

UN BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2016

On Tuesday, 13 December, WG I approved, with minor amendments, a CRP on progress in the implementation of the awareness-raising strategy; and further addressed CRPs on capacity building under the Protocols. WG II approved, with minor amendments, CRPs on: key scientific and technical needs related to the Strategic Plan implementation, including voluntary guidance to improve the accessibility of biodiversity-related data and information; and the glossary under Article 8(j). WG II further addressed IAS, and biodiversity and human health. An afternoon plenary held an interactive dialogue on “Living in Harmony with Nature”; reviewed progress; adopted decisions; and addressed organizational matters. Contact groups and Friends of the Chair groups met throughout the day to address: mainstreaming; unintentional transboundary movement of LMOs; financial resources; synergies; synthetic biology; capacity building; and the budget.

WORKING GROUP I

CAPACITY BUILDING (NP): On a draft decision, NORWAY, opposed by JAPAN and MEXICO, proposed the Secretariat should facilitate, but not carry out, capacity-building activities to support the ratification and implementation of the Nagoya Protocol. JAPAN recalled that the Secretariat carries out capacity-building activities already, through the Japan Biodiversity Fund. Regarding a specific reference to capacity building for non-commercial use of genetic resources, the EU proposed to move the reference to the annex listing capacity-building activities for effective implementation of the Nagoya Protocol. Following lengthy discussion, delegates agreed to move it under the listed activities, with a desired outcome on “increased capacity of non-commercial research institutions and actors.” Regarding the annex, NORWAY questioned some of the indicators and the rationale for naming specific actors. SWITZERLAND said detailed discussion on the annex could be done in the contact group. WG I Chair Damsgaard mandated the contact group on capacity building to also consider capacity building under the Protocols, including the annexes.

CAPACITY BUILDING (CP): On a paragraph in a draft decision inviting parties and others, including the GEF, to provide additional financial and technical support to developing countries to further implement the Framework and Action Plan for Capacity Building, the EU, supported by EL SALVADOR, UGANDA, VENEZUELA and COSTA RICA, opposed giving priority to parties that have received limited support to date. The EU, opposed by BRAZIL, GABON, EL SALVADOR, MEXICO and others, further proposed deleting the specific reference to the GEF. Following extensive consultations, this reference to the GEF was removed,

and new language was added, requesting the GEF to continue to provide financial support to enable developing countries to further implement the Framework and Action Plan for Capacity Building. Discussion on the annex continues in the contact group.

WORKING GROUP II

INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES (IAS): On a draft decision, the EU and BRAZIL offered compromise text inviting parties and others to “take into account or review, as appropriate, legislation relevant to trade in wildlife to prevent illegal trade and reduce the risk of biological invasion associated with trade in wildlife via e-commerce.” After consultations, delegates agreed on also noting relevant CITES decisions. On collecting information on the movement of IAS attached to sea containers, delegates agreed to include reference to biofouling and ballast water. Delegates also agreed to invite parties to join the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships’ Ballast Water and Sediments, as appropriate.

CANADA offered compromise language on encouraging parties to apply bio-control agents to consider using native species, where possible. The EU proposed: inviting governments to submit information on gaps in achieving Aichi Target 9 (IAS) “including gaps in capacity”; and encouraging governments to cooperate with the private sector to address IAS, rather than “to develop strategies and mechanisms” to this end. The draft decision was approved with these and other minor amendments.

BIODIVERSITY AND HUMAN HEALTH: On a draft decision, the EU proposed adding preambular text regarding the benefits of biodiversity in urban environments as it “contributes to a feeling of well-being, by stimulating physical exercise, providing clean air and improving mental well-being amongst others.” TIMOR LESTE suggested adding reference to biodiversity as a source of clean water. The EU, with EGYPT, proposed that the annex be referred to as “information on health-biodiversity linkages,” rather than as “voluntary guidance,” as suggested by BRAZIL. Following consultations, delegates agreed to the EU proposal.

Following deliberations on a proposal by Brazil, delegates agreed to “invite governments and donors to further advance in the analysis of the interlinkages between biodiversity and human health, such as the identification of microbiological biodiversity, and pathogenic species, among others.” BRAZIL proposed convening a meeting of the inter-agency liaison group on biodiversity and human health, chaired by the CBD and WHO, to which delegates agreed. On the annexed information on health-biodiversity linkages, the EU recommended deleting the term “unsustainable” in relation to “reducing the use of unsustainable pesticides” in agricultural production. The draft decision was approved with these and other minor amendments.

PLENARY

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE ON LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE: Diego Pacheco, Vice-Minister of Planning and Coordination, Bolivia, identified the symbiotic relationship between indigenous peoples and nature, their organization of commons and wealth distribution as common features of living in harmony with nature. He emphasized interdependence between the rights of Mother Earth, peoples' right to holistic development, and the right to live without material, spiritual and cultural poverty.

Professor Tohru Nakashizuka, Tohoku University, Japan, presented examples from Japan, including on globally important agricultural heritage systems and the Satoyama initiative. He highlighted: sharing lessons learnt; mobilizing scientific knowledge while recognizing TK; and conducting local, in addition to global assessments. Presenting on the Batwa experience of living in harmony with nature, Penninah Zaninka, Uganda, stressed the importance of incorporating gender dimensions in natural resource management. Providing specific examples of traditional activities performed by the Batwa, she underscored that IPLCs should fully and effectively participate in natural resource management, and be empowered to participate in decision making.

