

ITPGR GB 3 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 1 JUNE 2009

Delegates to the third session of the Governing Body (GB 3) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Treaty or ITPGR) met in plenary throughout the day, to hear keynote speeches and opening and regional statements, address organizational matters, and begin discussions on outstanding financial rules and compliance.

PLENARY

OPENING: GB Chair Modesto Fernández Díaz-Silveira (Cuba) welcomed delegates and thanked the government of Tunisia for hosting the meeting and showing their commitment to the Treaty.

Afioga-Taua Tavaga Kitona Seuala, Minister of Agriculture of Samoa, presented on the importance of agriculture to Pacific Islands and the need to protect biological diversity to ensure food security, especially in light of climate change and natural disasters. He said that the region's significant diversity is not enough to deal with future challenges, and welcomed access to global diversity through ratification of the ITPGR. He pointed to the work of the Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees hosted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and signed an agreement with FAO to place material in the Centre's collection in the Treaty's Multilateral System (MLS).

Efrain Figueroa, Vice Minister of Agriculture of Honduras, stressed the need to strengthen the processes of conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA), calling on parties to act in harmony with each other and on developed countries to provide financial resources.

Alicia Crespo Pazos, Spain's Ministry of Environment, Rural and Marine Affairs, invited parties to contribute to the funding strategy's benefit-sharing fund as a key element of the Treaty, and announced Spain's contribution of 3 million Euros.

A video presented how the Treaty connects farmers, researchers and donors globally through the exchange of genetic material and benefit-sharing. It was noted that over 440,000 accessions to the MLS occurred in one year, and some 300 proposals were submitted for small-scale projects to support local farmers.

Cinzia Scaffidi, Slow Food, Italy, noted recent G8 statements recognizing the role of local communities in promoting food security. She alerted delegates of the need to educate consumers to counter the erosion of genetic resources and food cultures.

Jean Beigbeder, Pro-Maïs, France, stressed that facilitated access to plant genetic resources is key to creating improved varieties and vital for food security, and highlighted that they made the first private sector contribution to the MLS, consisting of 500 accessions from maize populations and lines.

Abdelmajid Labidi, Tunisian Union of Agriculture and Fishing, for the International Federation of Agricultural Producers, stressed farmers' contribution to food security and biodiversity protection, and called for their involvement in decision making and for universal recognition of their right to save, use and exchange seeds.

Chair Fernández then declared the session open and presented his report (IT/GB-3/09/3). He highlighted the Treaty's importance for adapting agriculture to climate change and said that the lack of necessary financial resources hampers its implementation. He announced that on Sunday, 31 May 2009, the Bureau approved the first eleven projects under the benefit-sharing fund, demonstrating that benefit-sharing is a reality.

Presenting his report (IT/GB-3/09/4), ITPGR Secretary Shakeel Bhatti said the Treaty heeds the call for a new multilateralism based on global public goods to address the inter-related crises of food, climate and energy, by setting up an MLS that covers more than 80% of our foods from plants and is a key tool for climate change adaptation. He described how the MLS has been implemented over the past 18 months including through the standard material transfer agreement (SMTA), which he said requires revisions to overcome legal and technical uncertainties. He raised concerns about the Treaty's financial stability and said the budget presented is a minimum one that ensures operationalization of core tasks. He stressed that the ITPGR serves as a model to various international forums, and can put agriculture back on the international policy map.

Abdessalem Mansour, Tunisia's Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, stressed his country's commitment to PGRFA conservation and utilization, and to the full implementation of the ITPGR. He highlighted that Tunisia has managed to preserve crop biodiversity while ensuring intellectual property protection for new varieties, including through international cooperation and the establishment of a national genebank in 2007.

Modibo Traoré, FAO Assistant Director-General, expressed satisfaction with record progress made under the Treaty and with the innovative governance model it provides. He urged delegates to accelerate resource mobilization to avoid the risk of undermining implementation of the Treaty.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates adopted the agenda and timetable (IT/GB-3/09/1 Rev.1 and IT/GB-3/09/2); elected Campbell Davidson (Canada) as Rapporteur of the

meeting; and established a credentials committee, as well as a budget committee, co-chaired by François Pythoud (Switzerland) and a G-77/China representative to be nominated on Tuesday. Noting that the budget committee will need to reach consensus on the work programme and budget, Chair Fernández said it will be open to all delegations but only parties will have decision-making power.

REGIONAL STATEMENTS: Ecuador, for G-77/CHINA, said the Treaty was more than the SMTA and called for transparent implementation and the meeting of funding commitments by increasing voluntary contributions to the core budget and agreeing to base these on an indicative scale. She requested daily updates in plenary by the budget committee and asked to postpone work on compliance until GB 4. Australia, for the SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, disagreed on postponing discussions on compliance, noting it had already been postponed from GB 2. Uruguay, for the LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), said that equitable benefit-sharing and financing were required for the Treaty to be sustainable. Belgium, for the EUROPEAN REGIONAL GROUP, stressed that all its members want to further promote implementation and are committed to working constructively.

