



ISOC-1 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 28 JUNE 1999

The first Intersessional meeting on the Operations of the Convention (ISOC-1) opened Monday morning. Following several opening statements and adoption of the agenda, delegates began their review of the operations of the Convention and the programme of work. They continued this discussion in a contact group during the evening.

OPENING PLENARY

Láslo Miklós (Slovakia), President of COP-4, opened the session. He highlighted COP-4 concerns regarding measures to improve the CBD's operation and said principle questions to address encompass: how to improve the clarity and implementation of COP decisions; expectations for the financial mechanism and other institutions; measures to improve scientific input and the scientific basis for policy recommendations; and the possibility of creating further subsidiary bodies, such as one for Convention implementation or one similar to other treaties such as the FCCC and Montreal Protocol. He also underscored the session's other agenda topic of access to genetic resources and benefit sharing, particularly regarding trade-related aspects, intellectual property rights (IPRs) issues and pre-CBD *ex situ* collections.

Hamdallah Zedan, Acting Executive Secretary of the CBD, noted that the Convention will only achieve its goals through effective management and organization. He highlighted a number of SBSTTA-4 recommendations that will help provide scientifically-based advice to the COP, including recommendations on a strategic plan and peer review. He also noted that ISOC-1 can provide guidance to the Expert Panel on Access and Benefit Sharing, which will meet in Costa Rica in October 1999. Jorge Illueca, UNEP, on behalf of the UNEP Executive Director Klaus Töpfer, wished participants a successful meeting.

Delegates agreed that the COP-4 Bureau would serve as ISOC-1's officers and adopted the agenda (UNEP/CBD/ISOC/1). They also agreed to conduct the entire meeting in Plenary. The Secretariat introduced the document on the review of the operations of the Convention and the programme of work (UNEP/CBD/ISOC/1/Add.1), which contains options for review, including proposals regarding scientific assessment, a more developed programme of work, regionalization of work and potential needs for subsidiary bodies.

REVIEW OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE CONVENTION

Cristián Samper (Colombia), Chair of SBSTTA-5, highlighted improvements made during SBSTTA-4, including: a more focused agenda and proposal to hold two SBSTTA meetings between each COP; three presentations by leading scientists to introduce topics; and the establishment of staggered Bureau members' terms to facilitate continuity. He suggested that delegates may wish to find ways and means to: enhance scientific inputs into SBSTTA, including peer reviews and transparent intersessional workshops; develop a strategic plan for SBSTTA, leaving politically sensitive issues to open-ended working groups or another subsidiary body; improve SBSTTA outputs to COPs; request the Executive Secretary to assess the relevance to COPs of SBSTTA recommendations and possible follow-up mechanisms for their implementation; and promote better coordination with other scientific bodies and institutions.

GERMANY, on behalf of the EU, noted the importance of agenda setting, reporting and notification, and he suggested holding annual SBSTTA's and bi-annual COP's. With SWITZERLAND and BURUNDI, he expressed preference for making the CBD's existing structures work better than fundamentally changing them, such as through a new subsidiary body. CANADA supported incremental rather than radical change of Convention operations. The UK encouraged considering measures to: improve notification of intersessional activities; increase categorization of COP decisions; strengthen the role of regional meetings; and place additional focus on reporting and implementation review processes. BURUNDI said the meeting should address impediments such as the inability of matching SBSTTA recommendations with available funds. The NETHERLANDS stressed the need to better prepare for COPs through, *inter alia*, joint SBSTTA and COP Bureau meetings and regional meetings. He also noted potential difficulties in ensuring continuity in the Bureau election process for bi-annual COPs.

INDIA supported yearly SBSTTA meetings and bi-annual COPs. With BRAZIL and INDONESIA, he supported establishing a limited number of specific expert panels, which they said should be transparent and have equitable geographic representation. BRAZIL said the options of making no significant changes to the Convention and establishing new bodies are not mutually exclusive. He said he could support a parallel intersessional body that could address implementation issues not dealt with by SBSTTA, such as financing and capacity-building. GUYANA, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, supported creating a subsidiary body for monitoring. She also stressed the need



for capacity-building, and emphasized the importance of the CHM and strategic plans, including short and medium-term action plans. ALGERIA favored the creation of an intersessional body for CBD implementation.

The PHILIPPINES stressed the need for full cooperation by all participants in a transparent manner, especially regarding capacity-building, financial and budgetary issues. ARGENTINA, KENYA and MALAYSIA called for transparent and equitable participation in expert groups.

CANADA, NEW ZEALAND, the UK, SWITZERLAND, AUSTRALIA, RUSSIA and others supported developing a strategic plan. CHINA emphasized the need for a 10-year strategic plan, along with a medium 5-year and 2-year rolling implementation plan. HAITI supported a strategic plan that identifies clear operational plans for national strategies. ALGERIA said the CBD strategic plan should be flexible to incorporate new elements as needed. CAMEROON said such flexibility could translate into Secretariat participation in the upcoming WTO TRIPs negotiations.

