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CBD COP-4 HIGHLIGHTS TUESDAY 5 MAY, 1998

On the second day of the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-4), delegates met in Plenary throughout the day and addressed pending issues from COP-3, the clearing-house mechanism (CHM) and biosafety. The Ministerial Roundtable continued to meet throughout the morning to consider a draft summary of its conclusions. In the afternoon, Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP, addressed the Plenary.

PLENARY

Bureau members for COP-4 were announced: Jozef Zlocha, (Slovakia), Stefan Schwager (Switzerland), Marcel Vernooij (Netherlands), Sid Ali Rahadan (Algeria), Ralph Devoy (Nigeria), Bernaditas Miller (Philippines), Mick Raga (Papua New Guinea), Elaine Fisher (Jamaica) and Feliciano Ortiga Sampaio (Brazil).

PENDING ISSUES: The Plenary considered unresolved issues on voting procedures as well as financial rules for the administration of the trust fund (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/3). The SEYCHELLES, supported by MALAWI, SENEGAL and ETHIOPIA, requested that full representation of all Parties be ensured when a vote is taken. MALI stressed the importance of allowing all Parties to express their participation in the vote. ETHIOPIA, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, noted that funding may prohibit developing country participation and voting.

BRAZIL recalled that the Memorandum of Understanding with the GEF must be considered when addressing administration of the trust fund. COLOMBIA suggested convening a group to discuss the matter. This was accepted by the Plenary.

CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM (CHM): The assessment and review of the CHM began with a report from the Secretariat (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/8) on the implementation of the pilot phase of the CHM. The report extended the pilot phase until the end of 1998. Delegates stressed the essential role of the CHM in ensuring smooth implementation of the CBD and in facilitating and promoting technical and scientific cooperation. Delegates supported, *inter alia*: recommendations from SBSTTA-3; the CHM's needs-driven and decentralized approach; and participation of civil society.

CANADA said that work on the CHM should be a priority, but that progress was too slow. INDONESIA said that the CHM is still lacking, particularly with respect to human and technical resource development, and that capacity-building initiatives should begin as soon as possible so that when the pilot phase is completed the CHM will be ready for implementation by Parties. Many delegates, including, *inter alia*, COLOMBIA, BURKINA FASO, PERU, TUNISIA, MALAYSIA, TURKEY, TANZANIA and MEXICO, underlined that the CHM should not be confined to

information, and should include the development of national human, technological and institutional capacities. KENYA stressed the importance of training and the transfer of technology, while MALAWI stressed the importance of building regional, subregional and national capacities.

Delegates, including, *inter alia*, the UK, on behalf of the EU, COLOMBIA, PORTUGAL, INDIA, ITALY, MEXICO and TANZANIA, stressed that the COP should require an independent review of the pilot phase by the Secretariat so as to provide recommendations and guidance in preparation for the wider functions envisaged for the CHM. MALAWI remarked that without a review there can be no progress.

PERU, CUBA, BRAZIL, PORTUGAL and others called for the COP to provide a clear mandate to the GEF, stating financial requirements for the CHM. BRAZIL expressed its disappointment with the weak participation of GEF, calling it "preposterous", and expected the GEF to play a catalyst role. CUBA, COLOMBIA, TUNISIA, JAMAICA and others stressed that the GEF must support national and regional initiatives, particularly in developing countries, and should consider the varying conditions in each country and region.

Some delegates, including HAITI, AUSTRALIA and JAPAN, stressed synergy to avoid duplication of information within the CHM and with other UN-related conventions. TANZANIA, the EU, SLOVENIA, speaking for the CEE, COLOMBIA and others also made suggestions. Some of these included: coordination between national, regional, and international networks; national information systems; consolidation of regional networks; and subregional information sharing. The EU and INDIA stressed assistance to developing countries for implementation of national CHMs, highlighting electronic communication and the internet.

SOMOA, representing the Pacific Island Countries, expressed concern that the CHM did not reflect the needs of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as they have limited resources to develop the CHM and often do not have access to the internet.

GERMANY supported an interactive information system to encourage broad public participation in the implementation of CBD objectives and will continue to support other countries to develop their national CHMs.

CANADA, supported by, *inter alia*, MEXICO, ITALY and TANZANIA, stressed the importance of the inclusion of indigenous network systems to facilitate communications between the world's indigenous peoples. ITALY stressed that NGO participation in the CHM is necessary and should be encouraged.

BELGIUM offered bilateral support under the Secretariat for countries to develop national focal points. PORTUGAL proposed a biogeographical approach to take into account cultural and biological similarities. MALAWI underlined the importance of awareness of the CHM so that Parties are aware of its function and how to utilize it.

