



Earth Summit Bulletin

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UNCED HIGHLIGHTS 2 JUNE 1992

PRE-CONFERENCE CONSULTATIONS

UNCED Pre-Conference Consultations got off to a slow start yesterday. The formal meeting was scheduled to resume at 3:00 pm., after regional group meetings and informal consultations. However, it was 4:30 pm before the Chairman, Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Lafer, convened the meeting.

The regional groups held meetings Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning to address a variety of issues including the nomination of Vice Presidents for the Plenary and the Main Committee as well as the selection of "Friends of the Rapporteur-General" of the Plenary. Each of the five regional groups were asked to select two "Friends." The African Group also had to decide on its nominations for Vice Presidents of the Plenary, since on Monday it had tabled 12 nominations for its 11 seats. The Asian Group had to resolve a similar problem as it, too, had tabled more nominations than allotted seats.

Lafer convened "Friends of the Chair" meetings on Monday and Tuesday with the heads of the regional groups. On Monday night, they agreed on several matters related to the Summit portion of the Conference. Speeches by the Heads of State or Government during the Summit will be limited to 7 minutes. The additional time allotted for speeches (from 5 to 7 minutes) thus requires a change in the Summit timetable. On 12 June, the meeting will start earlier, at 9:00 am, and end later, at 6:00 or 7:00 pm. On 13 June the speeches will also begin at 9:00 am but will end at 5:00 pm so that the Heads of State or Government can hold a one-hour roundtable discussion. During this discussion, statements will be made by the United Nations Secretary-General, the Secretary-General of the Conference, and one representative from each of the five regional groups. The meeting will conclude with a statement from the President of the Conference, Brazilian president Fernando Collor de Mello. Several changes in protocol related to the introduction and timing of the Heads of State or Government will be required. For example, it is believed that one Head of State or Government will be able to start his or her speech before the other is seated so as to speed up the process.

When the formal Pre-Sessional Consultations finally reconvened at 4:30 pm, the first item on the agenda was the continuation of the elections of officers for the Plenary and the Main Committee. Tommy Koh was elected as Chairman of the Main Committee and Algeria was elected as Rapporteur-General of the Conference. The matter of the Vice Presidents of the Plenary was not as easily resolved. One of the members of the African Group continued to insist that his country be one of the Vice Presidents of the Plenary. With 12 African nominees for 11 seats, and no compromise reached within the Group, another solution had to be found. At one point during the day, the delegate in question suggested that an additional position for a Rapporteur be added to the Bureau for the Main Committee and that seat should be given to him. The Bureau for the Main Committee was intended to include a Chair (Koh) and four Vice Chairs, one from each of the remaining regional groups, with one of the Vice Chairs acting as Rapporteur.

After much discussion between Lafer and the heads of the regional groups, the Latin American and Caribbean Group agreed to give up one of its eight seats (Colombia) on the Plenary Bureau and give it to the African Group, providing that it was understood that this would not be a precedent-setting move. As part of the package, the Bureau for the Main Committee would remain as originally planned. Thus, the Latin American and Caribbean Vice Presidents for the Plenary are Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Brazil and Jamaica. The African Vice Presidents now include Tanzania, Kenya, Benin, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Tunisia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Gabon, Zaire and Mauritania.

Now the sole remaining issue on the composition of the Bureau of the Plenary is the list of Vice Presidents from the Asian Group. In order to avoid a vote, it was decided to postpone the final selection of Vice Presidents until the Asians could make a final decision. Problems in reaching a consensus decision on this issue is understandable given the disparate geo-political composition of the Asian group, which stretches from Jordan to Japan.

The meeting broke up Tuesday night when it was announced that the invitations for the opening ceremony were available at the Protocol Desk and the delegates streamed out of the conference room. It was unclear whether the delegates had finished discussing all of the items on their agenda, however, a set of recommendations will be forwarded to the Plenary for its opening session today.

MAURICE STRONG'S PRESS CONFERENCE

"UNCED will accomplish a great deal more than most people expect", predicted Secretary-General Maurice Strong. Speaking to several hundred newspaper, radio and television journalists from around the globe, Strong stated that he was not concerned about media speculation that the Earth Summit was in trouble and in danger of collapsing. He said that the same idle predictions were made on the eve of the 1972 Stockholm Conference. Strong also guaranteed the reporters that they would have more than enough story material over the course of the next two weeks. In response to questions from the media, Strong also suggested that they should not view the Earth Summit as a two-week session that will solve all the Earth's problems. He emphasized that UNCED is "a launching pad, not a quick fix" and that this conference will hopefully be the beginning of a process that will lead to fundamental change.

IN THE CORRIDORS I

There was much discussion in the corridors of RioCentro yesterday about a number of procedural questions that must be addressed before substantive negotiations can commence. Some of these have been addressed during the pre-sessional consultations, others in the "Friends of the Chair" meetings and still others will be left to be decided by Tommy Koh and the Bureau of the Main Committee. These decisions are critical in determining the speed, flexibility and possible success of the negotiations over the next two weeks. The decisions that many delegates feel are most important include:

- **Meeting Flexibility:** Many feel that the decisions related to

the number and timing of meetings must be as flexible as possible to ensure rapid progress in the negotiations. At present, the draft rules of procedure state that the Main Committee may establish sub-committees or working groups, as necessary, for the performance of its functions. During the Preparatory Committee meetings, Conference rules limited the number of meetings that could be held simultaneously, so as to avoid overtaxing countries with small delegations. If seven or eight sub-committees or contact groups are established by the Main Committee, the possible number of meetings could surpass this limit and may be objected to by G-77 members. In a related issue, many delegates feel that the G-77 should schedule its meetings so as not to conflict with the limited time available for sub-committee or contact group meetings on the problematic substantive areas of Agenda 21.