Noting that the environmental and social crisis are inseparable, Monsignor Ramon Macias, Secretary of State, the Holy See, highlighted that everything is interconnected. He stressed that in order to live in harmony with nature, "we need to distance ourselves from this economy based on immediate gain and the culture of individualism, waste of things and neglect of people." Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, highlighted that living in harmony with nature or Mother Earth is a needed paradigm shift. Pointing to evidence that, where indigenous peoples' rights are recognized and protected there is less biodiversity loss, she said that respecting human rights is consistent with respecting the rights of nature.

COP President Pacchiano requested the panelists' views on actions required to mainstream living in harmony with nature. Pacheco recommended establishing a task force and adopting a declaration to mainstream biodiversity and living in harmony with nature as a cross-cutting approach. Tauli-Corpuz suggested reforming existing governance systems from the local to the global level, while promoting a living democracy. She underscored that indigenous peoples' rights and free PIC cannot continue to be violated because states or corporations want to exploit their lands. Panelists further discussed: solidarity building under international conventions to address global challenges; implementation of a legal framework on the rights of Mother Earth; and the need to respect the plurality of knowledge systems and a human rights-based approach to development.

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL asked about the impacts of synthetic biology, gene drives and other extreme genetic engineering techniques. Tauli-Corpuz said that technological fixes cannot solve problems and underscored that environmental and social risk assessments are needed to investigate such impacts. Pacheco explained that Bolivia imposed a moratorium on synthetic biology due to many uncertainties, and called for COP 14 consideration of the issue.

REPORTS: Plenary then heard reports from parallel events, including: the third Science for Biodiversity Forum (1-2 December), which discussed science's contribution in mainstreaming biodiversity and assisting in decision making and monitoring; the International Parliamentary Forum for Biodiversity (7 December), and adoption of the Cancun Communiqué on the Role of Legislators in Mainstreaming Biodiversity for Well-Being; the "Muuchtanbal Summit on Indigenous Experiences: Traditional Knowledge and Biological and Cultural Diversity" (9-11 December), with calls to reverse the loss of biological and cultural diversity; the 5th Global Biodiversity Summit of Cities and Subnational Governments (10-11 December), including adoption of the Quintana Roo Communiqué; the Forum of Civil Society and Youth Alliances for Biodiversity Mainstreaming to Well-being (28-30 November), stressing, among

others, violence suffered by environmental activists; and the Business and Biodiversity Forum (2-3 December), highlighting sustainable use of natural capital. Plenary also heard reports from the Working Groups and the budget group.

DATE AND VENUE OF FUTURE MEETINGS: Plenary approved Egypt as host of CBD COP 14 and Protocol meetings, and Turkey of COP 16.

ADOPTION OF DECISIONS: Plenary then adopted COP decisions, without or with minor amendments, on: biodiversity and climate change (UNEP/CBD/COP/13/L.8); ecosystem restoration (L.10); impacts of marine debris and anthropogenic underwater noise on marine and coastal biodiversity (L.11); a voluntary specific workplan on biodiversity in cold-water areas within the jurisdictional scope of the Convention (L.12); the in-depth dialogue under Article 8(j) (L.13); best-practice guidelines for TK repatriation (L.14); enhancing integration among the Convention and its Protocols and organization of meetings (L.15); and scientific assessment of progress towards selected Aichi Targets (L.17).

CP COP-MOP 8 adopted a decision on integration among the Convention and its Protocols (UNEP/CBD/CP/COP-MOP/8/L.3). NP COP-MOP 2 adopted decisions on the use of the term "indigenous peoples and local communities" (UNEP/CBD/NP/COP-MOP/2/L.3) and on integration among the Convention and its Protocols (COP-MOP/2/L.4).

CONTACT GROUPS

FINANCIAL RESOURCES: Among other issues, delegates debated language on taking note, with concern, of insufficient information gathered from the financial reporting frameworks submitted by parties, which will, to a large extent affect the validity and credibility of the assessment towards achieving the resource mobilization targets.

MAINSTREAMING: At lunchtime, delegates addressed text on cross-sectoral mainstreaming, and debated whether to refer to an equitable and/or participatory approach to the management and restoration of critical ecosystems. On certification, they discussed the need to refer to: "voluntary" certification; transparency and independent verification; consistency with international obligations, specifically international trade obligations; and reflecting the three pillars of sustainable development in certification criteria.

SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY: Delegates discussed gene drives, addressing a proposal: urging parties to apply the precautionary approach in considering the release and creation of gene drives until thorough risk assessments are performed and gene drive-specific regulations for biocontainment are developed and implemented respectively; referencing potential irreversible harm on populations, species and ecosystems caused by gene drives; and requesting consent from parties whose biodiversity could be affected by any proposed gene drive before approval of its release. Delegates were also presented with an additional task for the AHTEG's terms of reference, namely to further analyze the importance of sciences for life, including the knowledge, experience and perspectives of IPLCs, in order to compare and better understand the potential benefits and adverse effects of synthetic biology.

IN THE CORRIDORS

"It's getting more and more difficult to keep tabs on the big picture," a participant muttered, as Working Groups continued painstakingly churning out draft decisions. "We are already running against the clock," another one worried, as contact groups multiplied. Despite the quest for additional negotiating time, however, many appreciated the bottom-up examples of living in harmony with nature, which were shared during the plenary interactive dialogue. "A paradigm shift is urgently needed, technofixes will not save the planet," a delegate echoed the speakers, while waiting for the contact group on synthetic biology to commence its evening deliberations.