



GC-23/GMEF HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2005

Delegates to GC-23/GMEF met in morning and afternoon sessions of the ministerial consultations, focusing on environmental sustainability and gender equality, and in a contact group on the Programme of Work and Budget. The Committee of the Whole (COW) met in the morning and afternoon to discuss chemicals management, UNEP's water policy and strategy, IEG, and state of the environment. A contact group on chemicals management also met in the morning, and the drafting group met in the afternoon to begin consideration of draft decisions.

MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: In his keynote address, Achim Steiner, IUCN Director General, emphasized: the importance of stakeholder participation; environmental flows; synergies between agricultural and environmental aspects of water management; and the need to increase international financing.

Many delegations outlined their water management activities. Several delegations made proposals, including:

- that UNEP should focus on further streamlining the links between the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) and the Regional Seas Programme (Iceland);
- clear identification of actions as part of the CSD-13 outcomes (EU);
- creating regional monitoring and follow-up bodies for the MDGs (France);
- youth involvement in MDG advocacy and implementation (Youth);
- implementation mechanisms for MDG-7 (Tunisia);
- a UNEP and UNDP road map on IWRM (Finland);
- ecosystem approaches to water management (EU);
- decentralized water management systems (Colombia);
- negotiation of a water convention (Cameroon);
- implementation of the Kyoto Protocol (Kiribati);
- a legally-binding instrument on mercury (Norway); and
- new models for creative financing involving the private sector (US).

GENDER EQUALITY: In her keynote address, Rejoice Mabudhafasi, South Africa's Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, stressed: the importance of women in decision-making; a gender focus on climate change vulnerability and mitigation; and the impossibility of sustainable development without women's empowerment and gender equality.

In the discussion, participants gave national examples and highlighted:

- support to Sweden's draft decision on gender equity and women's rights (Colombia, Norway, and the EU);
- increased women's presence at all decision-making levels (Burundi, Denmark, Malawi, Norway, Swaziland, Tunisia, and Uruguay);

- women's involvement in environmental impact assessments (Swaziland);
- free market access (Malawi);
- access to education for women (Algeria, Bangladesh, Benin, Burundi, Colombia, Denmark, Cape Verde, Romania, Iran, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, China, and Kenya);
- raising the visibility of the WAVE recommendations within UNEP's activities (Women's Caucus);
- that gender equality and sustainable development is closely linked; (Norway, Island, Burkina Faso, Germany, and the EU); and
- promoting women's environment rights, eliminating gender discrimination, and giving women equal decision-making power (Palestine, Norway, Brazil, the EU, Romania, Cape Verde, Germany, NGO representative, the League of Arab States, China, Ireland, and Burkina Faso).

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

CHEMICALS MANAGEMENT: Warning against dedicating efforts to the negotiation of a legally-binding instrument on mercury, the US, supported by AUSTRALIA, called for a partnership approach to achieve further results. While expressing support for this approach, CANADA said the possibility of negotiating a legally-binding instrument should not be precluded. INDIA said a partnership approach would be fruitful, but noted that it requires capacity building and technology transfer at no cost to developing countries. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, with the G-77/CHINA, said the first priority should be to conclude the SAICM process. NORWAY and SWITZERLAND said further action by UNEP would contribute to SAICM and, supported by ICELAND, highlighted a legally-binding instrument on mercury and other heavy metals as the best long-term solution. NORWAY and SWITZERLAND further noted that a legally-binding instrument would ensure financial support to developing countries, and called for studies on lead and cadmium. The EU expressed support for a legally-binding instrument on mercury.

The G-77/CHINA called for the chemicals decision to be accompanied by parallel decisions for capacity building and technology transfer. JAPAN stressed the importance of developing country participation, and said the focus should be on concrete actions rather than on a legally-binding instrument. ARGENTINA warned against duplicating the efforts of SAICM and those of the Stockholm and Rotterdam conventions. NIGERIA said a legally-binding instrument could be a long-term proposal, but should not jeopardize other actions. CHINA supported partnerships on mercury, and stressed the need for alternatives. URUGUAY urged concrete actions on mercury and other substances, supported by increased resources and regional cooperation. TANZANIA called for a survey on mercury uses and mercury-containing products in artisanal gold mining. PANAMA urged research on mercury-containing products of military origin.



WATER: The RAMSAR CONVENTION SECRETARIAT spoke on its role in promoting IWRM. A number of delegations, including CHINA, the EU, ISRAEL, the US, KENYA, the GAMBIA, NIGERIA, and the LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES welcomed UNEP's updated water policy and strategy. EGYPT urged focusing on existing targets rather than developing new ones, and cautioned against establishing a new water advisory board. SWITZERLAND, with MEXICO and KOREA, emphasized ecosystem management approaches.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION drew attention to the impact of climate change on water resources.

INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE: The EU, the G-77/CHINA, the US and CANADA called for the effective implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan.

SWITZERLAND, CANADA and MEXICO expressed support for universal membership. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION and AUSTRALIA said the GC was sufficiently representative. COLOMBIA said it could accept universal membership on the condition that UNEP's current structure is maintained and no Executive Board is created.

The US and the GAMBIA supported enhancing UNEP's scientific base, and KENYA urged the full integration of scientists and institutions from African countries.