Canada, for NORTH AMERICA, underscored that the US fully supports the objectives of the ITPGR and said the Obama administration has recommended Senate action on the Treaty. He highlighted Canada's contribution to the Treaty's core budget and announced a voluntary contribution to the benefit-sharing fund. Indonesia, for ASIA, offered to host GB 4 in 2011. Egypt, for the MIDDLE EAST, supported the establishment of a reliable and stable funding strategy and stressed the need to: build capacity in all countries for implementation; support plant breeding programmes; and involve all stakeholders. Kenya, for the AFRICAN GROUP, noted that lack of funding had slowed progress on the Treaty's implementation in the region, and indicated that the balance between access and benefit-sharing remains skewed towards the former.

The INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, on behalf of civil society, emphasized that implementation of farmers' rights is critical to addressing the world's food, climate change, energy and economic crises. They put forward proposals including for parties to ensure the rights of small-scale farmers, indigenous peoples and pastoralists to protect farming social systems and cultures, and commit to biennial reporting on the state of the world's farmers and farmers' rights.

FINANCIAL RULES OF THE GOVERNING BODY: The Secretariat introduced the item (IT/GB-3/09/5) and noted that outstanding matters concern whether parties' voluntary contributions will be based on an indicative scale. He highlighted that parties' contributions to date are in line with the UN indicative scale and explained that the UN Joint Inspection Unit report on voluntary contributions has found that use of this scale has helped to improve predictability and adequacy of resources, and sustainability of programme delivery.

The G-77/CHINA supported that contributions be based on an indicative scale, stressing that these would remain voluntary. INDIA suggested that an indicative scale would be better for both the Treaty and the parties, bringing certainty and predictability to budget planning. SWITZERLAND and NORWAY also supported using an indicative scale, adding that this would strengthen the Treaty's independence from FAO. CANADA preferred voluntary contributions without an indicative scale. The Czech Republic, for the EU and TURKEY, asked that the financial rules be dealt with under the agenda item on implementation of the MLS. Pointing to the majority in support of an indicative scale, the ETC GROUP supported

adopting it, thereby putting in place the key building block for sustainable financing. FRANCE stressed that the brackets around the two existing options could not be removed unless there was unanimity.

Supporting the G-77/CHINA position, the AFRICAN GROUP suggested establishing a contact group on the issue, while SWITZERLAND proposed suspending discussions until the end of the week, when further voluntary contributions will be announced. CAMEROON suggested building consensus through informal consultations. The EU then proposed deferring consideration of this issue until GB 4. Chair Fernández suspended discussions to allow for informal consultations among regional groups.

COMPLIANCE: The Secretariat introduced the draft procedures and operational mechanisms to promote compliance (IT/GB-3/09/06 Rev.1) and presented documents tabled and decisions taken in previous sessions of the GB recommending that a contact group be established at this session.

The G-77/CHINA, supported by the AFRICAN GROUP, requested deferring this issue to a later GB session, noting it was premature to address it when there is a lack of resources to ensure proper implementation of the Treaty. The EUROPEAN REGIONAL GROUP called for implementing the GB 2 decision to set up a contact group at this session, and noted the compliance committee should be small and composed of technical and legal experts who serve in their personal capacity. INDIA stressed that the aim of compliance procedures should be to formulate responses and correct non-compliance. The SOUTH WEST PACIFIC and SWITZERLAND also noted that the establishment of a contact group on compliance was mandated by GB 2 and could not be postponed. The G-77/CHINA remarked that GB 2 had decided to establish a contact group "as appropriate," which, in their view, is not the case here, and Chair Fernández suspended discussions to allow for informal consultations.

FUNDING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION: The Secretariat introduced the item and reported on actions undertaken since GB 2, in particular the completion of the first project cycle under the benefit-sharing fund (IT/GB-3/09/8 Rev.1). The Secretariat noted the number and quality of proposals received and awarded certificates to representatives of eleven projects approved for funding, as listed in IT/GB-3/09/Inf.11. Discussions will resume on Tuesday.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Arriving in Tunisia, many delegates commented that the ITPGR Secretariat had mounted a tireless campaign to facilitate implementation of the Treaty, overcoming impressive obstacles on the way, not unlike Hannibal on his epic journey from Carthage to Rome. The announcement of the first eleven projects to be funded under the benefit-sharing fund was taken as further proof of a job well done. Yet many wondered whether such an effort could be sustained in the absence of long-term financial commitments. A heated afternoon discussion on whether parties' voluntary contributions should be based on an indicative scale or not, coupled with developing countries' reluctance to discuss compliance in the absence of commitments from developed countries on additional financial resources, made it clear that funding issues would take center stage at this session. Meanwhile, rumor had it that developed country regional groups still need to bridge internal divides regarding the provision of increased financial support towards the Treaty's implementation. As delegates broke for the evening, it was evident that a strategic plan of attack is needed to ensure that clear directions for the next two years of campaigning are brought back to Rome from Carthage.