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PREPCOM HIGHLIGHTS WEDNESDAY, 8 SEPTEMBER 1993

GROUP OF 77 MEETING

The Group of 77 held a meeting Wednesday morning to review and endorse a new draft of the "Basic Elements for an Action Programme for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States." Members of AOSIS worked until 1:00 am the previous night redrafting the paper based on comments received from other delegations. This new draft, Revision 1.0, was endorsed by both the G-77 and China. AOSIS only redrafted Chapters 1-14 and has yet to address Chapter 15 on implementation. AOSIS also drafted a second paper, "Preamble and Basis for Action." This paper was also endorsed by the G-77 and China and forwarded to the Plenary for consideration.

PLENARY

The Chair convened a brief formal session of the Plenary at noon, after the conclusion of the G-77 meeting and other informal consultations. Colombia, on behalf of the G-77 and China, formally introduced documents, A/CONF.167/PC/L.5 and Add.1, "Position of the Group of 77 and China on Basic Elements for an Action Programme for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States." These two documents contain Chapters 1 - 15 that were discussed informally by the Plenary on Friday and Tuesday. Colombia mentioned that this document was only being introduced for procedural reasons, as a revised version of this document was now available.

As no other delegations wished to take the floor at this time, the Chair adjourned the meeting to allow delegations the opportunity to review the new G-77 papers. She said that she would convene an informal session at 3:00 pm.

BRIEFING ON VULNERABILITY INDICES

After Plenary was adjourned, Professor Lino Briguglio of the University of Malta briefed delegates on the construction of a vulnerability index with the aim of adjusting GNP per capita statistics to allow for economic fragility. The question of creating a vulnerability index had been raised by several delegates during the course of last week's general debate. Briguglio pointed out that although some islands have a high GNP per capita, they are still economically weak as they are subject to outside forces beyond their control. His vulnerability index does not measure poverty, but, rather, fragility and weakness. He used three basic criteria for constructing the index: simplicity, ease of comprehension and suitability for international comparisons. He tried to build an index that relied as much as possible on existing statistical data, although many islands do not have adequate data. He focused on three variables: exposure to foreign

economic conditions (as it reduces ability to take control of affairs); remoteness; and proneness to disaster. He did not use environmental fragility because there is not enough data available. The resulting index included 113 countries including 19 island countries and 13 small island developing States (SIDS). He found, not surprisingly, that the most vulnerable countries were the SIDS. Although this is a reality that was known, it is now quantitatively proven and numbers attract attention.

INFORMAL SESSION

The Chair did not convene the afternoon informal session until 5:10 pm. She pointed out that there had been a series of intensive informal discussions underway that had lasted since the Plenary's adjournment in the morning. She expressed hope that the PrepCom would now be in a position to move ahead.

Colombia, on behalf of the G-77 and China, took the floor to submit the revised version of the "Basic Elements" text and the text of the "Preamble and Basis for Action" to the PrepCom. He also announced that for the rest of this meeting, Amb. Robert van Lierop of Vanuatu, the Chair of AOSIS, would preside over these negotiations on behalf of the G-77. He commented that a negotiation process that has too many spokespeople on behalf of SIDS and the G-77 would not result in a good and effective outcome.

The Chair then opened discussion on the structure of the document. It was pointed out by a number of delegates that some of the chapters in the G-77 document address cross-sectoral or "horizontal" areas while others address sectoral areas. More visibility needs to be given to the horizontal subjects and they should be reordered as follows: XIV. Human Resource Development; X. National Institutions and Administrative Capacity; XI. Regional Institutions and Technical Cooperation; and XIII. Science and Technology. Having reordered these chapters, they should also be placed at the beginning of the document. Another question was raised about the overall structure of the document. The G-77 responded that they envision a single, integrated document with the preamble first, followed by the 15 chapters, each preceded by a Basis for Action section. Regarding the order of the chapters, he said that the current structure had been agreed upon at the organizational session. He said that they would discuss this further in informal meetings. The Chair responded that the proposal to move Chapters 10, 11, 13 and 14 to the beginning of the document was introduced last week and should be taken up here and now. The G-77 was able to accept the reordering, but not the relocation of the chapters to the beginning of the document. Discussion on this was expected to continue on Thursday.

Before adjourning for a short break and a change of venue, the Chair gave the floor to Jocelyn Dow, who spoke

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on behalf of the NGOs. She pointed out that the documents at this PrepCom fail to speak to the human dimension of island life. Furthermore, the presentation of island people as mendicants seeking a place in the ever reducing funding of the least developed countries is not an acceptable posture for Caribbean NGOs. She urged delegates to make this process a more human-centred one that reflects the reality of the lives of island people.

When the informal session resumed in Conference Room 5, the Chair asked delegates to concentrate on issues where consensus can be reached. The various views on structure are known to all and will be addressed at a later point. She then opened discussion on Chapters 1-14 and suggested that delegates use Rev. 1.0 of the Basic Elements text, the Basis for Action document, and the Chair's checklist prepared over the weekend. Also of use were L.5 and a detailed response to Rev. 1.0 prepared by the NGOs.

I. CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEA LEVEL RISE: The most contentious issue in the discussion of this chapter was the wording of paragraph 17 of the Basis for Action, as it referred to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and its lack of precise timetables and targets. All the delegates agreed that the FCCC is of the utmost importance to SIDS, but many warned against prejudging the ongoing FCCC negotiation process. It was finally agreed that reference to the FCCC could be retained if the wording was changed to reflect this concern. It was suggested that the vulnerability of SIDS to climate change is not exclusive and that other coastal countries are concerned with the problem. It was also felt that Revision 1.0 had failed to retain reference to the need for SIDS to maximize their participation in international programmes and negotiations, as was originally stated in L.5. Another paragraph was added to include a call for support to SIDS in developing integrated coastal zone management programmes, including response measures to the impacts of climate change and sea-level rise.

II. NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS: It was generally felt that while paragraph 18 of the Basis for Action, which noted the cycle of natural environmental disasters to which SIDS are prone, was a good description of the problem. Paragraphs 19 and 20, referring, respectively, to the consequent rise in insurance premiums, and the need for regional action, were seen as superfluous. There was recognition, however, that the issue of insurance coverage was of growing concern to SIDS and that it should be mentioned. This concern was incorporated into paragraph 18. Concerns were also raised that national emergency disaster funds might encourage unsustainable development. There was another call for reference to be made in the Programme of Action to the UN Decade on Natural Disaster Relief, and delegates agreed to incorporate this in the text. There was also a reminder that a suggestion was made in the general debate to include language referring to coordination of disaster warning and preparedness with the WMO and other international and intergovernmental agencies. This was not opposed.

III. MANAGEMENT OF WASTES: Concern was raised with regard to the implications of paragraph 23 of the Basis for Action, which refers to the vulnerability of SIDS to marine pollution due to transboundary movement of toxic and hazardous wastes, on trade and other international agreements. This was resolved with inclusion of language referring to the need for consistency with international law. It was noted by one delegate that reference to cruise ships should be deleted in this paragraph as it was better covered under the tourism chapter. Consistency with international law and the need to harmonize language in this document with other relevant mechanisms, such as the London and Basel Conventions, were the general concerns expressed by delegates. They suggested a number of amendments in the programme of action along these lines.

IV. COASTAL AND MARINE RESOURCES: In the Basis for Action, paragraph 27 met with some opposition. As a compromise, activities related to biodiversity conservation and response strategies for climate change contained in paragraph 27 were added to paragraph 26 as issues that need to be encompassed in integrated coastal and marine area management. The rest of paragraph 27 on natural disasters was deleted. Minor additions were made to the rest of the chapter, highlighting the role of local communities and integrated coastal management. Discussion was most heated on the section on the UN Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. It was finally agreed that the rights and concerns of SIDS have to be taken into account by the Conference and that the participation of SIDS at the Conference should be encouraged and facilitated.

V. FRESHWATER RESOURCES: In the section on national action, the last paragraph on the development and acquisition of appropriate technology was amended to include reference to opportunities for technology interchange among SIDS. There was also discussion over the meaning of one delegate's proposal to include a new paragraph on multiple use conflicts dealing with freshwater resources.

VI. LAND RESOURCES: In the Basis for Action, the multiple use conflict issue was raised once again. The term "competing demands" appeared to be more acceptable to the other delegates. A lengthy discussion ensued when one delegate stated that the Basis for Action villified large commercial agricultural and related uses of land resources. No compromise was reached on this issue.

VII. ENERGY RESOURCES: A number of contentious issues arose in the discussion of this chapter. One was the appropriateness of economic instruments in promoting energy conservation in SIDS. Another contentious proposal was to change the commitment for "technology transfer" to "technology cooperation," citing the current work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. Other delegates commented that Chapter 34 of Agenda 21 specifically mentions technology transfer.

Discussion was supposed to continue until 11:00 pm.

IN THE CORRIDORS

While delegations met informally during the day to discuss the revised basic elements text, the preamble, and the basis for action, NGOs drafted specific amendments to all chapters. There was concern and some frustration among the NGOs that a number of points raised in the general debate and in the first set of comments prepared by NGOs had not been incorporated into the revised draft. The prevalent mood was one of disappointment. Many NGOs felt that SIDS governments were not focusing clearly enough on the need to address human resource issues and the issues resulting from international economic and trade regimes, specifically poverty. Some NGOs commented that the PrepCom so far had been a lost opportunity for SIDS.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

Today's schedule will depend on the success of last night's informal session. Earlier in the day the Chair had expressed the desire to complete a second reading of Chapters 1 - 14 of the G-77 text. It is expected that the PrepCom will continue to meet in informal session today to complete discussion of Chapters 1 - 14 of the G-77 draft and, perhaps, to focus on the preamble and Chapter 15 on implementation, monitoring and review. It is also likely that informal consultations will continue on the structure of the document. As there are only two more days left in this PrepCom meeting, delegates, the Chair and the Secretariat will have to work long hours today to ensure that some type of a draft programme of action can be forwarded to the Conference in Barbados in April.