



FORESTS

CAN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE BRACKETS

Working Group I will start discussions on forests for the first time at PrepCom IV today. The two documents to be addressed are: PC/WG.1/CRP.14, Rev.2, a non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and PC/100/Add.16, the forests section of Agenda 21.

CRP.14, the Principles text, reflects discussions which took place during PrepCom III. The cumbersome title reflects the fact that the high hopes held by some (including the G-7 at the 1990 Houston Summit) for the early negotiation of a legally binding global forest convention have been overwhelmed by the North-South conflict underlying UNCED. No one today talks about signing a global forest convention in Rio, although there seems to be strong support for negotiating basic principles upon which a subsequent convention could be based.

Does CRP.14, Rev.2 get the basic principles right? It is hard to tell at present since the document is riddled with brackets as well as underlined passages (representing new text submitted at the close of PrepCom III). Charles Liburd, Guyana's ambassador to UNEP, who chaired the contact group on forests at PrepCom III (and has been reappointed to that position at PrepCom IV) is quietly confident that progress can be made on the basis of the existing text. For the moment, many delegations appear ready to take a similarly optimistic view. The NGO Forest Working Group at PrepCom IV (a diverse group of NGO representatives from many regions and sectors) has prepared a set of specific amendments to CRP.14, concentrating on strengthening the text, where necessary, and including new paragraphs covering key concepts missing from the official text.

The real issue, of course, is whether UNCED, and subsequently the UN General Assembly, will agree to set up an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on a forest convention and, if so, within what time period. That particular decision may depend on other elements in the overall UNCED package, including progress on climate change, finance, technology transfer, etc. Although, Ambassador Liburd stated last week that until consensus is achieved on the application of forest principles, he sees no possibility of negotiations of a global forest convention.

After Liburd's contact group discusses the Forest Principles, Working Group I Chair Bo Kjellén will chair the discussion on the chapter on forests for Agenda 21 (PC/100/Add.16). Thanks to some excellent work by the UNCED Secretariat's Forestry Policy Working Group, this document is a vast improvement over the previous Options for Agenda 21 paper that was presented at PrepCom III. The NGO Forest Working Group has also prepared detailed amendments to PC/100/Add.16.

At previous PrepCom meetings, the negotiators in the contact group on forests have taken on many of the contentious issues later dealt with by other groups. Real progress was achieved on the Forest Principles document during the Third Session, and it was said in Geneva that as slow as the negotiations seemed to be, if as much progress had been made in other working groups, the PrepCom would be much further along with their work.

PREPCOM HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 16 MARCH 1992

HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (PLENARY)

Discussion on PC/100/Add.7, "Promoting Sustainable Human Settlement development" began yesterday morning. The Vice-Chair called for general comments on the text and written amendments to be submitted by 5:00 pm today. Notable comments

included the request that attention be paid to the critically poor (Guyana); capacity building for local governments to deal with urban problems (US and Sweden); and that Add.7 should address human settlement problems in developed as well as developing countries (Sweden). There was no first reading of the document and the informal meeting was transformed into the 60th meeting of Plenary for a brief statement by the Minister of the Environment of Gabon. The meeting then adjourned at 11:30 am.

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY (PLENARY)

The Plenary began its consideration of international economic issues (PC/100/Add.3) Monday afternoon. After three hours, only the first eleven paragraphs had been examined. During the debate, there was a general tendency for the developed countries, in particular, Japan, the US and the European Community, to stress that the document should incorporate conclusions from UNCTAD VIII, which was recently held in Cartagena, Colombia. It was suggested that UNCTAD was the more appropriate forum to consider trade issues than UNCED. However, the G-77, led by India and supported by Colombia and China, tended to resist this, noting that UNCTAD and UNCED represented different processes with different objectives. Since many delegates had not yet seen the report from UNCTAD VIII, the Secretariat announced that the paper would be distributed at the UNCTAD liaison office.

