

UNFF-6 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 2006

On Tuesday, 14 February, the Sixth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-6) convened at UN Headquarters in New York to continue the review of the international arrangement on forests (IAF). In morning and afternoon sessions, delegates convened in two Working Groups to discuss the Chair's draft text (E/CN.18/2006/2). Working Group I (WGI) discussed the UNFF general mandate, global goals, the legal framework, voluntary code/guidelines/international understanding, and declaration and message. WGI considered means of implementation, enhanced cooperation, and working modalities.

WORKING GROUP I

GENERAL MANDATE: On the preamble and the general mandate of UNFF, AUSTRIA, on behalf of the EU, with INDONESIA and VENEZUELA, suggested a reference to the 2005 World Summit. The US, opposed by BRAZIL, requested deletion of reference to national sovereignty and "common but differentiated responsibilities" of countries. The US further suggested language on, *inter alia*: strengthening commitment to SFM; recognizing the need to strengthen efforts at all levels to implement sustainable forest management (SFM); and, with COSTA RICA and SWITZERLAND, recognizing that SFM can contribute to sustainable development, poverty alleviation and internationally agreed development goals. SAUDI ARABIA called for language on contributions of forests to reducing emission sources and increasing sinks.

On strengthening the IAF, BRAZIL, supported by many, said it was premature to discuss financial issues prior to a better understanding of the session's outcome. The EU proposed moving text on the development of a voluntary code/guidelines/international understanding to the section on strengthening the IAF. CANADA proposed language requiring that negotiations to develop a legally-binding instrument (LBI) begin within 12 months. The US proposed strengthening political commitment by inviting member countries to subscribe to an annexed non-binding code of best practices. BRAZIL, supported by the US, proposed using "common international understanding."

On the principal functions of the IAF, NORWAY, opposed by the US, suggested referring to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) rather than internationally agreed development goals. AUSTRALIA proposed text on strengthening linkages and dialogue between the UNFF and regional and sub-regional forest-related mechanisms or organizations.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: On the achievement of shared global goals, the EU, with KOREA, SWITZERLAND, and CHILE, but opposed by BRAZIL, INDONESIA and INDIA, preferred reference to a timeline. BRAZIL, on behalf of the

Amazonian countries and supported by CHILE, preferred "strategic objectives" to "goals." CANADA proposed a reference to "the future legally-binding instrument on forests."

On the agreed-*ad ref* global goals, the EU, supported by INDONESIA, AUSTRALIA and COSTA RICA, but opposed by the US, CHILE and SOUTH AFRICA, on behalf of the African Group, requested not re-opening the debate on the content of the goals. AUSTRALIA, with the EU, reminded delegates that these goals or objectives are global and not national. INDONESIA recommended deletion of reference to increasing the area of protected forests worldwide. The US suggested language on increasing the area of legally-harvested forests, and requested reconsideration of the goal on reversing the decline of official development assistance (ODA) for SFM, stating that priorities of recipient countries and not donors determine the levels of ODA.

On national efforts to contribute to global goals, SWITZERLAND proposed language on establishing and publishing quantifiable, voluntary national targets. CHINA proposed inserting "common but differentiated responsibilities."

LEGAL FRAMEWORK: On the legal framework, the EU, supported by ARGENTINA, NORWAY, MEXICO, for the Central American Integration System (SICA), KOREA, CHILE, SWITZERLAND, IRAN, and AUSTRALIA, but opposed by INDONESIA, BRAZIL, on behalf of the Amazonian countries, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO for the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), PAKISTAN and INDIA, requested retaining language stating that an LBI remains an option for the future. The EU listed elements of an IAF that would ensure effectiveness of implementation, including interim evaluations and consideration of a sunset clause, and said that the LBI option should be reconsidered after a 2015 mid-term review.

VOLUNTARY CODE/GUIDELINES/INTERNATIONAL

UNDERSTANDING: On developing a voluntary instrument by 2007, the US, the EU and BRAZIL each said they would submit proposals outlining the elements of a voluntary code/guidelines/international understanding, and highlighted the following elements: the importance of national goals and objectives; international cooperation; more effective financial strategies; improved mechanisms of implementation; capacity building; and stakeholder involvement. The EU also proposed clear and time-bound goals. IRAN said proposals should conform to the ideas of an LBI. BRAZIL, with the US, said proposals should be in the context of the non-binding Forest Principles. MEXICO and SWITZERLAND proposed deletion of text referring to a code, saying it would not generate additional revenue or effectively achieve SFM. CANADA outlined a proposal on elements of an international convention on forests that includes party obligations, a compliance regime, and a monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR) structure. SOUTH AFRICA cautioned against focusing on a name for the instrument, rather than its content.

DECLARATION AND MESSAGE: AUSTRALIA suggested, and delegates agreed to, deletion of text referring to a Ministerial Declaration.

WORKING GROUP II

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION: The EU cautioned that agreement could not be reached prior to the outcome of WGI being known, and urged participants to consider voluntary and non-legally binding agreements. SWITZERLAND proposed text requiring the submission of national reports after 2009, based on progress in implementation and contribution to global goals. The US inserted text on supporting SFM activities in developing countries. CANADA preferred removing text on voluntary contributions by donor countries, and suggested the development of an LBI and the creation of a new forestry fund.

SWITZERLAND requested that new financial resources be from “public, private, domestic and international” instead of “all” sources, and called for voluntary contributions to the UNFF trust fund. BRAZIL, supported by INDONESIA, called for the creation of a global forest fund through new and additional financial resources.

