

ITPGR GB 4 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 14 MARCH 2011

Delegates to the fourth session of the Governing Body (GB 4) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Treaty or ITPGR) met in plenary throughout the day, to hear statements and reports, address organizational matters, and begin discussions on the Funding Strategy.

PLENARY

OPENING: Following a ceremony led by a Balinese priest and featuring traditional Balinese dancers, GB 4 Chair Cosima Hufler (Austria) expressed her appreciation to Indonesia for hosting the session. The meeting observed a minute of silence in memory of the victims of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

ITPGR Secretary Shakeel Bhatti highlighted Indonesia's support for the Treaty and its financial contribution to the benefit-sharing fund, the support of FAO and its Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) and the positive institutional relationship between the Treaty and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). CBD Executive Secretary Ahmed Djoghlaif presented an overview of the outcomes of the tenth meeting of the CBD Conference of the Parties, including the new Strategic Plan and the Nagoya Protocol on access and benefit-sharing (ABS), noting the complementarities between the Treaty and the ABS Protocol and highlighting the need for the Protocol's early entry into force.

CGRFA Secretary Linda Collette emphasized recent collaboration between the Governing Body of the ITPGR and the Commission, highlighting the launch of the second Report on the State of the World's PGRFA, the draft updated Global Plan of Action, and draft revised genebank standards.

Director-General of the Indonesian Agency for Agricultural Research and Development Ir. Haryono announced that Indonesia pledged US\$100,000 to the Treaty. He informed delegates that 48 countries took part in the Ministerial Conference on Biodiversity for Agriculture and Food Security aimed at strengthening implementation of the ITPGR in view of climate change, which was held on 11 March and resulted in the Bali Ministerial Declaration.

In a keynote address, FAO Assistant Director-General Modibo Traoré commended the ITPGR for its fast rate of ratification. Noting the Treaty's benefit-sharing fund's disbursement of US\$10 million, including to assist farmers adapt crops to climate change, he called on all parties to fulfill their financial commitments.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Chair Hufler announced replacement of vice-chairpersons, with the new ones being: Travis Power (Australia) for the South West Pacific Region;

Maria Cecilia Calvacante Vieira (Brazil) for Latin America and the Caribbean Region; and Mohd Saad Azman (Malaysia) for the Asian Region.

Morocco, for the G-77/CHINA, requested that implementation of the funding strategy be considered before compliance procedures. Delegates adopted the agenda (IT/GB-4/11/1) as amended, and the timetable (IT/GB-4/11/2 Rev.2) as revised following the Bureau meeting. They elected Kassahun Embaye (Ethiopia) as Rapporteur of the meeting; and established a credentials committee, as well as a budget committee, co-chaired by Lim Eng Siang (Malaysia) and Søren Skafte (Denmark). Chair Hufler noted that participation in the budget committee is restricted to parties.

ITPGR Secretary Bhatti acknowledged the financial restraints that parties are under and urged them to support the Treaty's growth. He underscored priorities for the 2012/13 work programme and budget, including consolidating public recognition of the Treaty's role and cooperation with the ABS Protocol.

REPORTS: Chair Hufler presented her report (IT/GB-4/11/4) highlighting that voluntary contributions to the budget have significantly increased, and the benefit-sharing fund has received greater political attention.

ITPGR Secretary Bhatti presented his report (IT/GB-4/11/5), praising delegates for the tremendous progress of the Treaty in the past ten years and calling for renewed commitment in the new biennium. He noted, among others, progress in inclusions of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) in the Multilateral System (MLS), including from developing countries. He highlighted the Treaty's synergies with the Global Crop Diversity Trust and the CBD, and called for adequate allocation of resources to further ITPGR's implementation.

VIA CAMPESINA, for civil society, drew attention to corporate concentration in the seed sector, noting the Treaty cannot depend on corporate funding.

STATEMENTS: Stressing its support for the Treaty including an additional €2.2 million contribution to the benefit-sharing fund for the current biennium, SPAIN encouraged the GB to review the recommendations contained in the Cordoba Declaration on Agricultural Biodiversity in Addressing Hunger and Climate Change, adopted in September 2010. Brazil, for GRULAC, stressed the need for sustainable and predictable contributions to the core budget and agreement on financial rules, and called for the mandated regional workshops on farmers' rights to be undertaken.

G-77/CHINA prioritized work on farmers' rights, sustainable use of PGRFA, the Funding Strategy, budget and capacity development. Iran, for the NEAR EAST REGION, called on developed countries to meet their technology transfer

obligations. YEMEN called for awareness-raising about farmers' rights and national legislation to implement them. The US reported on Senate Committee hearings on the Treaty which recommended ratification, and expressed hope that the new Senate will consent to ratification.

The ETC Group and SEARICE, for civil society, presented José Ramon Lopez-Portillo (Mexico), Melaku Worede (Ethiopia) and César Gómez Campo (Spain) with the Herman Warsh Memorial Award for outstanding service to the PGRFA community.

FINANCIAL RULES: The Secretariat introduced the item (IT/GB-4/11/6) and called on parties to finalize outstanding issues. Chair Hufler proposed that a Friends of the Chair group, comprising one representative per region, meet to discuss the financial rules. CUBA opposed, citing logistical constraints faced by small delegations and the great interest by many parties in this issue. Chair Hufler said her proposal remains on the table, pending further consultations. SEARICE stressed that for the Treaty to be more effective, parties should agree to voluntary contributions based on an indicative scale.

