

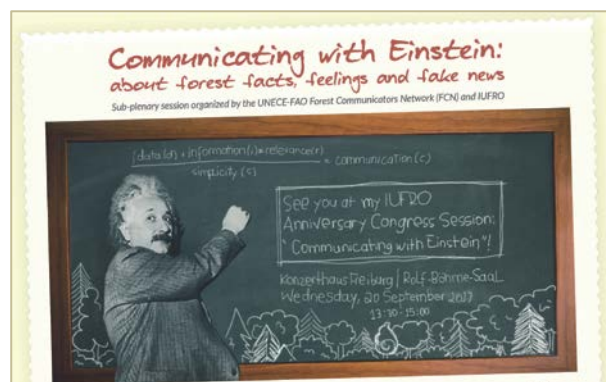
Media release



Forest communicators urged to use science-based facts to fight fake news

Freiburg, Germany, 20 September 2017 – Facts are vital tools for communicators striving to help the public understand critical issues such as climate change and the forest sector, according to a session on communication during the 125th Anniversary Congress of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO).

In a novel approach, session organizers from the UNECE-FAO Forest Communicators Network (FCN) and the IUFRO Working Party on Communication and Public Relations used quotes from the Nobel-prize winning physicist Albert Einstein as guidance on the critical importance of separating fake news from scientifically verified facts.



The value of plain language was also emphasized during presentations to scientists participating in the interactive communication session. "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough," said Einstein — a quote used by Maria De Cristofaro, Outreach and Capacity-Building Officer, FAO Forestry Department, to illustrate how important it is to translate complex scientific relationships into simple terms.

Kai Lintunen, Head of International Communications at the Finnish Forest Association as well as Deputy Leader of FCN, said it is critical to reach decision-makers with real information and to rebut "alternative facts" with science.

"Communication means being heard. For this, we need to build a strong, continuous dialogue on forests," said Lintunen. "We must also choose our words with care in order to break through to the minds of decision makers."

This includes reaching more people and ensuring that sustainable forest management becomes a topic of public awareness and discussion, said Ingwald Gschwandtl, Director of the Forest Policy Division at Austria's Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, and FCN Leader.

"The forest sector has long been at the forefront of defining sustainability and putting it into practice," said Gschwandtl. "This is a story we should be proud of, but we need to tell it better."

Jennifer Hayes, a Public and Legislative Affairs Specialist, and Yasmeen Sands, Public Affairs Specialist — both with the US Forest Service — offered concrete examples where scientific results, properly communicated, have contributed to better understanding and to finding solutions to specific problems.

The “Communicating with Einstein” session, moderated by Canadian science writer Bob Burt of IUFRO and FCN, was part of IUFRO’s five-day congress marking the organization’s 125th anniversary (<http://iufro2017.com/>).

Sub-Plenary Session: Wed. 20/09/2017, 13:30 - 15:00, Konzerthaus Freiburg
Communicating with Einstein – about forest facts, feelings and fake news

A **video** of the “interview with Einstein” can be watched here:
<https://youtu.be/aDAz7okK3dA>

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The FCN was established over 20 years ago by the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission. The network consists of more than 200 people from some 20 countries and 10 international organizations and institutions that liaise to improve forest communication and work to develop professionalism among forest communicators. Five other Regional Forest Communicators Networks have since been established by FAO across the world based on the same model. <http://www.unece.org/forests/areas-of-work/forestsinformationfcn/tos-on-forest-communication.html>

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO <http://www.iufro.org/>) is the only world-wide organization devoted to forest research and related sciences. Its members are research institutions, universities, and individual scientists as well as decision-making authorities and other stakeholders with a focus on forests and trees.