SAINT LUCIA called for explicit mention of small island developing states alongside “developing countries.”

On inviting the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council to consider further funding of SFM, the EU suggested text inviting GEF to give greater emphasis on forest programmes, and to allocate sufficient additional funds during the 2006-2010 replenishment period. SWITZERLAND suggested language specifying funding within the land degradation focal area. BRAZIL wished to add that GEF “strengthen its role in implementing SFM by establishing a new operational programme.”

On inviting institutions to channel additional resources to developing countries to support SFM, the US argued for an amendment to encourage requests by developing countries for SFM loans.

On private sector investment, COSTA RICA suggested adding “including the financial recognition of national efforts to reduce deforestation and to recover forest cover.”

On developing innovative mechanisms for revenue, COSTA RICA, supported by SWITZERLAND, but opposed by GUATEMALA, INDIA, COLOMBIA and BRAZIL, wished to add “including payment for environmental services.” The US added reference to debt reduction programmes.

On supporting diversification of income, SWITZERLAND, supported by COSTA RICA and CANADA, but opposed by INDIA, NIGERIA, GUATEMALA, COLOMBIA, SAINT LUCIA and BRAZIL, wished to add “including timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and environmental services.” CUBA suggested specifying “particularly poor people.” The PHILIPPINES, supported by NIGERIA and GHANA, proposed diversifying income “to further SFM.” PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PNG) suggested that diversification also apply to “landowners.”

The US, supported by the EU, CHILE, NORWAY and MALAYSIA, argued that text relating to trade regimes was out of place in this document. CUBA argued that an equitable economic system is essential to sustainable development.

On indigenous people, GHANA, supported by the EU, KENYA and YEMEN, called for empowerment of local communities, FIJI emphasised the importance of participation and land tenure, and the EU and the US agreed that consensual access and benefit sharing is central to the effective protection of traditional knowledge.

The US, CUBA, BRAZIL, FIJI and KENYA agreed that forest legislation and governance are essential elements of improving forest practices, but differed over the role of enforcement.

ENHANCED COOPERATION: On enhanced cooperation and cross-sectoral policy and programme coordination, KENYA encouraged participants to improve implementation through simplifying the language of the Proposals for Action (PfAs). The US, opposed by the EU and GUATEMALA, called for a new web-based clearinghouse.

The EU, supported by SWITZERLAND and ARGENTINA, cautioned that it may be premature to determine working modalities. She also suggested that interaction between the global and local levels could be facilitated by alternating annually between regional and global meetings.

The EU, supported by SWITZERLAND, the US and ARGENTINA, supported enhancing Major Group participation.

AUSTRALIA drew attention to a non-paper on the rationale and intent of using regional input. BRAZIL, supported by many, suggested building upon existing efforts, such as the Amazon Cooperation Treaty.

The US called for a strong IAF with a broader donor base, a strengthened CPF, and UNFF to be the principal forum for policy dialogue, and, supported by INDIA, GUATEMALA and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, argued for less frequent meetings. MALAYSIA supported an annual global meeting.

CHINA suggested that the regional approach requires greater consideration and must be linked to the global level. CANADA suggested that working modalities could be simplified through the development of an LBI. FIJI urged countries to provide the current UNFF with greater assistance for implementation, and encouraged the discussion of Australia’s non-paper.

ARGENTINA emphasized avoiding overlap with other institutions. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION emphasized strengthening the coordinating role of the Forum. The EU queried the possibility of using UNFF funding for regional meetings.

PNG suggested strengthening regional activities and implementation of Pfa’s under the UNFF. AUSTRALIA said the regional approach intends to reduce the bureaucratic burden on countries while achieving practical outputs and synchronizing activities globally. CROATIA noted a strong IAF and Multiyear Programme of Work (MYPOW) are needed to coordinate regional activities.

On improved collaboration between relevant multilateral agreements, instruments, processes and UN bodies, CANADA requested the inclusion of text on an LBI while COSTA RICA and SWITZERLAND argued for a regional approach.

WORKING MODALITIES: On working modalities, NORWAY, supported by SWITZERLAND, urged countries to develop and strengthen cooperation and participation at the regional level, and FIJI recommended coordinating those meetings with other high level ministerial meetings.

While the EU supported the Forum’s collaboration with the CPF to further develop and harmonize processes for voluntary MAR, CHINA called for a review of these issues to reduce the burden of reporting.

The EU and the US called for the deletion of wording relating to the strengthening of the Secretariat, while KENYA, CHILE and CROATIA emphasized the Secretariat’s importance for implementation follow-up.

On the UNFF trust fund, the US urged all countries to make annual contributions to improve the Forum’s effectiveness.

On future collaboration of the CPF, the EU and the US urged CPF members to explore ways to engage Major Groups as activity partners.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Some suggested that Valentine’s Day, characterized by very close cooperation, was a propitious date to begin consideration of the Chair’s text. And indeed, while none of Cupid’s arrows hit their targets (quantifiable or otherwise), many delegates have expressed optimism for movement in the next WGI session, when the Bureau will present an “international understanding on forests” based on proposals solicited from countries. However, some questioned the utility of one developed country reverting to its long-standing position and insistence on advancing an LBI, now seen by many as a non-starter.

Several delegates expressed disappointment that the Australia-New Zealand non-paper on strengthened regional input was not given time for discussion in WGII, despite several requests.

As a “first date” the day was reasonably successful, as delegates were able to communicate their desires. But given the numerous areas of non-consensus, it may be too early to tell where this relationship is going.