

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to address you here at the World Bamboo Congress, and during World Bamboo Day. As the Director-General of the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR), I am pleased to lead this organisation that represents 41 Members States, mostly bamboo producing nations and home to nearly half the world's population. INBAR and the World Bamboo Organisation are different organisations, with a different governance structure and membership composition. But we both aim to promote bamboo, and to help producers and users of bamboo. So we have agreed to work more closely together, and join forces where we can. Of course, INBAR has been part of every World Bamboo Congress in the past, but this time I wanted to stress how important it is to work together, and that is one very important reason for me to give a statement at the opening of the Congress.

The other very important reason is the fact that today is World Bamboo Day. This day is celebrated throughout the world by groups and individuals that want to bring attention to the benefits and opportunities that bamboo can bring. But it is currently not a United-Nations recognised day. We are working to make this official. INBAR and the World Bamboo Organisation are talking to the FAO and the United Nations Forum on Forests, and we are exploring the best way to present this idea to the United Nations decision-making processes. INBAR is taking the lead, and we hope to get this issue on the agenda of the next FAO Committee of Forests, or present it to the Economic and Social Committee of the United Nations – ECOSOC.

I do not have to tell this group how important bamboo is. In this room many of you have helped promote bamboo to a global audience during the past decades, and in particular, I want to salute some of the bamboo pioneers that I have met during the past year, and who will be recognised later during the congress. There are also people here that are in the vanguard of exploration, research and development, and I am excited to hear about your work during the coming days. There are very exciting developments taking place in our area of work, and bamboo is most definitely a plant for the future.

I believe that bamboo has an important role to play in helping countries shift to more sustainable development models. Next week, the United Nations General Assembly will confirm the 17 Sustainable Development Goals – or SDGs - that will guide the international sustainable development agenda for years to come. Six of the 17 SDGs are directly relevant for bamboo-producing countries and their green economy plans. They target: poverty reduction, energy, housing and urban development, sustainable production and consumption, climate change, and land degradation.

But for bamboo to be well integrated into national sustainable development plans, much work remains to be done. If countries are to harness bamboo as a force for green growth through new businesses, we need to have much more precise information about the state of our bamboo resources. And today we don't have enough information at the appropriate scale.

Bamboo can perform an array of critical environmental functions. At the same time, we want to promote bamboo for energy, for green infrastructure and for sustainable, earthquake-proof construction. To be successful, we may need more bamboo than is currently available to ensure robust ecosystem services and to secure a reliable supply of raw material.

There are three inter-related key questions in this conundrum: What do we have? Where can we plant more? And what species do we advocate?

Last week, at the World Forestry Congress in Durban, INBAR launched the Global Assessment of Bamboo and Rattan – or GABAR - which will aggregate the knowledge required to answer these questions. GABAR will facilitate learning between partners and provide the resources, case studies, maps, practical tools and data that countries can use to make more effective use of bamboo in their national green economy plans and development agendas.

During the launch, 11 country delegations – including 5 ministers – and senior representatives from FAO, UNEP, World Bank, CIFOR and IKEA gave their support to the initiative. These endorsements demonstrate the recognition that a knowledge and evidence-sharing platform like GABAR is needed to further expand the global bamboo sector – helping, for example, to identify opportunities for growth, determine the costs and benefits of new bamboo plantations, and better understand how bamboo can be used to restore unproductive land.

The new and additional knowledge that GABAR generates will provide evidence that governments and development partners throughout the world's bamboo belt can use to harness the benefits of a healthy bamboo vegetation cover and to develop a thriving bamboo industry. We need to be able to guide them on managing and expanding bamboo habitats and advise them on quality control, manufacturing standards, and certification of the raw material for production.

Our overall goal is to demonstrate the environmental, economic and social benefits of healthy bamboo forests – at the national, regional, and global level, and let us not forget the people on the ground, who depend on these forests for their livelihoods.

In Durban we gathered political support. My job now is to focus on fundraising, so we can help implement the plans, report and communicate progress, coordinate the various activities and provide technical assistance where needed. I have to explain to the traditional donor community that the bamboo development value chain starts with local farmers cutting the poles by hand, and that channelling their development assistance into bamboo development will reduce poverty in the Global South. I have to convince charitable Foundations and think-tanks that research and development of bamboo is cutting-edge, and that we can find new, ecologically sound solutions for the manufacturing of bamboo fiber for a whole range of products. And I need to encourage the finance and business community to consider that investing in bamboo can help their corporate image, but more importantly, that it makes sense from a long-term financial perspective.

Finally, I also appeal to all of you because investigating the opportunities and challenges for bamboo development is what you are all doing. Many of you are involved in research in one way or another. Many of you represent the private sector. And most of you have knowledge, experience and expertise that can contribute to a Global Assessment of Bamboo and Rattan. I therefore ask for your help to make this initiative a success.

We made a bold move two weeks ago, and INBAR now has the exciting task to lead the next steps of putting GABAR into action. We will set up a governance structure, recruit a team to coordinate the programme, and work closely with all INBAR Members and partners to tackle individual components, one-by-one, often in parallel. Your help in this will be very important, and we hope we can count on your participation.

The final Global Assessment of Bamboo and Rattan report will be released in 2020 at the same time that the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) presents its next Forest Resource Assessment report. We hope to have a first draft of the GABAR report ready in two years.

When I took over as Director-General in early 2014, I was told by the Board of Trustees that INBAR should be better recognised as the global inter-governmental organisation for bamboo and rattan. Our strategy for the coming five years is aimed at influencing national and international environmental and social-economic development policies; promoting South-South collaboration through capacity building and information management; and implementing a number of large, on-the-ground applied research projects.

In November 2017, we will organise a Global Bamboo and Rattan Summit, which will be a major milestone for INBAR, and will coincide with the 20th anniversary of our establishment. By 2017, we will be able to show the first results of the new Strategy, and we will present the interim GABAR report. I hope that many of you will be able to join us for the event. Watch the INBAR website for more information in the months to come.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by congratulating the World Bamboo Organisation with the organisation of this wonderful congress. I am well aware that this is the work of volunteers, and organising an event like this on the other side of the world is not easy. Hats off to you! I also want to thank the local authorities here in Damyang, for their efforts to make this congress a success.

I look forward to being with you, and I will moderate a dialogue with some of the key speakers at the Congress during an event on Sunday afternoon. Have a very productive and enjoyable Congress.