CLIMATE CHANGE TALKS ADJOURN IN NEW YORK

LITTLE PROGRESS MADE DURING TWO-WEEK SESSION

The fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC) adjourned in New York on 30 April - 8 May. According to Eco (the NGO newsletter of the Climate Change Negotiations), if the INC is to successfully negate a substantive Climate Change Convention, the following issues must be resolved:

• The INC must commit to specific targets and timetables for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, in light of the stated commitments of other industrialized countries.
• An inter-sessional meeting must be convened between those countries that have been asked to make specific CO2 reduction commitments, primarily the OECD countries.
• The current mode of decision-making must shift from a consensus-based to a majority-based process to prevent minority views from impeding progress.
• Developing countries need to continue to push the industrialized nations to make firm, meaningful commitments.
• All participants must shift their thinking from a national to a global perspective.

PREPCOM HIGHLIGHTS

OVERVIEW OF THE UNCED PREPARATORY PROCESS

The fourth session of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Preparatory Committee (PrePCom) begins today in New York. This is the final opportunity for formal negotiation on all of the agenda items, including the Statement on Forest Principles, the Earth Charter/Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. The success of the Earth Summit rests largely on the progress that may or may not be achieved during the next five weeks.

The PrePCom was created by the United Nations General Assembly to flesh out the agenda of the Earth Summit; establish the terms of reference; and develop a general consensus on the parameters of the issues to be discussed. The PrePCom is composed of members of the approximately 170 national delegations who are participating in UNCED.

PrePCom I was held in August 1990 in Nairobi. At that meeting, the agenda and the negotiating procedures were agreed upon and two working groups were established. Working Group I deals with the issues of atmosphere, land resources, forests, biodiversity and biotechnology. Working Group II focuses on substantive issues as they pertain to the natural environment, including chemicals, freshwaters and wastes. Countries also requested the UNCED Secretariat to prepare thirty reports on the various issues on the UNCED agenda, referred to as PrePCom ("PC") documents.

PrePCom II, which was held in March 1991 in Geneva, was devoted primarily to the review of the Secretariat's PC documents. It was hoped that substantive negotiations on the Agenda 21 documents would begin yet little negotiation actually occurred. Nevertheless, Working Group III on legal and institutional issues was created. In addition, the delegates agreed not to negotiate a separate forest convention but to state a forest principle to be used as the basis for future negotiations on forestry issues.

PrePCom III, which was held in August 1991 in Geneva, continued the work of the previous two PrePComs and moved the process of translating the issues into actual negotiation. The Secretariat had prepared the initial negotiating texts for each Agenda 21 subject area (i.e., atmosphere, biodiversity, etc.). These documents (cited as PC/Intl/Addendum #) outline the basis for action; goals, objectives, and some substantive areas and implementation requirements. PrePCom III also addressed the legal and institutional issues within the mandate of Working Group III and the cross-sectoral issues under the mandate of the Plenary (i.e., financial resources, technology transfer, poverty, sustainability, health and education and economic issues). Very little progress was made during PrePCom III towards reaching agreement on the major program areas within Agenda 21. Agreement was not reached on most of the text and in several cases, substantive negotiations had not even commenced due to lack of time and problems with the availability of translated documents.

According to many NGOs and developing countries, PrePCom IV must address a number of key issues if the Earth Summit is to be a success. These include:

• Resolution of the North-South debate. During PrePCom III the representatives of the developing countries had substantive discussions on the central issues. Specifically, the Group of 77 stressed that their primary objective at UNCED was to raise their living standards; that UNCED has an ecological bias; and that many key issues of concern to developing countries, such as toxic wastes and desertification, had not been addressed adequately. By contrast, the North wants the South to practice conservation, better resource management and population control while the South wants the North to finance more research toward conservation, provide access to new technologies and address other inequities.

• Support for the negotiating process. The UNCED Secretariat is clearly overburdened due to the tremendous amount of documentation it has had to provide. As a result, prior to PrePCom II and III, many documents were not completed or translated on time for review by the governments prior to meetings. The lack of translators and interpreters at PrePCom III also took its toll on the negotiations. If sufficient translation and interpretation services are available at PrePCom IV, it is possible that greater progress will be made.

• Lack of integration between environment and development. The economic policies and practices of all countries are...