Many delegates noted the importance of the CHM for sharing information, scientific cooperation and COP preparation, among other reasons. INDIA and CÔTE D'IVOIRE called for capacity-building in the CHM context. MALAYSIA supported making funds available for the development of national CHMs in developing countries. KENYA agreed with ETHIOPIA and INDIA that the CHM will benefit countries if they have the capacity to transmit its information to stakeholders within the country. CHINA emphasized the important role of SBSTTA, the CHM and capacity-building, especially in developing countries.

INDONESIA highlighted the rigidity of GEF support for CBD implementation, particularly regarding operationalizing the CHM in developing countries and enhancing capacity for institutional coordination and participation at the national level. CAMEROON said the CBD can not be implemented without the release of GEF funds for capacity-building and improving the CHM.

Many delegates supported the SBSTTA Chair's recommendations. ARGENTINA noted that SBSTTA could be improved through the creation of expert groups with specific terms of reference and timeframes. NORWAY said four elements are lacking for establishing a scientific assessment mechanism under SBSTTA: a strategic framework identifying the components of an authoritative scientific assessment mechanism; a broad basis for the establishment of terms of reference for expert panels; the establishment of more formal links to existing scientific mechanisms and centers of excellence; and a system whereby SBSTTA makes full use of the current roster of national experts. HAITI suggested eliminating long preambles in SBSTTA recommendations and called for close cooperation between the CHM, GEF and SBSTTA. HUNGARY stressed the importance of input from independent scientific and other organizations. SWITZERLAND stressed the importance of a CHM and financial mechanism and called for strengthened cooperation between the GEF's Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel and SBSTTA.

SOUTH AFRICA highlighted the importance of improving the functioning of regional meetings and implementation at the regional level, and suggested that regional reports could be a useful instrument. AUSTRALIA supported KENYA, TONGA and others' calls for better use of regional meetings. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA said regional and sub-regional meetings are important to enhance transparency. The CZECH REPUBLIC suggested holding regional meetings of experts. CUBA and JORDAN also emphasized the importance of regional meetings. MEXICO stressed the importance of local and regional focal points. SYRIA emphasized capacity-building, the CHM and the need for the GEF and CBD Secretariat to enhance their work with national, sub-regional and regional scientists and institutions. TONGA stressed

the need to incorporate regional processes and meetings prior to COPs and SBSTTAs. The COOK ISLANDS, on behalf of the Pacific Island States, recommended measures to improve the participation of small island countries of the Pacific, including CBD Secretariat cooperation with regional conventions and biodiversity-related bodies such as the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

NEW ZEALAND emphasized that national reports need to be more focused. CÔTE D'IVOIRE supported including indicators for national reporting and ways to prioritize recommendations. BELARUS called for monitoring the CBD through national reports and indicators for biodiversity. COSTA RICA stressed the importance of assessment and monitoring programmes at the national level.

ETHIOPIA, on behalf of the African Group, said the CBD should work closely with other multilateral agreements, including Ramsar and CITES, to gain from their experience and to avoid duplication. MALAWI recommended identifying mechanisms that the Secretariat should put into place for the CBD to cooperate with other organizations. MALI suggested raising policymakers' awareness of scientific considerations. TOGO, with support from GUINEA, stressed the need for capacity-building and rejected the concept of multiple contact groups, citing the difficulty for small delegations to participate. A coalition of eight NGOs recommended that decisions on cross-cutting themes be integrated into the thematic work programmes, that the definition of experts be extended to include social scientists, holders of traditional knowledge, economists and local users, and that experts not appointed by governments be included. The Chair proposed establishing a contact group, chaired by Jonathan Tillson (UK), to further discuss the issue and to report back to Chair Miklós by mid-day Tuesday.

IN THE CONTACT GROUP

The contact group on the review of operations of the Convention met in the evening and discussed a Chair's draft text, based on points that had attracted general support in Plenary. The draft proposed, *inter alia*: sequencing of COP and SBSTTA meetings; supporting a strategic plan; improving the work of SBSTTA; supporting regional meetings; and proposing three options concerning whether or not to have an implementation body. A number of developing country delegates sought greater prominence for the implementation body, while others proposed that existing institutions could be strengthened. Some said that a number of the Secretariat's recommendations supported in Plenary were not incorporated in the draft text.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As promised by the Executive Secretary in his opening statement to SBSTTA-4, many "Cartagena faces" have arrived in Montreal in expectation of Thursday's informal consultation on the Biosafety Protocol. Observers reported that delegates started corridor discussions on Monday. Some delegates suggested that new developments in regional and national policies on biotechnology, including the EU's Environmental Ministers' related discussion last week on GMO regulation, has pushed the agenda. Others expressed some concern that, after the confrontations in Cartagena, some countries may have become more cautious. The informal consultations reportedly hope to identify common ground and a strategy for regional consultations as well as discuss dates and the venue for a resumed ExCOP.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Delegates are expected to discuss the agenda item on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing beginning at 10:00 am.

CONTACT GROUP: The contact group on the review of the operations of the Convention is expected to report to Plenary Chair Miklós by mid-day.