BUDGET: Reiterating that it is a major contributor to the Treaty, SPAIN expressed concern that the Treaty survives due to the generosity of a handful of countries, which is not sustainable in the long-term and runs counter to multilateralism. He expressed concern at the deficit in the core administrative budget, as contributions have not been received and therefore core activities had to be funded on the basis of loans from the special funds. He noted that the proposal for the next budget, at almost zero nominal growth, is in the same predicament due to the many mandated activities under the Treaty. He stressed that a core administrative budget for the Treaty has to be set aside and commitments have to be made to finance it. IRAN agreed, stressing that activities under the Treaty should not all be donor-driven, but based on decisions taken and funding agreed by the GB.

FUNDING STRATEGY: Bert Visser (the Netherlands), Co-Chair of the Advisory Committee on the Funding Strategy, presented the Committee's report (IT/GB-4/11/8), highlighting its recommendations on: resource mobilization; operation of the benefit-sharing fund; and implementation of the full Funding Strategy. Noting that further intersessional work is needed, he said that, with a renewed mandate, the Committee could address: oversight of the project cycle, in particular project management, monitoring and evaluation; oversight of resource mobilization efforts; and advice on establishment and implementation of partnerships.

Chair Hufler noted the Bureau's recommendation to give the panel of experts more time to complete their appraisal of proposals, for approval to be given by the GB 5 Bureau.

Cyprus, for the EUROPEAN REGIONAL GROUP (ERG), called for continued efforts to reach the target of US\$166 million. Among others, she recommended: intensifying cooperation between the benefit-sharing fund and the Global Crop Biodiversity Trust; and building partnerships beyond donor relations. She expressed concern over high overhead costs and suggested speeding up FAO recruitment processes to avoid delays in resource mobilization.

CANADA requested the Secretariat identify the budgetary implications of resolutions under consideration. AUSTRALIA praised the Secretariat for searching out non-traditional funding sources and drew attention to his country's contribution of US\$ 800,000 to the benefit-sharing fund.

AUSTRALIA opposed renewing the mandate of the Advisory Committee, with CANADA suggesting that the Bureau could fill the Committee's role. ANGOLA stressed that funding must reach farmers, and opposed dismantling the Advisory Committee.

BRAZIL suggested establishment of a permanent expert body to handle the calls for proposals. MALAYSIA further noted the need to fund projects in all regions. SWITZERLAND said the benefit-sharing fund must continue to be a pillar of the Funding Strategy and called for predictable funding and regular voluntary contributions.

The INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (IFAD) illustrated the importance of biodiversity for rural poverty reduction and stressed the need for biodiversity conservation through sustainable utilization. VIA CAMPESINA stressed that *ex situ* conservation should not monopolize funding, noting that on-farm conservation is far more important and should benefit from contributions by parties and industry. The INTERNATIONAL SEED FEDERATION highlighted the seed industry's support for genebanks, breeding programmes in developing countries and the Global Crop Diversity Trust, and called for innovative approaches for the Treaty's implementation. ITPGR Secretary Bhatti expressed his appreciation to the parties that contributed to the benefit-sharing fund.

Summarizing discussions, Chair Hufler highlighted, among others, agreement on: the need for sustainable, multi-year contributions; developing partnerships; and identifying implementing agencies. She underscored differing views on: reconvening the Advisory Committee; collaboration between the Treaty and the Global Crop Diversity Trust; and overhead costs, noting this issue will be addressed by the budget committee. A revised resolution will be tabled on Tuesday.

COMPLIANCE: René Lefebvre, Co-Chair of the *Ad Hoc* Working Group on compliance, presented the Co-Chairs' report (IT/GB-4/11/7), highlighting the need for further discussion to finalize outstanding issues. Chair Hufler suggested establishment of a contact group mandated to finalize the rules and procedures on compliance and consider the accompanying resolution. She proposed the contact group comprise two spokespersons per region, and be open to parties and observers.

GRULAC and YEMEN opposed establishment of a contact group at this point, as well as to participation on the basis of regional groups. AUSTRALIA, the ERG, MALAYSIA, the PHILIPPINES, and Kenya, for the AFRICAN GROUP, supported its establishment. Discussion on the issue will continue.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The Treaty's biannual Governing Body session opened under pouring rain in Bali. In a region that knows the devastation caused by tsunamis, delegates expressed heartfelt solidarity with Japan as it comes to terms with the effects of the recent natural disaster. Mindful of the heavy workload, they got into work-mode quickly. Lawyers especially seemed to look forward to the deliberations on compliance. One delegate claimed "we have done lots of intersessional work; we just need to resolve a few issues and we can build something really good here." At the same time, scientists focused on the need to improve MLS implementation, to accelerate inclusion of PGRFA into the system and generate benefit-sharing payments. Afternoon discussions centered around money: the key to ensuring Treaty implementation. Some delegates stressed that the crux of the matter is not just agreeing on a core budget and pledged contributions, but also having more than a handful of parties actually realize those pledges and donations. Everybody seemed to agree that unless long-term sustainable funding is put in place, the Treaty's potential and relevance could be undermined. The end of day one presented a further worry: how delegates are going to get through the agenda, with proposals for any and all break-out groups being seemingly nipped in the bud. "A break-out session may actually be in a warmer room!" joked one delegate as an incentive to get delegates out of the freezing plenary hall.