



## RAMSAR COP8 HIGHLIGHTS SATURDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2002

Delegates met in Plenary to hear the report of the Credentials Committee and briefings on progress in the Committees on Finance, Future COPs, and the Strategic Plan and Work Plan. They also considered reports from the Technical Sessions, and discussed the procedure for selecting STRP members. The regional group for Africa met to conclude discussions on the draft resolution on the Ramsar List, and a contact group convened to consider text on the World Commission on Dams (WCD).

### PLENARY

**CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE:** Committee Chair María Elvira Posada (Colombia) reported on the Credentials Committee's work during COP8, indicating that 118 Parties had submitted credentials. Observing that the Committee had encountered a series of problems in considering Parties' credentials, she proposed several amendments to the Rules of Procedure, including the insertion of a new sentence stipulating that, after the opening of the COP, any further changes, in particular of the Head of Delegation, should be submitted to the Secretary General or to the Regional Representative of the Credentials Committee. COP8 Vice-President Hector Condé (Cuba) said a final decision on these proposals would be taken on Monday.

**STRATEGIC PLAN AND WORK PLAN COMMITTEE:** Paul Mafabi (Uganda), Chair of the Committee on the Strategic Plan and Work Plan, reported that the Committee had completed its work, having approved changes to the relevant resolutions (COP8 DR 25 Rev.1 and DR 26). Amendments included: eliminating the list of global priorities; moving targets to an annex; and requesting the Standing Committee to consider global priorities for work at its first meeting. Revised drafts will be taken up in Plenary on Monday.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE:** Karen Jenderedjian (Armenia), Chair of the Committee on Finance and Budget, reported that the Committee had agreed on a revised budget for 2003-2005, including a 4% annual budget increase, and decreases in several budget lines. He noted that a draft resolution on the Endowment Fund was still under consideration. GERMANY welcomed the budget revision.

**FUTURE COPS COMMITTEE:** Herbert Raphaelle (US), Chair of the Committee on the content and duration of future COPs, informed Parties that the Committee had recommended:

considering technical resolutions prior to the COP; limiting the opening ceremony and the number and length of presentations; and finalizing the work on streamlining the COP in the Standing Committee. A revised draft resolution was being prepared for discussion on Monday. SOUTH AFRICA called for clear criteria for categorizing the resolutions. EL SALVADOR and MALAYSIA suggested creating ministerial sessions at the COPs.

**REPORTS OF THE TECHNICAL SESSIONS:** The Chairs of the five Technical Sessions held over the previous three days reported progress on the various draft resolutions taken up in their groups.

**Challenges and Opportunities:** Ruhakana Rugunda (Uganda), who had chaired the Technical Session on Challenges and Opportunities, reported that revised drafts were under preparation on water allocation, integrated coastal zone management, and synergies with MEAs; that an alternative text for the draft resolution on the WCD was still being negotiated; and that consultations were continuing on the draft resolution on climate change. The EU reiterated its support for acknowledging the work of the WCD in the relevant resolution.

**Baselines for Sustainable Use:** Technical Session Chair Nadra Nathai-Gyan (Trinidad and Tobago) reported that no significant controversial issues had emerged on any of the draft resolutions on inventory, harmonization, status and trends and CBD guidelines, and that the Bureau was preparing revised draft resolutions.

**Ramsar List of Wetlands:** Louise Lakos (Hungary), who had chaired the Technical Session on global biodiversity and sustenance of human life: the Ramsar List of Wetlands, informed Parties that the draft resolution on use of the Ramsar List had been amended significantly, and that the African regional group had yet to finalize its position. On under-represented wetland types, she drew attention to the European group's proposal to delete the glossary. She also noted discussions on source, quality and confidentiality of data in relation to information enhancement. She observed that the Bureau was currently revising all three draft resolutions.

**Wetlands Management:** Technical Session Chair Natalya Kasymova (Uzbekistan) reported that there had been no major points of difference over management planning guidelines, and that a middle ground appeared to have emerged on the draft resolution on the San José Record. She also noted that a reference to outcomes from the Seventeenth Session of the Global Biodiversity

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Forum will be added to the draft resolution on peatlands, and that discussions were continuing on the draft resolution on invasive species.

**Culture and Wetlands:** Session Chair Clayton Rubec (Canada) indicated that numerous comments had been received on the draft resolution on culture, particularly from the Americas and Europe groups, and that conflicting positions existed on a number of paragraphs. He noted that the Bureau was assisting in preparing a revised draft.

