the urgent global environmental problems we are facing... At least not be possible within the existing fossil-based paradigm. Therefore, we need a new paradigm. A paradigm that ensures that prosperity takes place within the renewable boundaries of our planet. A paradigm therefore where renewable energy and renewable biological resources are the basis for a sustainable and renewable economy. A paradigm where the bioeconomy becomes the prosperity engine for sustainable development. Why are biological resources and a bioeconomy so fundamental? Well while the energy sector in the long run can be fully decarbonised still we will need to produce an increasing amount of materials for construction, clothing, packaging and transport to meet the increasing demands of a fast growing and urbanised middle class. And those materials will still need to rely on carbon, but in order to address climate change such materials, will need to come predominantly from fossil-free sources, from renewable biological resources.

A bioeconomy is not only replacing fossil resources by bioresources, it is also an opportunity to address our past failure to value nature and opportunity to create a synergistic relationship between ecology and economy. And here is where forests, the most important land biological infrastructure in our planet, and forestry should play a central role. I mentioned before that IUFRO has witnessed already two industrial revolutions, and now it is time for all of us not to witness but to lead the future bioeconomy revolution... But to do that **Forest science** will not

only need to provide the knowledge base for an intelligent and sustainable use of our forest resources in a changing environment. We also need to proactively build partnerships across disciplines, policies and sectors. And of course across continents as the situation requires genuine global action. Furthermore, forest science needs to make ambitious investments in the scarcest resource of all: talent. We need to attract talent, young talent, and provide that talent with the right environment and skills so that they shape the future.

In this respect, I am very happy to announce that the European Forest Institute and IUFRO have joined forces in order **to create the IUFRO-EFI Young Scientists Initiative a transcontinental mobility programme to support young forest scientists in understanding better the world, so that they can build a better world.**

Let me finish with a quote about the future from Abraham Lincoln that reflects well the spirit of our new Initiative: **The best way to predict the future is to create it!!**