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BIOSAFETY: Veit Koester (Denmark), Chair of the *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Biosafety (BSWG), reported on BSWG meetings since COP-3 and introduced the document on issues related to biosafety (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/9). He underlined the BSWG's strong commitment to complete its work in 1998, and reported the schedule for completion of the protocol on biosafety as outlined at the BSWG's fourth meeting in February 1998. The proposed schedule calls for an additional meeting in August 1998 to complete the group's work as well as a meeting to be held in December, followed by a two to three day extraordinary COP to adopt the protocol. Koester said that, failing to meet the December 1998 deadline, the COP could alternatively take place in February 1999. Noting that evaluation of all government submissions by the Working Group is imperative, and invoking the six month rule, he requested the COP to adopt a 1 June deadline for government submissions to be considered at the December meeting. He also reported that the BSWG budget is insufficient to cover the costs of completing the protocol and urged consideration of means for funding. He added that funding is also necessary to ensure the fullest possible participation of developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

KENYA, on behalf of the Africa Region, NORWAY, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, GAMBIA, JAPAN, the UK, on behalf of the EU, TANZANIA and PERU, speaking for GRULAC, stressed their support for the meeting schedule as presented by Koester. JAPAN and NORWAY expressed flexibility concerning the finalization of the protocol in February 1999. The UK stressed that the protocol should provide an adequate level of safety in the field of biotechnology, and that it would only be useful with wide membership. MEXICO said the protocol should be in line with country-specific situations and, noting complicated discussions at the domestic level, asked to extend the deadline for government submissions to 1 August and to postpone the date for the final meeting to February 1999. ETHIOPIA, on behalf of the G-77/ CHINA, supported hastening the process and not going beyond the planned period. The G-77/CHINA, the EU and several other delegations supported retaining the current biosafety Bureau as opposed to any alternative. MOROCCO said the protocol should be accompanied by appropriate national legislation as well as national implementation capacity. The MARSHALL ISLANDS, on behalf of Pacific Island States, expressed concern over developing countries' ability to participate in the biosafety meetings. The EU, the G-77/CHINA, the MARSHALL ISLANDS, and MOROCCO underlined the need to facilitate participation of all countries.

In his address to the Plenary, Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP, contemplated the relationship between UNEP and the CBD. He noted that UNEP has a sense of ownership of the CBD due to its role in the formulation of the Convention, as well as its support of the interim and permanent Secretariats. He highlighted several areas where UNEP could facilitate implementation of the CBD, including, *inter alia*: enhancement of cooperation between biodiversity-related conventions; development of methodologies, guidelines and tools to assess marine and coastal, forest and agricultural biodiversity; provision of legal advice and technical support for the implementation of the future biosafety protocol; and the global taxonomy initiative. He lauded the GEF's success as the financial mechanism and stressed the need for continual evaluation of GEF performance and for development of additional funding sources. He envisioned interlinking the CBD with the UNFCCC and CCD in order to maximize available financial resources.

MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE

The Ministerial Roundtable convened for its second session on Tuesday morning. Chair Jozef Zlocha, President of COP-4, presented a draft summary of the Roundtable's conclusions on: the integration of biodiversity concerns into sectoral activities; tourism; and the participation of the private sector.

The conclusions highlighted the need to integrate biodiversity considerations into all sectoral activities either public or private in nature, while utilizing and encouraging the ecosystem approach. Regarding tourism, the conclusions suggested, *inter alia*, that: sustainable development is necessary for poverty alleviation and that sustainable tourism could play a major role; guidelines be formulated that are specific and practical; an *ad hoc* body be created to prepare such global guidelines; in support of such guidelines; a review be carried out which includes threats and benefits to biodiversity from tourism and a compilation of best practices; and that protected areas and SIDS be considered in particular. Regarding participation of the private sector, the conclusions suggested, *inter alia*, that: the integration of biodiversity concerns into sectoral activities at the national level would also secure integration of the private sector; it should work under the guidance of and in partnership with governments; while its role is important, it is in no way a substitute for the role of developed countries in providing financial resources to developing countries; and that guidelines could be considered to assist the private sector.

Klaus Töpfer commended the Plenary on its conclusions and declared UNEP's commitment to the CBD. He stressed the need to coordinate with other biodiversity-related conventions, particularly on trade and environment issues, as well as with other Rio Conventions. Participants discussed the conclusions at length and suggested numerous amendments.

Several participants complained that while the draft summary reflected the main discussions, it was not balanced overall. Regarding sectoral integration of biodiversity concerns, many participants said it would have been preferable to discuss either more pertinent sectors or sectoral integration in general, and not solely tourism, since not all tourism affects or is affected by biodiversity.

One participant said that the proposed guidelines on biodiversity and sustainable tourism would be so general they would not be useful. Several participants requested that a deadline be established for the formulation of such guidelines, preferably by COP-5. While many participants supported the creation of an *ad hoc* body for this purpose, some suggested that it take the form of a small, regionally balanced group, subject to appropriate funding. However, others said the creation of such a body was premature, and that its necessity should first be addressed by the SBSTTA. Some participants stressed the role of indigenous and local communities in preserving biodiversity. Others questioned the degree to which tourism could alleviate poverty.

Several participants were discouraged by what they perceived to be a negative appraisal of the private sector. They said it was time to move beyond regulation to active partnership and the provision of useful economic instruments, such as incentives. An amended final statement on the outcome of the Ministerial Roundtable will be presented to the COP for consideration on Wednesday morning.

IN THE CORRIDORS: In reaction to Töpfer's speech in Plenary, observers reminisced about a time when UNEP had the capacity and competence to undertake/coordinate the range of actions it has proposed. Most felt that until UNEP completes its reorganization and demonstrates excellence in execution, Töpfer was not strategic in his comments, nor acting on the wishes of the Governing Council and that he, like his predecessor, had been poorly advised.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

Pontification on the potential implications of precedence between international agreements on issues surrounding biosafety. Plenary will convene indefinitely in Hall A at 10:00 am.