

# Effective law needed for policing of forest

Malaysia willing to tie its hands and feet to a convention, says Mahathir

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By Seema Viswanathan  
seema@thesundaily.com

**KUALA LUMPUR, Mon:** The call for an all-encompassing legal instrument on forestry has resurfaced at the 21st World Congress of the International Union of Forestry Organisations.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that such a convention is necessary to address various issues on forestry and timber in a "holistic, integrated and comprehensive manner".

Mahathir's speech at the congress, which was read by Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, lamented the fact that related meetings in the past, espe-

cially the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, failed to result in such a law.

"There is a glaring vacuum . . . eight years down the road from Rio, and after extensive and intensive debates, the issue of a legal instrument on forests has yet to be resolved," he added.

He said a legal framework would facilitate the achievement of sustainable forest management for all types of forests, compared with the "ad hoc, non legally-binding" international environment "which can be a hindrance to the best forestry practices".

Lim later told reporters that the legal framework, which should cover temperate, boreal and tropical forests, should not be politi-

cised by governments.

"We (Malaysia) are willing to tie our hands and feet to a convention to practise internationally accepted criteria towards forest management.

"I've been looking for such an appropriate mechanism, one that should have come from the United Nations as a follow-up to the Rio summit . . . there was much talk but no action," he added.

However, Prof Jeffrey Burley, president of the International Union of Forestry Research Organisations (Iufro), said the convention must get complete political acceptance if it is to be successful.

"It's a political decision. Scientists can only provide the information. It's up to the

politicians . . . what's good for the forests may not be good in the political sense," he added.

Burley said it is understandable that governments are slow in accepting such a framework because there are already several institutions and laws, for example on climate change, desertification, anti-deforestation, bio-diversity and trade and endangered species.

"All of these have a connection to forestry. This is what concerns the politicians . . . how to set up yet another convention?" he added.

The five-day congress at the PWTC carries a theme of **Forests and Society: The Role of Research, and includes the World Forestry 2000 Exhibition.**