On financial contributions, CANADA, MEXICO, CHINA and KENYA supported the extension of the application of the voluntary indicative scale of contributions for the 2006-2007 biennium. COLOMBIA and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION said they could only accept the scale on a voluntary basis. JAPAN and the US expressed reservations about the extension of the scale. SWITZERLAND suggested adopting the scale on a permanent basis, calling for contributions to increase over time.

On MEAs, SWITZERLAND and CANADA commended UNEP's work on improving the coherence of MEAs and synergies between them. The US, supported by the GAMBIA, said the EMG should focus on coordinating UNEP's activities with those of other bodies.

Chair Nobs said the draft decision would be forwarded to the drafting group for further consideration.

ASSESSMENT, MONITORING AND EARLY WARNING: STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT: The G-77/CHINA underscored UNEP's role in early warning and disaster relief, urging increased participation of developing country experts. The UAE called on UNEP to undertake a detailed study on the environmental situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. SENEGAL stressed the need for capacity-building activities for regional economic communities.

On the draft decision on keeping the world environment situation under review, the US said it was opposed to the paragraph on climate change. Chair Nobs said the draft decision would be forwarded to the drafting group for further consideration.

SIDS: The COW approved the draft decision on SIDS without amendment.

OTHER DRAFT DECISIONS: Three drafts were introduced and briefly discussed: strengthening emergency response in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster; a sustainable procurement program for UNEP; and gender equity and the environment.

CONTACT GROUPS

PROGRAMME OF WORK AND BUDGET: Regarding the subprogramme on environmental conventions, the US, opposed by several delegations, called for deleting a paragraph on pilot demonstration projects on the implementation of equitable benefit-sharing arrangements in relation to several conventions, particularly the CBD and CITES.

On the draft decision on the Programme of Work and Budget for the biennium 2006-2007, delegates approved a total of US\$144 million for the Environment Fund. CANADA and the US noted the increase over the previous biennium and called on UNEP to prioritize its activities. Many delegations supported the EU's proposal to urge governments to support further strengthening of the Environment Fund through a wider

application of the voluntary indicative scale of contributions. The US, JAPAN and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION opposed this, noting that the issue is being considered in the discussions on IEG. CANADA, supported by NORWAY and others, emphasized the need to ultimately reflect such discussions in the decision on the Programme of Work and Budget.

NORWAY, the G-77/CHINA, CANADA and several others supported the idea that the Executive Director continues to shift emphasis from the delivery of outputs to the achievement of results.

On the budget for the Bali Strategic Plan, the Executive Director noted that capacity building and technology support are at the center of UNEP's Programme and will be linked to all its divisions. The EU noted the need for proper budgetary allocations for the Plan and requested background information on available and additional funding identified for implementing the Plan. The G-77/CHINA stressed that language on the Bali Strategic Plan in the Programme of Work and Budget decisions should be consistent with that on other issues. Delegates agreed to a paragraph requesting the Executive Director to give high priority to the effective and immediate implementation of the Plan. They also debated on whether, or how, the Executive Director should exercise his authority to reallocate resources for the Plan's implementation.

CHEMICALS: Chair Viveka Bohn proposed, and delegates agreed, to focus on the preambular text of the mercury and SAICM-related decisions, and to defer the less controversial issues of lead in gasoline and collaboration between MEAs to a later contact group session. On SAICM, discussions focused on financing of SAICM, the idea of partnerships, and the relationship between SAICM and mercury. While some delegates expressed concern at negotiating a legally-binding agreement on mercury without having completed the SAICM process, others said the two initiatives are complementary, and GC-23/GMEF should provide input to the SAICM process in relation to mercury.

DRAFTING GROUP: The drafting group commenced the first reading of the draft decision on UNEP's updated water policy and strategy. Brazil, for GRULAC, suggested new text referring to Principle 2 of the Rio Declaration. There was lengthy discussion on: referencing upcoming meetings, including CSD-13; reflecting the status of the "Jeju Initiative;" "adopting" or "taking note" of the updated strategy; and access to water supply by the poor. The ecosystem management approach was also debated, with SWITZERLAND, MEXICO and the EU preferring its inclusion, and EGYPT and NIGERIA raising objections. CHINA proposed text on its hosting of the second intergovernmental review of the GPA in 2006. NIGERIA suggested the development of a framework on sanitation.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Two issues proved stormy on the second day of the meeting. Virtually all delegates agree on the gravity of the mercury problem, and on the need to assist developing countries in addressing it. While for some the situation requires a legally-binding instrument to ensure strong action and provision of adequate resources to developing countries, others warn that the SAICM process should be finalized before further efforts on mercury are undertaken, and say the focus should be on concrete actions. A number of participants feel that the SAICM argument is unfounded, since UNEP could contribute to the SAICM process by providing an input on a particularly noxious heavy metal. Meanwhile, some delegates are concerned that dealing with mercury may open the door to dealing with other heavy metals of economic importance.

An equally touchy affair was the extension of the pilot phase of the voluntary indicative scale of contributions to the 2006-2007 biennium. Some find it ironic that while two major donors would prefer the scale to "fade away," some least developed countries strongly support its continuation. According to one participant, the reaction of those who reject the indicative scale is not surprising, since its very goal was to put pressure on those donors who are not contributing to UNEP's finances in accordance with their capabilities, and to "shame" them for not doing so.