CBD COP-4 HIGHLIGHTS
FRIDAY 8 MAY, 1998

On day five of the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-4) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), delegates continued to meet in two Working Groups. Working Group I completed its consideration of agricultural biodiversity and forest biodiversity, and addressed implementation of Article 8(j) (Traditional Knowledge). Working Group II resumed discussion on the relationship between the CBD and other Conventions and began review of the operations of the Convention and consideration of financial resources and mechanisms. A Plenary was convened briefly to address organizational matters.

PLENARY

Jozef Zlocha, President of COP-4, introduced Mohamed Mehmoud Ould el Ghaouth (Mauritania) as Chair of the opened-end contact group on administration and budget.

WORKING GROUP I

On Friday, Working Group I (WG-I) completed discussion of agricultural biodiversity and forest biodiversity, and began discussion on implementation of Article 8(j). WG-I established a contact group on forests, chaired by Adam Delaney (Papua New Guinea).

On agrobiodiversity, some delegates highlighted areas for future consideration, but others stressed it was premature to engage in a priority-setting process before identifying gaps in efforts. Delegates supported: increased cooperation with FAO and other related organizations; finalization of negotiations harmonizing the International Undertaking (IU) with the objectives of the CBD; and adopting the IU as a protocol. Many delegates welcomed progress already achieved, but stressed that implementation should be faster.

Several developing countries emphasized the link between agrobiodiversity and food security, and said policies undermining sustainable food production are unacceptable. Many developing countries called for, inter alia: increased funding; capacity building at the national level; protection of traditional farming knowledge, innovations and practices; benefit sharing; identification of threats to agrobiodiversity from biopiracy; control against invasive alien species; and incentives for in situ conservation.

PAKISTAN, SRI LANKA, RWANDA and RURAL ADVANCEMENT FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL (RAFI), among others, condemned the use of “terminator technologies.” The REPUBLIC OF KOREA called for assessment of trade liberalization’s impact on agrobiodiversity in future work programmes.

CANADA noted a draft GEF framework for agrobiodiversity activities and suggested a working group or workshop be convened to provide feedback. BRAZIL proposed establishing a steering committee to promote increased cooperation and more efficient implementation. The CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (CGIAR) reaffirmed its mission to promote sustainable agriculture for food security in developing countries.

WG-I discussed the draft work programme for forest biodiversity (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/7). The Secretariat of the INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON FORESTS (IFF) stressed synergies with the CBD and called for the involvement of the Intergency Task Force on Forests (ITFF).

The CONGO, supported by MADAGASCAR and others, stressed provisions on research, evaluation and development of techniques for conservation and sustainable use. BRAZIL called for, inter alia: taxonomic studies and inventories; harmonization with GEF decisions; emphasis on sustainable use, not solely conservation; and establishment of a capacity.

BRAZIL, ETHIOPIA, on behalf of the Africa Group, and INDIA stressed provisions for benefit sharing. TURKEY supported regional initiatives and, supporting INDIA, public participation in the work programme. INDIA, supported by MADAGASCAR, KENYA, RWANDA, ETHIOPIA, AUSTRALIA, HAITI, the UK on behalf of the EU, ECUADOR, POLAND and others, stressed that traditional knowledge and indigenous rights were not addressed adequately in the work programme.

AUSTRALIA, BRAZIL, SWEDEN and others called for a global assessment of forest biodiversity. INDIA, supported by the US, stressed that a global assessment of biodiversity was premature. PERU noted the lack of reference to the assessment process and called for a clearing-house mechanism on forests. Some delegations, including PERU and CUBA, urged establishment of an intergovernmental working group on forests. KENYA, supported by AUSTRALIA, NORWAY, DENMARK and others, said the CBD should support the IFF’s proposal for countries to implement national forest programmes.

SPAIN noted the high percentage of forests in private hands and called for cooperation with the private sector. AUSTRALIA, HAITI and KENYA called for sending specific directives to the GEF. The EU, PERU, MEXICO, the REPUBLIC OF KOREA and others called for criteria and indicators.

