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IPF-4 HIGHLIGHTS 11 FEBRUARY 1997

The Fourth Session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF-4) opened Tuesday in New York. Delegates heard statements from the Co-Chairs, adopted the agenda and programme of work and heard general statements in the opening Plenary. In the afternoon Plenary, delegates and one NGO made initial statements on International organizations and multilateral institutions and instruments, including appropriate legal mechanisms.

OPENING PLENARY

Co-Chair Martin Holdgate (UK) opened the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests with a brief statement, emphasizing the time constraints under which the Panel must complete the work of this final session. Co-Chair Manuel Rodriguez (Colombia) highlighted the importance of formulating concrete recommendations to address the problems facing the world's forests. He noted that relevant progress has been made on the use of private capital to promote SFM, but necessary public investment has been scarce. He called for progress in the areas of international cooperation and trade and urged delegates to fulfill the Rio commitments on technology transfer and the provision of new and additional resources.

Nitin Desai, Undersecretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, highlighted the Panel's progress on national forest programmes (NFPs), criteria and indicators (C&I), assessment of the world's forests, certification and eco-labelling and institutional arrangements.

Co-Chair Holdgate introduced Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters (E/CN.17/IPF/1997/1), noting that the report of IPF-4 must be an agreed and negotiated text. The US, INDIA and PAPUA NEW GUINEA endorsed the Co-Chairs' proposal to use Elements of a draft report (E/CN.17/IPF/1997/3) as the basis for negotiation at IPF-4.

The Plenary adopted the agenda and programme of work.

Three speakers reported on the Intersessional Meeting of Indigenous and Other Forest-Dependent Peoples on the Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forests held in Leticia, Colombia from 9-13 December 1996. COLOMBIA stated that the workshop focused on promotion of participation and legal frameworks for protection of indigenous lands and knowledge. The INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE TROPICAL FORESTS outlined proposals from the workshop, including transparent and indigenous-designed mechanisms for financial assistance and

technology transfer and a permanent UN forum for indigenous peoples.

JAPAN reported on the International Workshop on the Integrated Application of Sustainable Forest Management Practices held in Kochi, Japan from 22-25 November 1996. The workshop focused on translating an international understanding of sustainable forest management (SFM) into practice and enriching the IPF process with field-level knowledge. The workshop report calls for a new multidisciplinary, stakeholder-driven and fully implementable culture for land-use planning, forest research and extension.

UGANDA reported on the Intergovernmental Workshop of Experts on Sustainable Forestry and Land Use: The Process of Consensus Building, held in Stockholm 14-18 October 1996. The workshop focused on country experiences in consensus building during the preparation of national forest and land-use plans and called for: a common vision and working definition of consensus; harmonization of vested sectoral interests with larger interests; training in consensus building; secure property rights; iterative processes; proper forest valuation; and linkages with other sectors and decision-making. He noted the IPF's catalytic role and called for continued dialogue.

The EU, supported by BULGARIA, CYPRUS, ESTONIA, HUNGARY, LITHUANIA, POLAND, ROMANIA, SLOVENIA and SLOVAKIA, said it is prepared to negotiate on the basis of the Co-Chairs' draft text, focusing on proposals for action. He stressed the need for a holistic approach that includes economic and development issues not adequately addressed by other conventions. A global forest convention would provide the appropriate framework and would ensure the implementation of the Forest Principles. He hoped for a unanimous recommendation through the CSD to the UN General Assembly to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee to negotiate a global forest convention.

The G-77/CHINA emphasized the need for new, innovative and additional financial and technical assistance as part of a comprehensive approach to forests. Anti-poverty programmes that ensure benefits to local communities and forest-dwellers are essential. Environmentally-sound technology should be made available on affordable terms and without restrictions of intellectual property rights. He said that interim arrangements should be considered for implementation of IPF-recommended programmes during a long-term dialogue.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA said forest partnership agreements and forest plantations hold promise for addressing natural forest depletion. He called for mutually supportive trade and environment policies and entrenchment of the principles of non-discrimination, open access and transparency in trade of forest products and services, including certification and labelling. He recommended

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establishing a forum for dialogue on forestry policy without time limits and based on IPF recommendations that would discuss the necessity of an international agreement on forests.

ARGENTINA reported on the results of the third Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. He noted the COP's decision (in E/CN.17/IPF/1997/8) to develop a focused work programme on forest biodiversity to complement work by IPF and other fora and the work programme's focus on research cooperation and development of techniques necessary for conservation and sustainable use of forest biodiversity. The CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY RESEARCH (CIFOR) proposed that the IPF improve forest research by establishing: a clearinghouse to guide and evaluate research; a consortia of research networks; mechanisms to assist capacity building and the dissemination of results; and a mechanism to mobilize resources.

