

UN BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: SUNDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2016

Following the conclusion of the High-Level Segment (HLS) and adoption of the Cancun Declaration, the main part of the UN Biodiversity Conference started in the afternoon of Sunday, 4 December, with opening plenaries of the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 13) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CP/COP-MOP 8) and the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization (NP/COP-MOP 2).

COP 13 PLENARY

Chun Kyoo Park, Ministry of Environment, Republic of Korea, on behalf of the COP 12 Presidency, opened the meeting, noting that the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 is integrated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thus making achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets a necessary condition to meet the SDGs. He further underscored challenges ahead, including the need for: intensification of efforts to achieve the Aichi Targets that lag behind; and tools and resources to implement National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

Plenary then elected Rafael Pacchiano Alamán, Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Mexico, President of COP 13, CP/COP-MOP 8 and NP/COP-MOP 2. Pacchiano noted Mexico's central role in the creation of the Group of Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries (LMMC). He highlighted the Cancun Declaration, noting, *inter alia*, the need for: political will to take into account the economic value of ecosystem services; accountability mechanisms; and increased collaboration among governments, academia, the private sector and other stakeholders.

JOINT PLENARY OF COP 13, CP/COP-MOP 8 AND NP/COP-MOP 2

UN Environment Deputy Executive Director Ibrahim Thiaw noted: the interaction of biodiversity and all SDGs; the importance of combating environmental crime, especially illegal trade of wildlife and timber; the fact that climate change adaptation and mitigation can only be achieved with healthy ecosystems, which need to be integrated in private and public sector decisions; and the challenge to communicate biodiversity to the general public.

CBD Executive Secretary Braulio Dias called for all parties to continue their efforts to achieve all Aichi Targets by 2020. Welcoming increased NBSAPs' submission, he noted, however, that few NBSAPs addressed capacity building, communication, poverty eradication and sustainable development plans. On the Cartagena Protocol, he highlighted significant progress in areas such as the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH), while progress is needed on issues including capacity building for risk assessment and unintentional transboundary movement. Noting that only four more ratifications are needed for the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to enter into force, he called upon parties to deposit instruments of ratification as soon as possible. On the Nagoya Protocol, Dias noted a number of national efforts on access and benefit-sharing (ABS), while outstanding issues include a possible global multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism.

Saint Kitts and Nevis for the GROUP OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES (GRULAC) expressed hope that this conference will be a watershed event in mainstreaming biodiversity into all sectors. He expressed concern that Global Environment Facility (GEF) funds were not assigned to countries in the region, and urged that funding be made available in the next GEF replenishment.

Bosnia and Herzegovina for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (CEE) noted that biodiversity conservation can only be successful in a cross-sectoral context, and underscored Aichi Target 11 (protected areas) as a priority for the region.

Japan for ASIA-PACIFIC noted the need to enhance funding for developing countries' participation, particularly in the light of concurrent meetings. He called for pursuing synergies with the SDGs, and between multiple international initiatives.

Chad for the AFRICAN GROUP underscored the insufficient support for participation of African countries in this meeting, and called for financial resources for the implementation of the Strategic Plan. He highlighted: capacity building, synthetic biology, sustainable use, and synergies across conventions and protocols. He supported Egypt as host of COP 14.

AUSTRALIA, on behalf also of Canada, Lichtenstein, Norway, New Zealand, Israel and the US: welcomed COP 13 theme on mainstreaming biodiversity for wellbeing and its relevance for sustainable development; noted financial shortfalls across multilateral environmental agreements, as well as the need to ensure the full participation of developing countries and indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and to seek funding from various sources; and emphasized gender mainstreaming across

the Convention and in national biodiversity policy, planning and programming. She also supported starting consideration of strategic action beyond 2020.

The EU underscored: failure to achieve Aichi Target 10 (coral reefs); opportunities for biodiversity mainstreaming arising from the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement; and the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolution inviting the CBD COP to consider developing a follow-up framework to the Strategic Plan.

Guatemala for the LMMCs: welcomed the Cancun Declaration to promote dialogue and build consensus; called for a practical approach based on lessons learnt and successful experiences of mainstreaming; and announced that Ethiopia had joined the group.

The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) called for indigenous participation in the implementation of all CBD decisions and throughout all CBD processes, including work on description of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs). She prioritized adoption of the voluntary guidelines on prior informed consent (PIC), while removing brackets around “free” before PIC.

