

Vol. 12 No. 322

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Monday, 7 May 2007

TWENTY-SIXTH SESSIONS OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODIES OF THE UN FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND ASSOCIATED MEETINGS: 7-18 MAY 2007

The twenty-sixth sessions of the Subsidiary Bodies (SB 26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are taking place from 7-18 May 2007, at the Maritim Hotel in Bonn, Germany. The third session of the *Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol* (AWG) will also be held, from 14-18 May. In addition, the third workshop under the UNFCCC "Dialogue on long-term cooperative action to address climate change by enhancing implementation of the Convention" (UNFCCC Dialogue) will take place on 16 and 17 May.

At SB 26, the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) will take up issues such as the Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change, the development and transfer of technologies, reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries, methodological issues, and climate change mitigation. The Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) will consider national communications, the financial mechanism, including the Least Developed Countries Fund and Adaptation Fund, the adverse effects of climate change, capacity building, compliance with the Kyoto Protocol, arrangements for intergovernmental meetings, and administrative and financial matters. SB 26 is expected to result in a number of draft decisions to be forwarded to the thirteenth Conference of the Parties (COP 13) to the UNFCCC and third Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP/MOP 3), which will take place in December 2007 in Bali, Indonesia.

The UNFCCC Dialogue and the Protocol's AWG are being held as a result of decisions taken during COP 11 and COP/MOP 1 in Montreal in late 2005. At those meetings, delegates adopted a number of decisions to engage in discussions to consider a framework for the post-2012 period (when the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period ends) and long-term cooperative action on climate change.

In addition to the regular SB 26 sessions, the UNFCCC Dialogue and the AWG, four in-session workshops are scheduled. These workshops will address a proposal by the

Russian Federation relating to voluntary commitments under the Kyoto Protocol (11 May), urban planning and development (11 May), energy efficiency, including industry, and residential and commercial end-use (15 May), and power generation, including clean fossil fuels and renewable energy (15 May).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNFCCC AND THE KYOTO PROTOCOL

Climate change is considered 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. 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 COP, and twice a year in meetings of the subsidiary bodies – the SBI and SBSTA.

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 in 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, 172 parties have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, including Annex I parties representing 61.6% of Annex I greenhouse gas emissions in 1990. 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 (BAPA). The BAPA set COP 6 as the deadline for finalizing these 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 COP 6 was suspended until July 2001, when it reconvened in Bonn, Germany. After further talks, parties adopted the Bonn Agreements, a decision that provided high-level political direction on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol. But 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 November 2001 at COP 7 in Marrakesh, Morocco, delegates reached agreement on the outstanding matters in 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 parties at the first COP/MOP. The Accords also addressed issues such as 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, elaborating on various technical rules and procedures. Parties also agreed on two new agenda items focused on adaptation and mitigation, and began informal negotiations on the complex and sensitive issue of how parties might engage on commitments to combat climate change in the post-2012 period. As a result of these discussions, a seminar was held in May 2005 that began to address some of the broader issues facing the climate change process.

COP 11 AND COP/MOP 1: COP 11 and COP/MOP 1 took place in Montreal, Canada, from 28 November to 10 December 2005. Parties discussed and adopted decisions on the outstanding operational details of the Kyoto Protocol, including formally adopting the Marrakesh Accords. Parties also took decisions on a process to discuss post-2012 commitments, which included a decision to establish a new subsidiary body, the *Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol* (AWG).

COP 11 addressed issues such as technology transfer and the adverse effects of climate change on developing and least developed countries. After lengthy negotiations, the COP also agreed to consider future action under the UNFCCC through a series of workshops that would constitute a “Dialogue” on the matter until COP 13. The AWG and UNFCCC Dialogue each convened for the first time in May 2006, alongside SB 24.

COP 12 AND COP/MOP 2: Held in November 2006, in Nairobi, Kenya, COP 12 and COP/MOP 2 placed strong emphasis on discussions on long-term action and a framework following on from the Kyoto Protocol’s “first commitment period,” which finishes in 2012. The “multi-track” approach to these issues agreed at COP 11 and COP/MOP 1 continued, with meetings of the

AWG and the UNFCCC Dialogue, which included a discussion on the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change. In addition, a review of the Protocol was convened, as required under Article 9, and discussions were held on a proposal by the Russian Federation on procedures to approve voluntary commitments under the Protocol. While the Nairobi conference did not result in any major breakthrough in negotiations, it did mark a staging post as negotiators seek to pave the way for a future post-2012 agreement.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

IPCC WORKING GROUP MEETINGS: The IPCC is currently concluding its work on the Fourth Assessment Report, which is scheduled to be completed during IPCC’s 27th session in Valencia, Spain, in November 2007. The IPCC’s three working groups have completed their contributions to the final report. In late January/early February, Working Group I met in Paris, where it adopted its report, “Climate Change 2007: the Physical Science Basis,” including its Summary for Policy Makers (SPM), and the underlying report and a Technical Summary. The SPM found more than a 90% probability that human action has contributed to recent climate change, and contained a range of projections for future impacts, including on temperatures, sea level rise, and extreme weather events.

In early April 2007, Working Group II finalized its report, “Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability,” at a session in Brussels, Belgium. Working Group II emphasized the observed and projected impacts of climate change, including accumulating evidence that changes in many physical and biological systems are linked to anthropogenic warming.

Working Group III completed its report on mitigation of climate change in early May at a meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. The report analyzed mitigation options for the main sectors in the near term, and provided information on long-term mitigation strategies for various concentration stabilization levels.

SECURITY COUNCIL SESSION ON CLIMATE CHANGE:

On 17 April 2007, the UN Security Council discussed climate change for the first time. The meeting focused on the impact of climate change on peace and security. Over 50 participants spoke. Some delegates, including the G-77/China, raised doubts regarding the Council’s role on this issue, suggesting that it was primarily a socioeconomic and/or sustainable development issue that should be addressed by the General Assembly. However, many others, particularly small island states, welcomed the Council’s discussions. Many speakers urged the UN to give urgent consideration to holding a global summit on climate change. Participants also discussed the IPCC reports, the upcoming negotiations in Bali in late 2007, and the needs of the most vulnerable countries. The EU reiterated its recent unilateral commitment to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 compared with 1990 levels, and to increase this to 30% if other developed countries took similar steps.

OTHER MEETINGS: As well as the IPCC and Security Council meetings, numerous other climate change-related events have been held since COP 12 and COP/MOP 2. These include a range of workshops and meetings organized by the UNFCCC Secretariat on issues such as adaptation (Beijing, China, April) and deforestation in developing countries (Cairns, Australia, March). In addition, the Commission on Sustainable Development is considering climate change, energy for sustainable development, air pollution/atmosphere, and industrial development during its fifteenth session, which is taking place in New York from 30 April to 11 May.