Several delegates wanted the programme objectives stated in the document to be redrafted, pointing out that it was unclear what was to be understood by "improved commodity prices."

On programme activities, G-77 countries preferred to begin each activity with a general reference to the international trading system, to be followed by specific comments on policies to be adopted by developing countries. This would mean shifting the order of paragraphs in the text. The US, Canada and Switzerland preferred keeping the order of the paragraphs, but suggested deleting reference to "developing" countries, on the ground that policy measures listed in the document should apply to all countries. This idea was supported by Poland and the Russian Federation and was resisted by India and other G-77 members.

The EC stressed the importance of the paragraph on the international trading system and suggested redrafting the text to reflect what was covered in the Uruguay Round of the GATT. The G-77 had several proposals for text amendments that had not been distributed before the meeting, but which were read out by India and found to be "interesting" by the EC and other Northern delegations.

The debate on this subject resumes Wednesday afternoon.

OCEANS (WORKING GROUP II)

Although Working Group II did not meet on Monday, the three contact groups dealing with the oceans document (PC/100/Add.21) met in closed sessions. It appears that the contact group on land-based sources of marine pollution (Programme Area B) has begun to integrate the Nairobi recommendations (PC/113) into the list of objectives. It is possible that these recommendations will be diluted versions of their former selves. The contact group is still trying to decide what to do about Iceland's call for language dealing with the transport and dumping of radioactive waste at sea.

The contact group on marine living resources (Programme Areas C and D) made little progress again yesterday. The group worked its way through the objectives of both programme areas. There is still no agreement whether or not to keep these two programme areas separate or to integrate them. Programme Area C deals with high seas living resources and Programme Area D deals with living marine resources under national jurisdiction.

The contact group on institutions (Programme Area F) agreed that this programme area should remain in the document. Now delegates are trying to reach agreement on the language within this programme area.

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LEGAL INSTRUMENTS (WORKING GROUP III)

Working Group III commenced discussions today on the nature of the Agenda 21 chapter on the development of international law. Working Group III's deliberations commenced with a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of document PC/103, in particular Chapter VIII that sets out the basis for action, objectives and activities in this area. Interventions on this topic were fairly non-controversial and focused on such matters as: the Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law; the function of legal experts meetings; and the participation of developing countries in the negotiation and implementation of legal instruments. Many countries felt that the instruments discussion was premature in light of the fact that substantive discussions on institutions had not yet commenced. Noticeably absent from the draft Agenda 21 document was the requisite section on means of implementation. Peter Sand of the Secretariat informed the working group that the Secretariat will prepare the appropriate paragraphs for review by the working group shortly. With the first round of discussions on the instruments document complete, the next stage will involve a compilation of delegates' amendments and proposals into a bracketed text which will be tabled for actual substantive debate.

The rest of the afternoon was devoted to review of document PC/100/Add.26 which represents the Agenda 21 chapter on the role of regional organizations and cooperation. Interventions focused primarily on the need for UNCED follow-up to involve a designated regional coordinating body in each major region or sub-region of the world. The US outlined its proposal for regional environment and development coordinating centres which would carry out the following activities: serve as focal points for regional transboundary problems; assist in the implementation of regional strategies; facilitate region-wide capacity-building; collect and disseminate science and technology information; assist governments in the drafting of sustainable development legislation; and assist governments in the gathering of sustainable development information. The Chair, Dr. Bedrich Moldan, announced that the Secretariat would prepare an amended paper to take into account the proposals and amendments tabled by delegates. This paper (to be cited as a "CRP" paper) will be considered in the overall context of the institutions discussion.

