

## PRESS RELEASE

Mrs. Jayanthi Natarajan appealed for more scientific analysis of the issues relating to forest management in the country in the midst of ever increasing pressure on the forests and climate change threat. Inaugurating the first Indian Forest Congress, 2011 in New Delhi today, she urged for developing reliable data at the state level on forest biomass, increment, Non-timber Forest Products, Eco-tourism, etc. She asked the experts to evolve innovative solutions for human-wildlife conflict, development of forest certification in the country and to assess the tangible and non-tangible benefits from the forests. She stressed the need for second generation reforms in the Joint Forest Management Programme (JFM) and recognition of the rights of the local people and their capacity building. She praised the community of foresters for doing commendable work in protecting the forests in the midst of increasing population pressure and stressed that current investment in forest management be increased for ensuring food and water security. She urged the need for strengthening the forest bureaucracy in order to meet the increasing pressure on the forests.

The Minister released books entitled "Voices from the Field", "Forestry in the Service of Nation - ICFRE Technologies" and "Status of JFM in India" all published by ICFRE.

Prof. M.S. Swaminathan, Member of Rajya Sabha in his Presidential Address welcomed the initiatives of the Indian Council of Forestry Research & Education (ICFRE) to organize the First Forest Congress. Prof. Swaminathan lamented the fact that political commitment for forest conservation as shown by late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi is lacking today. He stressed the need for the ICFRE to conduct focused research on Coastal, Mangroves, Hills and Dry Zones of the country. Many Van Vigyan Kendra need to be established in the country to promote Agro forestry, he added. He asked the DG, ICFRE to start projects on developing technologies for the mining rehabilitation as these areas need immediate interventions. Local heritage sites need to be given special attention in protecting the sacred groves, he further added.

Ms. Caitilin Wiesen, Country Director of UNDP-India stated that UNDP is supporting the efforts of mainstreaming the biodiversity conservation and forest based livelihoods. She welcomed the theme areas selected for the congress and pledged the support of UNDP to ICFRE. Mr. Maharaj Muthoo, President of Roman Forum, FAO in his introductory remarks informed the delegates about the international trends in forest management. Mr. A.K. Mukherjee, Former Director General of Forests, Government of India in his key note address proposed policy changes in the forestry programmes of the country. He stressed the need to bring more and more science in JFM and on tribal land issues.

The Welcome Address was given by Dr. V.K. Bahuguna, Director General of the ICFRE & Chancellor of FRI University. Dr. Bahuguna outlined the issues of the themes of the Seminar and said that for food and water security investment in forests need to be stepped up. The Director General of Forests & Special Secretary to Government of

India, Dr. P.J. Dilip Kumar stressed the need for capacity building of the JFM Committee members. Vote of Thanks was given by the Director of FRI and Vice Chancellor of the FRI University, Dr. S.S. Negi who is also Chairman of the Organizing Committee.

The first ever Indian Forest Congress was inaugurated today by Mrs. Jayanthi Natarajan, Hon'ble Minister of Environment & Forests in New Delhi. The 4-Day congress is being attended by the invited National & International Experts, Officers from the Government of India, Forest Department Officers, Scientists, Farmers, NGOs and others. There are 28 sub themes running paralleled at NASC Complex. Special JFM conclave is also stated for 24<sup>th</sup> November 2011. The United Nations has declared the year 2011 as International Year of Forests and organization of First Indian Congress is most appropriate in showcasing the year long efforts of the country in celebrating various events during the International Year of Forests. Thirty six events have been organized during the year.