



Proclaim of the III International Congress on Forest and its Potential for Health, on the value of the most natural forests for societies' health and well-being

Girona and la Garrotxa (Catalonia), 7th to 10th of October of 2019

WE, the participants of the III International Congress on Forest and its Potential for Health, who come from 17 countries of five continents, represent local, regional, national and international organisations of the private, social and public sectors, forest owners, managers, scientists, forest officials and users, and work with or are interested in nature and health, do hereby:

RECALL the increasing scientific evidence of the positive effects that nature in general, and forests in particular, have on human health and well-being. This is based on biomedical, psychological and sociological research carried out in recent years in the forests of Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania, including reviews published by the World Health Organisation and other leading international organisations.

ACKNOWLEDGE the progress made in the application of medical forest therapy in several countries around the world, which have led to the development of specific programmes and manuals, the training of specialised guides and the creation of quality standards and certification systems.

RECOGNISE the "Healthy Parks, Healthy People" initiatives which have spread out over several countries of the world, as well as the valuable insights from the Specialist Group on Health and Well-being of the World Commission on Protected Areas of the International Union for the Conservation of the Nature, and the UN ECE/ILO Team of Specialists on Green Jobs in the Forest Sector, as well as, at the European level, the Working Group on Health and Protected Areas of the EUROPARC Federation, and the ongoing work of the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (FOREST EUROPE).

RECOGNISE the valuable contributions in recent years by several organisations and international networks, with many shared objectives, to forest medicine and therapy, which underscores the need for further cooperation in order to improve their effectiveness, while taking each organisation's particular circumstances into account.

TAKE INTO ACCOUNT the decisions of the 2018 Conference of the Parties to the Convention of Biological Diversity, as well as the 2019 EUROPARC Federation's Jurmala Communiqué to boost the "Healthy Parks, Healthy People" initiative in Europe, emphasising the links between human health and nature, which offer very attractive possibilities to reduce health costs by developing health and well-being programmes with a focus on nature.

EMPHASISE the contribution that forest therapy and other applications of the relationship between forests and health can make in advancing and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, especially number 3: Good Health and Well-being; 15: Life on Land; 13: Climatic action; and 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

STRESS THE SIGNIFICANCE of the proceedings of the two previous international Congresses on Forest and its Potential for Health, organised in Heringsdorf, Germany, in 2017, and Krems, Austria, in 2018, as well as the 1st International Forest Therapy Congress, held in California, USA, and the World Conference on Forests for Public Health which took place in Athens, Greece, both of them this year. They demonstrated the growing international movement that seeks to exchange knowledge, collaborate and learn from each other on this issue with the aim of creating cure and healing forests all over the world, along with evidence-based therapies. "Healing forests" are "forests and forest areas that are designed for therapeutic use for specific medicinal indications due to special properties" (1st International Congress Heringsdorf 2017). Treatment by trained and certified forest therapists and forest therapy practitioners and guides in healing forests can have a beneficial effect on a broad spectrum of diseases and disabilities including psychic disorders in advanced stages.

ACKNOWLEDGE that valorising the multiple ecosystem services provided by the most natural and mature forests is an essential component of the preservation of these forests for its own sake. These ecosystem services are not only related to human health and well-being, but also to biodiversity preservation, soil protection, hydric cycle regulation, water purification, carbon fixation, the fight against climate change and its consequences, and the provision of landscapes, leisure, spirituality, heritage, and so many other tangible and intangible products and resources. In this regard, it is very useful to assess and map out all of these forest services, values, uses and individual features.

EXPRESS SPECIAL GRATITUDE for the valuable contributions made in this congress, and the fruitful consensus achieved during our discussions and debates regarding all aspects mentioned above.



Considering the above, WE COMMIT OURSELVES to:

- 1. Foster cooperation and the realisation and diffusion of research** on the effects of forests on human health and well-being in all its dimensions (preventive, therapeutic, rehabilitative, palliative), prioritising the fields most important in each ecosystem, country, territory, society and healthcare system.
- 2. Promote networks of forests with therapeutic functionality** (with a level of protection equivalent to IUCN category IV) in our respective countries, integrated within the system of natural protected areas and/or a network of forest reserves that is representative of forest habitats (IUCN categories I-IV). This objective should be attained while promoting the quality and the vitality of the governance most suited to each case in order to ensure that the ecological integrity of forestlands is compatible with regulated use for health, therapeutic and eco-touristic applications, steeped in a culture of reciprocity that fosters policies and attitudes that help to heal forests and other related natural environments.
- 3. Foster cooperation between institutions involved in forest therapy at the international level in order to promote an agreed standard of quality and certification system** which includes an ethical code of professional conduct, takes into account the valuable contributions made by the existing models, and harmonises them in the most effective way possible, while considering the specificities of each country, territory and culture.
- 4. Adopt and promote urgent measures of joint responsibility and international cooperation** to minimise the negative impacts on tropical and boreal forests (which at present are the most severely affected by human activities). This means actively supporting their custodians, the indigenous peoples and local communities that live there, and learning from their cultural and spiritual values. It also means supporting local governance systems in order to conserve the biodiversity and its multiple associated ecosystem services, as demonstrated by the 2019 Evaluation of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.
- 5. Communicate this proclamation** among the interested public and private actors of our respective territories and countries, and send it to the relevant international organisations, congresses and conferences involved in related subjects, especially: the World Health Organisation, the IUCN World Conservation Congress (France, June 2020), the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention of United Nations on Biological Diversity (China, October 2020), and the IV Congress of the International Society of Forest Therapy (Portugal, 2020), as well as, at the European level, to the European Commission and the next Ministerial Conference on the Protection of the Forests of Europe - FOREST EUROPE (Slovakia, October 2020). In the forthcoming new funding period 2021-2027, the participants call for resources to be allocated in the European structural funding programmes (i) to improve the state of studies on evidence research of healing forests, (ii) to create healing forests as a preventive public health measure, (iii) to develop specific therapeutic applications to treat certain symptoms and (iv) to implement cure and healing forests as green infrastructure.

FURTHERMORE, THE ORGANISATIONS OF CATALONIA, AS HOSTS OF THE CONGRESS, COMMIT TO:

(a) Continue promoting the application of the conclusions of the Statement on the Interdependence of Health and Nature adopted this year in Catalonia; (b) in the short term, create a private-public fund for the diagnosis, preservation and stewardship of a network of forests of high ecological value, as well as the identifying and establishing a sub-network of forests with therapeutic functionality; (c) carry out a 2020-24 pilot project for the implementation of a Catalan Network of Cure Forests and Healing Forests following the Sèlvans methodology; (d) foster the dialogue and concertation of public health services with the aforementioned network; and (e) improve international cooperation to protect primary forests and to promote forest therapy as a tool for the conservation of natural and strategic forests. The Government of Catalonia will take appropriate leadership in catalysing and achieving all these commitments.

FINALLY, ALL PARTICIPANTS WARMLY CONGRATULATE the Sèlvans Association and all the organisations and individuals that have collaborated in the organisation of this Congress, and for achieving all of these promising results.

Girona, 10th of October 2019