The sixth session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-6) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) begins today and will continue until 16 March 2001 in Montreal, Canada. The meeting will be followed by the second session of the CBD’s Experts’ Panel on Access and Benefit-Sharing, which will meet from 19-22 March 2001.

SBSTTA-6 delegates are expected to meet in two working groups. Working Group I will consider invasive alien species, focusing on: status and trends; a review of existing instruments and identification of gaps; and options for future work, including elaboration of the guiding principles, consideration of the need for a legal instrument and development of joint work programmes. Working Group II will discuss: scientific assessments; the Global Taxonomy Initiative; biodiversity and climate change, including cooperation with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; migratory species and cooperation with the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. Additionally, the Plenary will review progress reports on: ad hoc technical expert groups; assessment processes; marine and coastal biodiversity; and biodiversity of inland water ecosystems.

Cristián Samper (Colombia) will serve as the Chair of SBSTTA-6. The recommendations of both SBSTTA-6 and SBSTTA-7 (November 2001) will be reported to the sixth Conference of the Parties to be held from 8-19 April 2002, in the Hague, the Netherlands.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONVENTION

The CBD, negotiated under the auspices of UNEP, was opened for signature on 5 June 1992, and entered into force on 29 December 1993. To date, 180 countries have ratified the Convention. The three objectives of the CBD are to promote “the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.”

COP-1: The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-1) took place in Nassau, the Bahamas, from 28 November - 9 December 1994. Some of the key decisions taken by COP-1 included: adoption of the medium-term work programme; designation of the permanent Secretariat; establishment of the Clearing-house Mechanism (CHM) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice; and designation of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as the interim institutional structure for the financial mechanism.

SBSTTA-1: SBSTTA-1 met in Paris, France, from 4-8 September 1995. SBSTTA-1 delegates discussed and produced recommendations on: the modus operandi of SBSTTA; components of biodiversity under threat; access to and transfer of technology; scientific and technical information to be contained in national reports; contributions to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization meetings on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; and marine and coastal biodiversity. SBSTTA-1 also requested flexibility to create: two open-ended working groups to meet simultaneously during future SBSTTA meetings; ad hoc technical panels of experts as needed; and a roster of experts.

COP-2: The second meeting of the COP was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, from 6-17 November 1995. Major outcomes of COP-2 included: designation of the permanent location of the Secretariat in Montreal, Canada; establishment of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety; adoption of a programme of work funded by a larger budget; designation of the GEF as the continuing interim institutional structure for the financial mechanism; and consideration of its first ecosystem theme, marine and coastal biodiversity.

SBSTTA-2: The second meeting of SBSTTA (SBSTTA-2) met in Montreal, Canada, from 2-6 September 1996. The meeting produced recommendations on: monitoring and assessment of biodiversity; approaches to taxonomy; economic valuation of biodiversity; access to genetic resources; agricultural biodiversity; terrestrial biodiversity; marine and coastal biodiversity; biosafety; and the CHM.

COP-3: At its third meeting (COP-3), held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 4-15 November 1996, the COP adopted decisions on a number of topics, including: elaboration of work programmes on agricultural and forest biodiversity; a Memorandum of Understanding with the GEF; an agreement to hold an intersessional workshop on Article 8(j) regarding traditional knowledge; an application by the Executive Secretary for observer status to the World Trade Organization’s Committee on Trade and the Environment; and a statement from the CBD to the Special Session of the UN General Assembly to review implementation of Agenda 21.
SBSTTA-3: At its third meeting (SBSTTA-3), held in Montreal, Canada, from 1-5 September 1997, SBSTTA delegates considered the implementation of the pilot phase of the CHM, and a progress report on SBSTTA's work and the effectiveness of its advice. Additional recommendations were formulated on: biodiversity in inland waters; marine and coastal biodiversity; agricultural biodiversity; forest biodiversity; and biodiversity indicators. SBSTTA-3 also adopted a recommendation on participation of developing countries in SBSTTA.

COP-4: At its fourth meeting (COP-4), held in Bratislava, Slovakia, from 4-15 May 1998, the COP adopted decisions on, *inter alia*: inland water ecosystems; marine and coastal biodiversity; forest biodiversity; agricultural biodiversity; implementation of the CHM's pilot phase; implementation of Article 8(j); national reports; cooperation with other agreements, institutions and processes; activities of the GEF; incentive measures; access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing; public education and awareness; and the long-term work programme. At a Ministerial Roundtable, Ministers, Deputy Ministers and special guests discussed integrating biodiversity concerns into sectoral activities, such as tourism, and private sector participation in implementing the Convention's objectives.