ZIMBABWE, supported by RWANDA, KENYA and others, stressed inclusion of savannah regions among the thematic areas currently under discussion. NEW ZEALAND emphasized national priorities. AUSTRIA called for investigation of the effects of industry emissions, trade policy and traffic, and for a biogeographical approach.

On Article 8(j), SPAIN reported on the Madrid Workshop on Traditional Knowledge, held 24 - 28 November 1997, and biodiversity (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/10 and UNEP/CBD/COP/4/10/ Add.1), and highlighted the need for increased participation of indigenous communities in the CBD. Indigenous representatives...
reported on the Third International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity held from 4-6 May in Bratislava, and called for: increased participation in the CBD; control of and access to resources; and establishment of an open ended ad hoc working group to expedite the implementation of Article 8(j).

Delegates supported the EU’s proposal for an intersessional working group on Article 8(j) and related articles. COSTA RICA urged that historical practices and indigenous rights be fully recognized and not impacted by IPR. FINLAND proposed increased levels of traditional land use. The PHILIPPINES advocated that the working group synthesize traditional best practices.

WORKING GROUP II

Working Group II (WG-II) continued its discussion of the CBD’s relationship to other international conventions, in particular the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights agreement (TRIPS). TOGO, INDONESIA, TANZANIA, BOTSWANA and SRI LANKA supported ETHIOPIA’s proposal from Thursday to convene an open-ended ad hoc working group on the issue. AUSTRALIA said COP decision III/17, on IPR, is a good basis for further consideration and proposed initiation of a new process. TOGO emphasized the need to address the irreversible damage of resource exploitation. BOTSWANA called for recognition and non-violation of collective community property and for harmonization of legal regimes to support this. The CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW (CIEL) requested Parties who are WTO to support this. The CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW (CIEL) requested Parties who are WTO to support this.

On the review of the operations of the Convention, WG-II evaluated, inter alia: the COP, Scientific Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), regional preparatory meetings, the Secretariat, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety (BSWG), cooperation with other processes and a longer-term programme of work (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/14). MAURITANIA presented conclusions from the London Working Group on modus operandi of the Convention (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/Inf.2). Conclusions drawn focused on improving, inter alia: cooperation with other processes; scientific contributions; links with civil society; and Party participation. NORWAY proposed that SBSTTA establish address specific issues.

On the long-term work programme, most delegations favored a ten-year rolling programme with one thematic and one cross-cutting issue addressed per COP. Several delegations proposed topics for the work programme, including: the MARSHALL ISLANDS for incorporation of the Barbados Plan of Action; BRAZIL for issues surrounding biodiversity for biotechnology, bioremediation and pharmaceuticals; INDIA for access to genetic resources and benefit sharing; KENYA for incorporation of national application into domestic law; SWEDEN and the EU for taxonomy; and various delegations for arid, mountain, rangeland and grassland ecosystems in the programme.

On financial resources and mechanisms, WG-II considered the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the COP and the GEF Council, activities of the GEF, effectiveness of the financial mechanism, additional financial resources and further guidance to the financial mechanism (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/14, UNEP/CBD/COP/4/15 and UNEP/CBD/COP/4/16). POLAND, AUSTRALIA, the BAHAMAS and RUSSIA supported designating the GEF as the permanent financial mechanism.

Contact Groups

DCOCONTACT GROUPS

Over the weekend, contact groups on the review of the convention, financial resources and mechanism, forest biodiversity and budget met to discuss their agendas for the upcoming week.

IN THE CORRIDORS

There was much surprise at the number of eager speakers on forest biodiversity, causing some to wonder whether lengthening the forest debate was a ploy by some to delay discussion of Article 8(j) until Monday, when many indigenous representatives will have left. Furthermore, as contact groups go into full swing, corridors are abuzz as to whether NGOs will be able to participate.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

WG-I: WG-I will reconvene at 10:00 am to continue its discussion of Article 8(j).

WG-II: WG-II will reconvene at 10:00 am to discuss incentive measures and public education and awareness.