The CANADIAN PULP AND PAPER ASSOCIATION advocated the initiation of negotiations for a legally-binding forest convention, which could, *inter alia*: develop a common definition of SFM; encourage forest conservation; enhance coordination of international institutions responsible for forest management; and encourage international free trade in forest products to facilitate development. SURVIVAL INTERNATIONAL expressed concern that governments' commitment to allow and encourage participation of major groups has begun to evaporate and may continue to erode. He called for the inclusion of major groups' contributions in final report of the IPF. GREEN EARTH noted that discussions about a forest convention are premature and could formalize lowest-common-denominator forest management standards. There are a plethora of options to encourage SFM and sustainable development, and a convention is not the "silver bullet" to solve all forest problems. IUCN called for a systematic effort to formulate enabling policies based on forest management experiences of indigenous and local communities and for the integration of these efforts into any proposed institutional follow-up to the IPF.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS AND INSTRUMENTS, INCLUDING APPROPRIATE LEGAL MECHANISMS:

Co-Chair Rodriguez introduced discussion on international organizations and multilateral institutions and instruments, including appropriate legal mechanisms. Joke Waller-Hunter, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development, introduced the Secretary-General's reports on the work of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests on programme elements V.1 and V.2. The report on V.1, International organizations, multilateral institutions and instruments (E/CN.17/IPF/1997/4), provides information on activities in the IPF's programme areas and on Task Force recommendations on coordination of international organizations' activities. The report on V.2, Contributions to consensus building towards the further implementation of the Forest Principles (E/CN.17/IPF/1997/5), gives information on different modalities for an intergovernmental policy forum following the IPF and on proposals for legal mechanisms. She noted that decisions on modalities must be taken after defining functions and that the financial implications of any proposal from IPF-4 must be considered.

The EU highlighted the importance of improving institutional structures, coordinating approaches and filling gaps in: NFPs; traditional forest-related knowledge; the efficient use of financial resources; C&I in regions and countries not yet involved in their elaboration; the integration of trade and environment; knowledge of biological diversity and the forest environment; and scientific research. He stated that these gaps and the risk of duplication are strong arguments for a global forest convention and high-level policy guidance.

CANADA proposed the establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee for elaborating a convention devoted exclusively to forests that would serve as a legally-binding means

to: provide a decision-making framework and a common integrated agenda on SFM and all forest issues; allow for a permanent, open and transparent intergovernmental dialogue between all interested parties; work with other conventions on an equal basis; and support financial and technological cooperation with developing countries and countries in transition. The UK supported statements by the EU, Colombia and IUCN that stressed the relevance of social and local-level issues.

VENEZUELA stated that it could accept a convention and elements for technical and financial cooperation. PAPUA NEW GUINEA proposed that the Panel harmonize policy guidance and recommend a legally-binding global instrument to the CSD. MALAYSIA proposed the establishment of a convention on sustainable forest management or an interim measure towards a convention with a predictable timetable.

The US noted gaps in IPF discussions regarding the identification of the comparative strengths of international organizations, institutions and instruments as well as the omission of regional organizations and initiatives. He favored improved use and coordination of existing international organizations and instruments and proposed: continuation and expansion of the Inter-Agency Task Force; better field-level coordination with case studies on underlying causes of forest loss and successful national policy interventions; consideration of regional forest-related organizations and initiatives; coordination of the governing bodies of international institutions and instruments on forests; and integration of social concerns.

COLOMBIA stated that coordination with other conventions is fundamental. CHINA highlighted the need to identify the future of relevant organizations and the problems faced by developing countries as priority issues. INDIA expressed concern that proposals regarding NFPs may pose problems for developing countries in acquiring multilateral assistance. He stressed the need for instruments to ensure the equitable sharing of benefits resulting from the utilization of traditional forest-related knowledge.

AUSTRALIA underscored the need for a continued high-level policy dialogue on forests and proposed that this body be under the purview of the CSD with a specific mandate and time frame. He said the need for a convention on forests has not been established, but there should be a process to determine whether such a need exists. ECUADOR emphasized the need to analyze a binding convention and proposed establishing a working group to examine this option. The GLOBAL FOREST POLICY PROJECT noted that there is currently a lack of consensus on strong recommendations, on a common definition of SFM, and on the need for and potential content of a forest convention. He proposed that the IPF build on areas where consensus already exists, for example C&I, rather than risk the loss of this consensus by pushing forward with non-consensus issues.

IN THE CORRIDORS

On the opening day of IPF-4 a number of delegations have already begun to air their positions on a possible forest convention. Some delegations who have not yet spoken out on the topic may be awaiting clarification of details. Several noted that supporters of a convention had not yet specified possible elements or aims of such an instrument. Others said that the implications of pursuing a convention — political, trade-related, environmental or otherwise — had not yet been explored. Almost all agreed that further discussion of the convention question will continue to be a prominent element, if not the pivotal theme, of IPF-4's quest for conclusions and recommendations.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Delegates are expected to have a general debate on programme element V.2, Contributions to consensus building to further implementation of the Forest Principles, during an all-day Plenary session.