SBSTTA-4: During its fourth meeting in Montreal, Canada, from 21-25 June 1999, SBSTTA-4 delegates made recommendations on: the SBSTTA programme of work; the Global Taxonomy Initiative; guiding principles to prevent the impact of alien species; control of plant gene expression; options for sustainable use of terrestrial biodiversity; incorporation of biodiversity into environmental impact assessments; and approaches and practices for the sustainable use of resources, including tourism.

ISOC: The Intersessional Meeting on the Operations of the Convention (ISOC) met in Montreal, Canada, from 28-30 June 1999, and was convened on the basis of COP-4 Decision IV/16, which called for an open-ended meeting to consider possible arrangements to improve preparations for and conduct of COP meetings. ISOC also held preparatory discussions on: access and benefit-sharing; *ex situ* collections that were acquired prior to the Convention's entry into force; and the relationship between intellectual property rights and the relevant provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and the CBD.

EXPERTS' PANEL ON ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING: The Panel met from 4-8 October 1999, in San José, Costa Rica. COP Decision IV/8 called for the establishment of a regionally balanced panel of experts on access and benefit-sharing, which received guidance from the ISOC. The meeting, co-hosted by the Governments of Costa Rica and Switzerland, focused on four items: access and benefit-sharing arrangements for scientific and commercial purposes; review of legislative, administrative and policy measures at national and regional levels; review of regulatory procedures and incentive measures; and capacity building. The Panel developed a set of recommendations, which included general conclusions and specific points on prior informed consent, mutually agreed terms, information needs and capacity building. The Panel will convene again in Montreal, Canada, from 19-22 March 2001, to: assess user and provider experience in access and benefit-sharing with a study of complementary options; and identify approaches to involvement of stakeholders in access and benefit-sharing processes.

**ExCOP FOR THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY:** The first Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties for the Adoption of the Protocol on Biosafety to the CBD (ExCOP) was held in Cartagena, Colombia, from 22-23 February 1999, following the sixth meeting of the CBD's Biosafety Working Group (14-22 February 1999). Delegates sought to develop a compromise package over two days of non-stop negotiations. Unable to reach an agreement, the meeting was suspended, and three informal consultations were held in Montreal (July 1999), Vienna (September 1999) and again in Montreal (January 2000). The resumed session of the ExCOP was held in Montreal, Canada, from 24-28 January 2000. Following four days of informal consultations and five days of formal negotiations, delegates adopted the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The Protocol addresses the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) that may have an adverse effect on biodiversity, with a specific focus on transboundary movements. It establishes an advance informed agreement procedure for imports of LMOs, incorporates the precautionary principle and details information and documentation requirements.

SBSTTA-5: The fifth session of SBSTTA met in Montreal, Canada, from 31 January - 4 February 2000. SBSTTA-5 developed recommendations on, *inter alia*: inland water biodiversity; forest biodiversity; agricultural biodiversity; marine and coastal biodiversity, including coral bleaching; a programme of work on dry and sub-humid lands; alien species; the ecosystem approach; biodiversity indicators; the pilot phase of the CHM; the second national reports; and ad hoc technical expert groups.

COP-5: At its fifth meeting (COP-5), held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 15-26 May 2001, the COP adopted decisions on, *inter alia*: dry and sub-humid land biodiversity; the ecosystem approach; access to genetic resources; alien species; sustainable use; biodiversity and tourism; incentive measures; the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation; the Global Taxonomy Initiative; scientific and technical cooperation and the CHM; identification, monitoring and assessment, and indicators; and impact assessment, liability and redress. A High-Level segment on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, including a Ministerial Roundtable and a special signing ceremony, was convened during the second week of the meeting.

ICCP-1: The first Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP) was held in Montpellier, France, from 11-15 December 2000. ICCP-1 addressed: information-sharing and the Biosafety Clearing-House; capacity building; the roster of experts; decision-making procedures; handling, transport, packaging and identification; and compliance. The meeting concluded with recommendations for inter-sessional activities prior to ICCP-2, along with Chair’s summaries of the discussions for further consideration by ICCP-2 (scheduled to take place in Montreal, Canada, from 1-5 October 2001). To date, 85 countries have signed the agreement, and two countries, Bulgaria and Trinidad and Tobago, have ratified it.

**PRE-SBSTTA-6 MEETINGS:** Over the weekend prior to SBSTTA-6, side meetings were held, pertaining to the Ecosystem Conservation Group, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. The relevant results of such meetings will be presented over the course of SBSTTA-6 in the form of meeting reports and lunchtime workshops.

**THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY**

**PLENARY:** Opening Plenary is scheduled for 10:00 am in the ICAO building, and will address the agenda and organization of work. Keynote presentations will be delivered by Robert Watson, World Bank and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), regarding the relations between climate change and biodiversity, and by Jeff Waage, CABI International; Harold Mooney, Stanford University (USA); and Timothy Twongo, Fisheries Research Institute (Uganda), regarding invasive alien species.