THE BUREAU

The Bureau met yesterday morning at 10:00 am to approve the new schedule that includes night meetings. There was no announcement on a coordinator for Institutions within Working Group III. The designated coordinator from Egypt had declined for numerous reasons. The Chair, Bedrich Moldan, announced that he is still looking for another coordinator. The Coordinator for the Major Groups discussions, Luke Mazairac, was given permission to schedule consultations with the representatives of the major groups this week. No decision was taken on the length or form of the major groups chapter of Agenda 21.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY AT PREPCOM

FORESTS (WORKING GROUP I): Vice-Chair Charles Liburd of Guyana will move directly to negotiations on the final version of the Forests Principles Document (CRP/14/Rev.2). Two emerging issues to watch for include the extent to which States are coming to accept the notion of differentiated responsibilities. The resistance by certain Northern countries to this concept appears to be breaking down. As well, look for the extent to which grassroots participation around management policy issues is becoming accepted by developing countries, especially India, which has taken a strong supporting position on this issue. The discussion that will unfold around the latter will be the first real test of governments' commitment to popular participation. The rapport built up between the negotiators over the last year and half should help move negotiations forward.

FRESHWATER (WORKING GROUP II): Discussion will begin this morning on freshwater resources (PC/100/Add.22). Look for a discussion on the integration of the four principles that emerged from the International Conference on Water and the Environment held in Dublin in January. Another potentially contentious issue will be the establishment of a World Water Council.

TOXIC CHEMICALS (WORKING GROUP II): Today's discussion of the environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals (PC/100/Add.23) is likely to be the least contentious of the Agenda 21 chapters on waste. Some developed countries are likely to object to any new international regulations of toxic waste. This may lead to a heated discussion. Other countries are concerned about a possible ban on asbestos. Although much of this text remains bracketed from PrepCom III, the Chair is confident that progress will be achieved and that the document will be completed during the scheduled sessions.

OCEANS (WORKING GROUP II): Working Group II will continue discussion on oceans during its evening session. The working group will review Programme Areas E (Addressing Critical Uncertainties) and G (Sustainable Development of Islands), which should be available in all UN languages today. These programme areas were the least contentious of the seven in PC/100/Add.21 and are likely to be approved by the working group with minimal changes.

INSTITUTIONS (WORKING GROUP III): The critical issue on the Institutions agenda is whether States are willing to support the establishment of a strong coordinating body with a real operational mandate to ensure substantive changes in the nature of economic development. Many States are advocating the creation of a special committee within ECOSOC. Look for the extent to which these various institutional proposals give real teeth to this proposed body. Will the mystery body have a mere reporting function, or will it be endowed with real decision-making authority which will bind the UN agencies? As well, will this potential policy body be linked in any way to the funding mechanisms, and secondly, will the nature of its decision-making be fully inclusive of all stakeholders, especially NGOs?

SCHEDULE OF PREPCOM IV EVENTS

OFFICIAL MEETINGS

March 17	10:00 am	UN Conference Room 4	Working Group II (Fresh Water)	Open
March 17	10:00 am	UN Conference Room 1	Working Group III (Institutions)	Open
March 17	1:00 pm	UN Conference Room 1	Working Group I (Forests)	Open
March 17	1:00 pm	UN Conference Room 4	Working Group II (Toxic Chemicals)	Open
March 17	8:00 pm	UN Conference Room 4	Working Group II (Oceans)	Open
March 17	8:00 pm	UN Conference Room 1	Working Group III (Legal Instruments)	Open

NGO AND OTHER MEETINGS

March 17	9:00 am to 10:00 am	UN Conference Room C	NGO Strategy Session	NGOs
March 17	10:00 am to 11:00 am	UN Conference Room C	Women's Caucus	NGOs
March 17	1:00 pm - 2:00 pm	25 Tudor City Place Apt. 1820	Meeting of Women from CANZ NGOs and CANZ delegations	CANZ Women
March 17	2:00 pm to 3:00 pm	CCUN 8th Fl. Grumman Room	NGO Strategy Meeting on Finance	NGOs
March 17	3:00 pm to 5:30 pm	CCUN Tillman Chapel	EUROSTEP - A Meeting on the Global Environmental Facility	NGOs
March 17	6:00 pm - 8:00 pm	UN Conference Room 4	NGO Gov't Dialogue and NGO Plenary "Major Groups Meeting"	NGOs