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TWENTY-FOURTH SESSIONS OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODIES OF THE UN FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND ASSOCIATED MEETINGS: 15-26 MAY 2006

The twenty-fourth sessions of the Subsidiary Bodies (SB 24) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are taking place from 18-26 May 2006, at the Maritim Hotel in Bonn, Germany. SB 24 will follow a UNFCCC "Dialogue on long-term cooperative action to address climate change by enhancing implementation of the Convention," being held from 15-16 May. In addition, the first session of the *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol will take place in parallel with SB 24, from 17-25 May. Both the UNFCCC Dialogue and the *Ad Hoc* Working Group under the Kyoto Protocol are being held as a result of decisions taken during the eleventh Conference of the Parties (COP 11) to the UNFCCC and first Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP/MOP 1) in Montreal in late 2005. At COP 11 and COP/MOP 1, delegates adopted a number of decisions to engage in discussions for considering a framework for the post-2012 period (when the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period ends) and long-term cooperative action on climate change.

At SB 24, the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) will take up such issues as national communications, financial and administrative matters, capacity building, and amendment of the Protocol in relation to the compliance mechanism. The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) will consider a range of issues, including the five-year work programme on adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer, reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries, and a range of methodological issues under both the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. Both SBI and SBSTA are expected to produce a number of draft decisions to be forwarded to COP 12 and COP/MOP 2, which will take place in November 2006 in Nairobi, Kenya.

In addition to the regular SB 24 sessions, the UNFCCC Dialogue and the *Ad Hoc* Working Group, one other pre-sessional meeting and three in-session workshops are scheduled. The Expert Meeting on Economic Diversification is being held from 16-17 May, while workshops are taking place on carbon capture and storage (20 May), carbon capture as a Clean Development Mechanism activity (22 May), and mitigation in relation to agriculture, forestry and rural development (23 May). Furthermore, over 40 "side events" have been scheduled on a range of climate change topics.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNFCCC AND THE KYOTO PROTOCOL

Climate change is considered to be one of the most serious threats to sustainable development, with adverse impacts expected on the environment, human health, food security, economic activity, natural resources and physical infrastructure. Global climate varies naturally, but scientists agree that rising concentrations of anthropogenically-produced greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere are leading to changes in the climate. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the effects of climate change have already been observed, and scientific findings indicate that precautionary and prompt action is necessary.

The international political response to climate change began with the adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992. The UNFCCC sets out a framework for action aimed at stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases to avoid "dangerous anthropogenic interference" with the climate system. Controlled gases include methane, nitrous oxide and, in particular, carbon dioxide. The UNFCCC entered into force on 21 March 1994, and now has 189 parties. The parties to the UNFCCC typically convene annually in a Conference of the Parties (COP), and twice a year in meetings of the subsidiary bodies – the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA).

THE KYOTO PROTOCOL: In December 1997, delegates at COP 3 in Kyoto, Japan, agreed to a Protocol to the UNFCCC that commits developed countries and countries making the transition to a market economy to achieve emissions reduction targets. These countries, known under the UNFCCC as Annex I Parties, agreed to reduce their overall emissions of six greenhouse gases by an average of 5.2% below 1990 levels between 2008-2012 (the first commitment period), with specific targets varying from country to country. The Protocol also establishes three flexible mechanisms to assist Annex I Parties in meeting their national targets cost-effectively: an emissions trading system; joint implementation (JI) of emissions-reduction projects between Annex I Parties; and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which allows for emissions reduction projects to be implemented in non-Annex I Parties (developing countries). Following COP 3, parties began negotiating many of the rules and operational details governing how countries will reduce emissions and measure their emissions reductions. To date, 163 parties have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, including 37 Annex I Parties representing 61.6% of 1990 Annex I greenhouse gas emissions. The Kyoto Protocol entered into force on 16 February 2005.

BUENOS AIRES PLAN OF ACTION: The process for finalizing the rules and operational details of the Protocol was agreed at COP 4 in 1998 in a document known as the Buenos Aires Plan of Action. The Plan set COP 6 as the deadline for finalizing these rules and operational details and strengthening implementation of the UNFCCC. In November 2000, parties met at COP 6 in The Hague, the Netherlands, to complete these negotiations. They were not successful and delegates suspended COP 6 until July 2001, when it reconvened in Bonn, Germany. After further talks, delegates agreed to adopt a political decision, the Bonn Agreements. While this decision provided high-level political direction on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, delegates were still unable to finalize text on some issues, and agreed to forward all the draft decisions to COP 7 for final resolution.

MARRAKESH ACCORDS: In late October and early November 2001 at COP 7 in Marrakesh, Morocco, delegates resumed their discussions and reached agreement on the Marrakesh Accords. These Accords consisted of a package of draft decisions on many of the details of the flexible mechanisms, reporting and methodologies, land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) and compliance with the Kyoto Protocol, to be adopted by the first COP/MOP. The Accords also address support for developing countries, including capacity building, technology transfer, responding to the adverse effects of climate change, and the establishment of three funds – the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Fund, Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF), and Adaptation Fund.