#### **APPOINTMENT OF THE MEMBERS OF THE STRP:**

Ramsar Secretary General Delmar Blasco reported that the draft resolutions on the *modus operandi* of the STRP (COP8 DR 28 and 28bis) were being revised. He also requested that Parties decide on whether to adopt a proposed change mandating the Standing Committee rather than the COP to select STRP members. Many Parties expressed support for the proposal, stressing that it would enable the Standing Committee to appoint STRP members to reflect the expertise required by the STRP's task list, which is established by the COP. It would also allow the Standing Committee to consider nominations additional to those already submitted. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION preferred that the process of elections by the Contracting Parties during the COP be retained. After further discussion, Parties adopted the proposed change.

**SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS: The impact of Ramsar designation on management effectiveness:** Gonzalo Castro, Team Leader for Biodiversity, GEF Secretariat, reported on a study by the World Bank and WWF to assess whether designating wetlands as Ramsar sites increases management effectiveness. He outlined the study's conclusion that listing Ramsar sites increases effectiveness by raising awareness, improving conservation action, reducing threats, and promoting local participation in management.

Stating that this study reinforces the view that the Ramsar Convention contributes significantly to biodiversity, the BAHAMAS said this should be reflected in eligibility for GEF funding. Castro said the GEF/World Bank recognized Ramsar's contribution, and would be giving it a higher priority when making funding decisions.

Secretary General Delmar Blasco stressed that, while there is no direct access to GEF funding through the Ramsar Convention, wetlands projects can be funded through the GEF's focal areas on biodiversity and climate change. IRAN said the Ramsar Bureau should be invited to participate in GEF meetings and activities.

**Ministerial Statement from Nigeria:** Imeh Okopido, Minister of the Federal Ministry of Environment of Nigeria, addressed the Plenary on the status of Nigeria vis-à-vis Ramsar and other regional instruments and MEAs.

**Signing Ceremony:** Delegates also witnessed the signing of the Ramsar Convention cooperation agreements with the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Niger Basin Authority. Secretary General Blasco commended the WWF on its role in facilitating these agreements.

#### **AFRICA GROUP**

The Ramsar regional group for Africa met to discuss the outcomes of a contact group it had formed on the draft resolution relating to improving implementation of the Strategic Framework and Vision for the Ramsar List (COP8 DR 10). The group agreed to streamline the text by combining the ideas contained in a number of

paragraphs. Delegates added a paragraph expressing appreciation to donor organizations and NGOs for their assistance and support in Ramsar site designation. SOUTH AFRICA supported retaining text referring to the cultural importance of wetlands. Delegates agreed to language instructing the Ramsar Bureau to inform Parties that have not provided or updated Ramsar site descriptions to do so as a matter of priority. Delegates also agreed to move the list of countries that have not provided updated site descriptions to an annex. SOUTH AFRICA requested that both maps and site descriptions be provided.

#### **CONTACT GROUPS**

**WORLD COMMISSION ON DAMS:** CHINA, also speaking for INDIA, TURKEY, NEPAL, PAKISTAN, and BRAZIL, introduced an alternative draft resolution on the WCD report, with TURKEY stressing that he opposed any reference to the WCD report. While the EU said that the *raison d'être* of the resolution was the WCD report, IRAN, CHINA and TURKEY explained that the original draft and the WCD report did not balance environmental and development needs, with IRAN stating that the WCD report was not widely accepted internationally. WWF, supported by COLOMBIA, noted that reference to water diversions as a source of conflicts was a key element and should be retained.

Informal consultations produced a compromise wording omitting specific factual information on dams' impacts, but recognizing both beneficial and negative impacts, including as a source of potential conflicts. Delegates bracketed it until relevant countries could consult with their capitals.

Delegates could not agree on whether to retain a quote from the WCD report regarding dams' impacts, and bracketed the relevant paragraph. SOUTH AFRICA and the EU opposed deleting reference to conflict resolution processes in text on water use. WWF proposed, and delegates agreed to, compromise wording on "a forum for interaction and conflict resolution." Parties were unable to agree on text referring to the WCD guidelines as an advisory tool to support decision making, and the relevant paragraph remained bracketed. Delegates bracketed a compromise text referring to using "all available information, including information provided by the WCD" in one of the operative paragraphs. Negotiations continued into Saturday evening, with Parties reportedly reaching a compromise formulation on the remaining outstanding text.

#### **IN THE CORRIDORS**

Many delegates seemed surprised to finish their work so early on Saturday, with Plenary wrapping-up several hours ahead of schedule, and only the WCD contact group meeting in the afternoon and evening. With many delegations taking a well-earned rest on Sunday, and the Secretariat busy on document preparation, the remaining unresolved issues – climate change, invasive species, and agriculture – are likely to need more work on Monday and possibly Tuesday before being finalized. Some observers are already predicting a late night on Monday.

#### **THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY**

**PLENARY:** A Plenary session will begin at 9:30 am to begin adopting some of the numerous resolutions on the agenda.