



Earth Negotiations Bulletin

A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

Vol. 8 No. 1

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Monday, 30 August 1993

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SMALL ISLANDS STATES CONFERENCE

The first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States begins today at UN Headquarters in New York. The two-week session will focus on preparations for the Conference and consideration of plans and programmes to support the sustainable development of small island developing States and the utilization of their marine and coastal resources.

The Conference, which is scheduled for 4-15 April 1994 in Barbados, has its roots in the preparatory process of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Participants at the third meeting of the UNCED Preparatory Committee expressed considerable interest in the problems facing small island developing States and requested the Secretary-General to add a programme area on islands to the oceans chapter (17) of Agenda 21.

When Programme Area G, "Sustainable Development of Small Islands" was first presented at PrepCom IV in New York in March 1992, it was accepted by the delegates with comparatively little debate. The objective of the programme area is to adopt and implement sustainable development plans for islands, including the utilization of marine and coastal resources, the maintenance of biodiversity and the improvement in the quality of life for island peoples. Paragraph 17.131 of the final text of Agenda 21 stated that: "Small island developing States, with the support, as appropriate, of international organizations, whether subregional, regional or global, should develop and strengthen inter-island, regional and interregional cooperation and information exchange, including periodic regional and global meetings on sustainable development of small island developing States with the first global conference on the sustainable development of small island developing States to be held in 1993."

THE 47TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The UN General Assembly resolution establishing the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States was one of the five major resolutions on UNCED follow-up to be negotiated during the 47th General Assembly in 1992. The final resolution states that the Conference will:

- Review current trends in the socio-economic development of small island developing States;
- Examine the nature and magnitude of the specific vulnerabilities of small island developing States;
- Define a number of specific actions and policies relating to environmental and development planning to be undertaken by these States, with help from the international community;

- Identify elements that these States need to include in medium- and long-term sustainable development plans;
- Recommend measures for enhancing the endogenous capacity of these States; and
- Review whether institutional arrangements at the international level enable these States to give effect to the relevant provisions of Agenda 21.

ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION

The Preparatory Committee for the Conference held its organizational session in New York on 15-16 April 1993. Penelope Wensley, Australia's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, was elected Chair of the PrepCom. The four Vice-Chairs are: Takao Shibata (Japan), Marian Dinu (Romania), John Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda) and José Luis Jesus (Cape Verde). Barbados, as host country, is an *ex officio* member of the Bureau.

The PrepCom had before it three documents for consideration: the draft provisional agenda (A/CONF.167/PC/1); a report of the Secretary-General on the preparations for the Conference (A/CONF.167/PC/2); and the draft provisional rules of procedure (A/CONF.167/PC/3).

The discussion on the draft guidelines for the work of the PrepCom was the most contentious. Issues that generated debate included the responsibilities of the international community in providing small island developing States access to financial resources; and the international community's responsibility to small island developing States regarding "access to environmentally sound and energy-efficient technology, including delivery mechanisms." The guidelines eventually adopted suggest that the PrepCom's consideration of the role of small island developing States should include actions at the micro level aimed at environment and development planning, measures for enhancing local skills and expertise, and medium- and long-term planning for sustainable development. The guidelines also emphasize the importance of regional technical cooperation on environmental problems and the necessity for regional organizations and commissions to participate in this process.

REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING FOR THE INDIAN AND PACIFIC OCEANS

As part of the preparatory process, two regional technical meetings were held. The first meeting for the Indian and Pacific Oceans was coordinated by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and was held from 31 May - 4 June 1993 in Vanuatu. The report of this meeting is contained in document A/CONF.167/PC/7.

The meeting recommended that the PrepCom consider the following 15 priority areas as the basis for developing an action programme for small island developing States. These priority areas include: climate change and sea level rise; natural and environmental disaster preparedness;

Earth Negotiations Bulletin is written and edited by Pamela Chasek (pchasek@cdp.apc.org), Charlotte de Fontaubert (61155@chopin.udel.edu), Langston James Goree VI "Kimo" (kimo@web.apc.org) and Rachel Kyte (rkyte@cdp.apc.org), with funding from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (iisd@web.apc.org). Additional funding for this volume of the *Bulletin* has been provided through the Caribbean Community and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme by the Environment and Natural Resources Group (ENR) of the United Nations Development Programme, which supports this effort for greater transparency and outreach to the NGO community worldwide. The authors can be contacted at their electronic mail addresses and, during the Conference, by phone at +1-212-355-7300, ext. 1603 and by fax at +1-212-753-9366. IISD can be contacted by phone at +1-204-958-7700, by fax at +1-204-958-7710 or at 161 Portage Avenue East, 6th Floor, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 0Y4, Canada. The opinions expressed in *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IISD. The contents of *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* may be freely used in other publications with appropriate citation. This volume of *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* is uploaded into the APC computer conference env.islands.

environmentally sound management of wastes and toxic substances; coastal and marine resources; freshwater resources; land resources; management of energy resources; management of tourism development; conservation of biological diversity; national institutions and administrative capacity; regional institutions and technical cooperation; transport and communication; management of science and technology; human resources (population, education, urban development and health); and environmental legislation.