Delegates built on the Marrakesh Accords at COP 8 and COP 9, agreeing on rules and procedures for the CDM Executive Board, and on modalities and procedures for afforestation and reforestation project activities under the CDM. Parties also discussed how to integrate findings of the IPCC's Third Assessment Report into the work of the UNFCCC, and agreed on two new agenda items focused on adaptation and mitigation.

COP 10: At COP 10 in Buenos Aires in December 2004, delegates agreed on the Buenos Aires Programme of Work on Adaptation and Response Measures. Parties also took decisions on technology transfer, LULUCF, the UNFCCC's financial mechanism, and education, training and public awareness. However, some issues remained unresolved, including items on the LDC Fund, the SCCF, and Protocol Article 2.3 (adverse effects of policies and measures). Meanwhile, lengthy negotiations were held on the complex and sensitive issue of how parties might engage on commitments to combat climate change in the post-2012 period. The Kyoto Protocol requires parties to begin considering the post-2012 period by 2005. Delegates agreed to hold a Seminar of Governmental Experts prior to the 22nd sessions of the Subsidiary Bodies (SB 22) in May 2005, although the terms of reference for the Seminar did not refer specifically to the post-2012 period or new commitments.

SEMINAR OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS AND SB 22: This seminar took place in May 2005, in Bonn. Delegates started to address some of the broader issues facing the climate change process, including a future framework and commitments beyond 2012. Immediately following the seminar, SB 22 convened, focusing on preparations for COP 11 and COP/MOP 1, and addressing a variety of issues ranging from budget matters to adaptation and mitigation.

COP 11 AND COP/MOP 1: COP 11 and the first Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP/MOP 1) took place in Montreal, Canada, from 28 November to 10 December 2005. At COP/MOP 1, parties discussed and adopted decisions on the outstanding operational details of the Kyoto Protocol, including formally adopting the Marrakesh Accords. COP/MOP 1 also took decisions on a process to discuss commitments for the post-2012 period. Various methodological, administrative, financial and institutional matters were also considered.

COP 11 addressed issues such as capacity building, technology development and transfer, the adverse effects of climate change on developing and least developed countries, and several financial and budget-related issues, including guidelines to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which serves as the Convention's financial mechanism. After lengthy negotiations, the COP also agreed on a process to consider future action under the UNFCCC.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

UNFCCC MEETINGS: Various UNFCCC events have been held since COP 11 and COP/MOP 1, including meetings of the CDM Executive Board (22-23 February and 10-12 May, Bonn), Joint Implementation Supervisory Committee (2-3 February and 8-11 March, Bonn), Compliance Committee (1-3 March, Bonn) and Expert Group on Technology Transfer (9-11 March, Brussels). In addition, there have been workshops on the Adaptation Fund (3-5 May, Edmonton, Canada), the five year adaptation work programme (13-15 March, Vienna), and a number of other technical and regional meetings events, including a regional workshop on adaptation for Latin America (18-20 April, Lima).

IPCC: As well as these UNFCCC gatherings, there have been a wide range of other relevant meetings in recent months. These included the twenty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (26-28 April 2006, Port Louis, Mauritius), which approved the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories and adoption of its Overview Chapter. Delegates also considered: the IPCC programme and budget for 2007-09; further work on emission scenarios; the future work programme of the Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories; a Special Report on Renewable Energy; a review of the IPCC's terms of reference; matters related to the UNFCCC; and progress toward the Fourth Assessment Report.

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

During 2006 and 2007, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development is focusing on four key issues: energy for sustainable development, industrial development, air pollution and the atmosphere, and climate change. At the Commission's fourteenth session, held in New York from 1-12 May, delegates launched a review of these issues, facilitated by expert panels, discussions on regional implementation, a multistakeholder dialogue and a high-level segment. Ministers engaged in dialogue sessions with business leaders, heads of UN agencies and international financial organizations, and Major Groups, focusing on barriers and constraints and providing guidance on the priority areas to be taken up at the CSD-15 policy session and at the preceding Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting in early 2007.

CSD-14 was dominated by the energy agenda, with discussions focusing on energy security, the impact of oil and gas prices, and the respective roles of renewable energy technologies and fossil fuels, which, as delegates were informed repeatedly by oil-producing countries, will play a dominant role in the world's energy mix for the foreseeable future. The non-negotiating format of this "review" session helped to disguise simmering tensions over the future of fossil fuels, nuclear power and the climate regime post-2012.

OTHER MEETINGS: Other recent events include the first ministerial meeting of the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate (11-12 January, Sydney, Australia). The meeting of six Asia-Pacific countries resulted in a communiqué that focuses on energy challenges, fossil fuels, industry and technology development. A variety of other regional meetings have also been held since January 2006, and summaries can be found at <http://www.iisd.ca/recent/recentmeetings.asp?id=5>.