- **Text Under Negotiation:** The vast portion of text in Agenda 21 has been negotiated with only the most contentious issues remaining in brackets. Although the formal rules of the Conference permit any country to open discussion on any item of text, many delegates feel that negotiations will quickly digress if unbracketed text is opened for debate. A possible agreement not to reopen negotiated text would have to take the form of an informal pact between governments. Many feel that the likelihood of such an agreement is slim given the chances that certain countries may well call for previously agreed text to be revised.

There is also a great deal of discussion about reopening the text of the Rio Declaration for further negotiation. The G-77 and the EC have announced that they do not want to reopen the document. Some believe that if the document is reopened it is highly unlikely that there will be a Declaration ready for signature at the conclusion of the Earth Summit. There are a few countries, including a member of the G-77, which have expressed concern about the current text and are trying to gain sufficient support to reopen negotiations. Some delegates maintain that it would be better to have no Declaration at all than one that is inadequate.

- **Coordinators:** Some delegates have expressed concern that the selection of the Main Committee's sub-committee or contact group coordinators should be based on experience and familiarity with the subject matter and not necessarily on political rank. It is likely that some of coordinators from the PrepCom will be asked to continue their roles here in Rio. The final decision, which is ultimately the responsibility of Main Committee Chair Tommy Koh and his Bureau, is a critical one.

IN THE CORRIDORS II

An increasing number of delegations have expressed tremendous frustration about the virtual lack of access to the UNCED Secretariat. Since Monday, the Secretariat offices (located in the Plenary Hall) have been heavily guarded and off limits to all but Secretariat staff. Delegations are required to make prior arrangements to meet with Secretariat staff. This has been problematic since delegations must often consult with Secretariat staff on an impromptu basis and do not have the time nor energy to track down individuals by phone. Another "grumbling point" has been the lack of access to press conferences to NGOs and delegates who maintain that if important information is to be communicated in a public forum, they should not be expected to rely on intermediaries for this information.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY AT UNCED

PLENARY: The UN Conference on Environment and Development formally opens this morning at 10:00 am when UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali will give the keynote address. The Plenary will then formally elect Brazilian President Fernando Collor de Mello as President of the Conference and hear speeches by Collor, UNCED Secretary-General Maurice Strong,

King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, and Portuguese President Mario Soares. The remainder of the morning's session will be spent on a number of procedural matters including: adoption of the rules of procedure; adoption of the agenda; election of officers other than the President; organization of work, including establishment of the Main Committee of the Conference; and credentials of representatives to the Conference, including appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee.

The Plenary will reconvene at 3:00 pm to commence the General Debate, which will continue through 11 June. The first hour of the Debate should be especially interesting, since the first four speakers will most likely set the tone for the rest of the Debate by touching on the full spectrum of issues to be addressed here at UNCED. Pakistan (on behalf of the G-77) will speak first, followed by Portugal (on behalf of the EC), the US and Israel. The other speakers listed for the afternoon are Germany, UNEP, World Health Organization, Chile and the EEC. Although the first three speaker's statements may be key in determining the positions of these major players, it is Israel that could trigger the first diplomatic firestorm at UNCED.

During PrepCom IV, the representative of Palestine, Yemen (on behalf of the Arab Group) and the G-77 inserted text into a number of chapters of Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration that refers to "people under occupation." This prompted Israel to intervene in the closing hours of PrepCom IV to decry the "threat of political pollution" and to question whether Rio would be another Middle East battleground. Israel then requested that the entire Rio Declaration be put in brackets. Koh responded that there would be no brackets or amendments to the text and closed discussion on the document, noting Israel's reservation and its subsequent vow to protest.

If, in its intervention today, Israel calls for the removal of all references to "people under occupation" it may create a political battle that would complicate work at the Conference. The first hour or two of Plenary this afternoon should not be missed.

THE MAIN COMMITTEE: The Main Committee will convene for the first time this afternoon to elect its four Vice-Chairs. Each of the four regional groups, other than Asia (which is represented by Tommy Koh), were expected to nominate one Vice-Chair. The newly-elected Chair Tommy Koh will probably also announce the establishment of a number of contact groups to deal with the most contentious chapters of Agenda 21. It is expected that Koh may announce the selection of the contact group coordinators. By contrast, the Main Committee will be charged with the responsibility of reviewing each chapter of Agenda 21 and resolving all of the minor outstanding issues that do not necessarily warrant a contact group.

To date, it is expected that contact groups will be formed for such outstanding issues as financial resources, technology transfer, institutions, atmosphere, biodiversity and biotechnology, and the Statement of Forest Principles. Additional contact groups may be formed where the need arises.

SPECIAL EVENTS: During the course of the Conference, a number of special events will be held to give multi-shareholder focus to several important cross-sectoral issues. The first of these will be held today. At 3:00 pm in Conference Room 4, a panel of experts will meet to discuss the "Urban Challenge". This panel will examine issues to the sustainable development of human settlements, exploring how a better balance can be reached between rural and urban areas; distribution of people and activities in a manner adapted to the resource base; and how essential services can be provided to all. The second panel of the day, which will take place in Conference Room 4 at 4:40 pm is entitled "Healthy People/Healthy Planet". This panel will focus on human health as an integral part of development and environmental policies.