The meeting also decided to endorse and recommend to the PrepCom guidelines for implementation, monitoring and review of the action programme for small island developing States. The recommendations include action to be taken at the national, regional, subregional and international levels. Some of the recommended actions at the national level include: prioritization of national strategies; nationwide reviews of national development and environmental plans; integration of environmental management into development planning; development of appropriate legislative measures; and improving understanding at the political and public levels.

At the regional and subregional levels, the meeting recommended that the appropriate organizations assist small island developing States to: build capacity to implement principles of sustainable development; participate in international negotiations on sustainable development issues; meet their commitments relating to international and regional instruments on sustainable development; facilitate the involvement of NGOs; and develop and apply environmental law. At the international level, the recommendations include: the provision of improved access to financial resources; support for agencies and programmes; encouraging private capital flows; encouraging cooperation and coordination between regional and subregional organizations; facilitating access to sound, efficient and appropriate technology; and ensuring education and the dissemination of information.

REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING FOR THE ATLANTIC/CARIBBEAN/MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The second regional technical meeting for the Atlantic/Caribbean/Mediterranean region was held in Trinidad and Tobago from 28 June - 2 July. The meeting was coordinated by the Caribbean Community (Caricom) with the assistance of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The report of this meeting is contained in document A/CONF/167/PC/8.

The meeting noted the constraints on small island developing States in pursuing sustainable development and the subsequent options. These options were developed as a series of programmatic actions on priority areas at the national, regional and international levels, as well as some cross sectoral actions. The priority areas were identified as the management of environmental problems of small island developing States, the integrated management of natural resources, and capacity building.

Programmatic areas noted within these areas included natural and anthropogenic environmental disaster preparedness; climate change, sea level rise and climate variability; pollution and waste management; coastal zone management and marine resources; energy resources; tourism; fresh water resources; land resources and human settlements; biological resources; national institutions; regional institutions; regional transport and communications systems; science and technology including indigenous knowledge; human resource development including education, training, health and pollution; finance including insurance; and information management.

As a general recommendation, the meeting encouraged the participation of NGOs and other major groups in policy formation and called for further work on developing a vulnerability index that would better reflect the particular situation of small island developing States. The meeting noted that the Global Conference, with the involvement of national, regional and international communities could provide a unique opportunity to develop supportive and integrated approaches to programme development.

PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK

The proposed programme of work for the PrepCom meeting is contained in document A/CONF.167/PC/5/Corr.1. The PrepCom will focus on preparations for the first Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (Item 2) and consideration of plans and programmes to support the sustainable development of small island developing States and the utilization of their marine and coastal resources (Item 3).

Discussion of Agenda Item 2 will include the following items: activities of the UN system and intergovernmental and other bodies of relevance to the preparatory process; reports from regional technical meetings; preparations by the host Government (Barbados); participation of NGOs; and operation of the voluntary fund. Discussion of Agenda Item 3 will include: meeting essential human needs; maintaining biological diversity; and improving the quality of life for island people; as well as measures that will enable small island developing States to cope effectively, creatively and in a sustainable manner with environmental changes and to mitigate the impacts on and reduce the threats posed to marine and coastal resources. The general discussion of Agenda Items 2 and 3 is scheduled to last throughout the first week of the meeting. Informal consultations are currently scheduled for the second week of the meeting. Agenda Item 4 -- Provisional agenda for the Conference -- is scheduled to be introduced on Wednesday, 8 September.

The documentation for the PrepCom includes:

- A/CONF.167/PC/4: Draft report of the Preparatory Committee for the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States on its organizational session
- A/CONF.167/PC/5 and Corr.1: Provisional agenda
- A/CONF.167/PC/6: Overview of system-wide activities relevant to General Assembly Resolution 47/189
- A/CONF.167/PC/7: Report of the regional technical meeting for the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Port Vila (Vanuatu), 31 May - 4 June 1993
- A/CONF.167/PC/8: Report of the regional technical meeting for the Atlantic/Caribbean/Mediterranean Region, Trinidad and Tobago 28 June - 2 July 1993.
- A/CONF.167/PC/9: Activities of the Conference Secretariat and other matters
- A/CONF.167/PC/10: Plans and programmes to support sustainable development of small island developing States
- A/CONF.167/PC/11: Provisional agenda for the Conference

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: The PrepCom for the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States will open today at 10:30 am in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. The meeting will begin with statements by Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development Nitin Desai and PrepCom Chair Amb. Penelope Wensley. The Committee is expected to adopt the agenda for the meeting (A/CONF.167/PC/5 and Corr.1) and begin the general debate on Agenda Items 2 and 3. The first speakers are expected to be the Group of 77, AOSIS and the European Community.

The adoption of the agenda may provoke some discussion. The general debate on Agenda Items 2 and 3 is scheduled to last four days. However, given the fact that this session includes only nine working days (Monday, 6 September being a US holiday), some delegates may wish to cut the general debate down to two days. Thus far there are no evening, weekend or holiday meetings scheduled. Considering the announcement last week by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali regarding a wide range of cost-cutting measures that will be instituted during the forthcoming session of the General Assembly, it seems unlikely that additional meetings will be scheduled.