Reminding delegates that there is little time left until 2020 and only one third of the Aichi Targets are on track, the CBD ALLIANCE called for: protection of small-scale farming; a rights-based approach to biodiversity conservation; adoption of the definition of synthetic biology developed by the *Ad Hoc* Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) and consideration of its socioeconomic issues; and a moratorium on development of gene drives.

The WOMEN’S CAUCUS expressed concern that the Cancun Declaration does not address gender and called for reference to the role and rights of women in CBD decisions. Reminding delegates that children and youth will have to live with the consequences of increasingly unpredictable environmental events, the GLOBAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY NETWORK urged follow up on CBD commitments to enable livelihoods for future generations.

Cristiana Pașca Palmer, Minister of the Environment, Romania, described her appointment as the next CBD Executive Secretary as a great challenge, noting that humans depend on nature and ecosystem services. She said that we are living in turbulent diplomatic times, when some see biodiversity as a lesser priority.

COP 13 PLENARY

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES: Delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work (UNEP/CBD/COP/13/1 and Add.1/Rev.2); and elected Sergei Melnov (Belarus) as Rapporteur for the meeting, and Mette Gervin Damsgaard (Denmark) and Skumsa Mancotywa (South Africa) as Chairs of Working Group I and Working Group II, respectively.

CP/COP-MOP 8 PLENARY

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES: Delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/8/1 and Add.2). IRAN proposed discussing the issue of visa granting and ensuring financial support for developing countries.

NP/COP-MOP 2 PLENARY

Delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work (UNEP/CBD/NP/COP-MOP/2/1/Rev.1 and Add.2).

COP 13

President Pacchiano introduced the reports of intersessional meetings (UNEP/CBD/COP/13/3-6) and delegates took note of them.

CP/COP-MOP 8 PLENARY

Jimena Nieto (Colombia), Chair of the Compliance Committee, presented the Committee’s report (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/8/2), stressing that, following extensive efforts, Luxembourg, Nicaragua and the Marshall Islands did not submit national reports in any of the three reporting cycles. Following a recommendation to issue a caution unless a response was received before COP-MOP 8, Nicaragua and Luxembourg submitted their national reports. She said a recommended caution for the Marshall Islands will be considered.

NP/COP-MOP 2 PLENARY

Christine Echokit Akello (Uganda) reported on the work of the Compliance Committee of the Nagoya Protocol (UNEP/CBD/NP/COP-MOP/2/4) on monitoring and reporting, the ABS Clearing-House, and rules of procedure.

JOINT PLENARY

REPORT ON ADMINISTRATION: Executive Secretary Dias reported on the administration of the Convention and its Protocols, trust funds and the 2017-2019 budget (UNEP/CBD/COP/13/7 and Add.1-4; 13/23 and Add.1-2; and INF/22 and 25). Following a brief presentation of two budget scenarios, a budget group chaired by Spencer Thomas (Grenada) was established. The EU stressed the importance of a realistic and affordable budget, and expressed concern about the high number of parties in arrears.

BRAZIL expressed her appreciation for the contribution of Braulio Dias as Executive Secretary for the past five years.

IN THE CORRIDORS

“Mainstreaming biodiversity for well-being” seemed to attract much more attention than previous COP themes at the opening of the 2016 UN Biodiversity Conference. Many – governments and stakeholders alike – hoped that the adoption of the Cancun Declaration on Mainstreaming will inspire outcome-oriented discussions. Some biodiversity veterans also speculated that the participation of ministers from key economic sectors in the High-Level Segment could be significant in advancing biodiversity objectives at the national level and cash in on political will to promote policy coherence. A skeptical participant, however, dwelled on the political and technical difficulties associated with biodiversity mainstreaming, and wondered whether the biodiversity agenda would be better served by a clearer focus on less complex items.

Concerns about the unprecedented “concurrent” negotiations at the COP and Protocol COP/MOPs, organization of work and time management, were shared by other participants gathering for the opening plenaries. While many welcomed the guidance provided by the Secretariat prioritizing draft decisions that include bracketed text, others questioned whether the many substantive items on the agendas will get the attention they deserve, with some being particularly worried about the heavy agenda under the Cartagena Protocol. Still, many appeared ready for the experiment, acknowledging the need for better integration between the Convention and its Protocols, with some pointing to synthetic biology as a clear example.

As participants headed to the host country’s reception, several speculated about the number of contact groups that will likely take over their evenings in the days to come, betting on Article 10 of the Nagoya Protocol (possible multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism), ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) under the CBD, and risk assessment and socioeconomic considerations under the Cartagena Protocol.