



Earth Summit Bulletin

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UNCED HIGHLIGHTS WEDNESDAY, 3 JUNE 1992

PLENARY

Amidst the chirping of cellular phones, the UN Conference on Environment and Development officially opened yesterday morning. The consensus among the morning's speakers appeared to be that regardless of what comes out of the Conference, the process must continue to meet the challenges that face the planet. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali opened the Earth Summit with two minutes of silence for the earth. He said that we cannot limit ourselves to words. Just because things have been said does not mean that challenges have been met.

The Plenary then elected Brazilian President Fernando Collor de Mello as President of the Conference. In his welcome speech, Collor stressed the need for greater evidence of brotherhood from the richer, more developed countries. "The struggle to reduce inequalities between countries still remains."

The next speaker was UNCED Secretary-General Maurice Strong who delivered a speech that he wrote himself. "We are the most successful species ever, but now we're a species out of control," he said. The world's population has grown by 1.7 billion since the Stockholm Conference in 1972 and 1.5 billion of those live in developing countries that are unable to support them. This growth cannot continue, he stressed. "If we don't control it, nature will." He expressed hope that the Rio Declaration form the basis of an Earth Charter to be developed in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the UN in 1995. Among other things, Strong called on UNCED to mandate a convention on desertification and work towards a forest regime.

King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, the President of the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, then addressed the Plenary. "Governments cannot do it alone," he said. He stressed that the role of NGOs is vital for the long-term success of the Conference. He stressed the fact that follow-up is as important as the conference itself.

Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland spoke next in her capacity as Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development. "There are less than 400 weeks left in the 20th century," she announced. "We must eradicate poverty and achieve greater equality.... We should rise to the challenge that confronts us." She added that the momentum is irreversible and narrowly focussed national priorities will only stand in the way. The final speaker of the morning was Portuguese President Mario Soares who stressed the need to control the population explosion and the great inequality between nations.

The Plenary then adopted the rules of procedure as contained in document A/CONF.151/2 and the provisional agenda as contained in A/CONF.151/1. The next item on the agenda was the election of officers. Professor Celso Lafer, Minister of External Relations of Brazil, was elected as the ex officio Vice President of the Conference. The Plenary then elected Vice Presidents from four of the five regional groups. The Vice Presidents from the Asian Group will be elected by secret ballot in the Plenary at 3:00 pm today. In other elections, Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi was elected as Rapporteur-General and Amb. Tommy

Koh of Singapore was elected Chairman of the Main Committee.

The Plenary then adopted the organization of work, including the establishment of the Main Committee, as contained in A/CONF.151/3. It also approved recommendations on the signing of conventions and the organization of the Summit portion of the Conference. Finally, the following states were appointed to the Credentials Committee: Belgium, Belize, Chile, China, Lesotho, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Togo and the United States. The Plenary adjourned at 1:00 pm.

The second meeting of the Plenary was called to order yesterday afternoon by the ex officio Vice President, Celso Lafer, although one Brazilian diplomat commented that Collor would probably chair the Plenary most of the time because he was "adoring" the job. The first speaker was H.E. Mr. Anwar Saifullah Khan, Minister for Environment and Urban Affairs of Pakistan (speaking on behalf of the G-77). He criticized the inadequacy of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions, vowing that other agreements at UNCED "not repeat such shortcomings."

The second speaker was H.E. Mr. Carlos Borrego, Minister for Environment and Natural Resources of Portugal, who spoke on behalf of the EC. He restated the Community position on the Conventions (early ratification and protocols); endorsed the Rio Declaration as it now stands; and emphasized the importance of institutional arrangements for the follow-up and implementation of Agenda 21 (including a revitalized ECOSOC in combination with a Sustainable Development Commission).

The third speaker, William Reilly, Administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency, stated that the US gives forests highest priority at this Conference. He urged quick implementation of the Climate Change Convention and the development of an UNCED action plan to control land-based sources of marine pollution. He pointed toward Eastern Europe as an example of how the lack of pollution controls in the interest of economic stimulation will ultimately devastate an economy.

The surprising speech of the afternoon was presented by Uri Marinov, Director General of the Ministry of the Environment of Israel. Although it was expected that Israel would follow up on its vehement objections to the politicizing of the UNCED documents, Marinov offered what many considered a conciliatory speech aimed at repairing the diplomatic rifts created at the end of PrepCom IV. He presented ten principles or commandments "to regulate man's relationship with the environment." These include: 1) respect for the environment; 2) change behavior; 3) integrate environmental concerns into decision making; 4) improve the environment; 5) conserve resources; 6) use renewable resources; 7) don't pollute; 8) study the environment; 9) be pro-active in the interest of environmental welfare; 10) take our trusteeship of the world to heart.

This speech was followed by Mr. Klaus Toepfer, German Federal Minister for the Environment and Nuclear Safety, who called for the strengthening of environmentally sound behavior, the inclusion of NGOs in the post-UNCED process and a follow-up meeting for the signatories to the Climate Change Convention to be held in Germany in 1994.

Mr. Mustafa Tolba, Executive Director of UNEP, pointed out the "sign posts" on the road ahead. He was followed by statements from Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of the WHO, H.E. Mr. Luis Alvarado, Minister of Lands of Chile, Mr.

Abel Matutes, Commissioner for North/South Relations at the Commission of the EC and Lord John Chatfield, International Union of Local Authorities.

MAIN COMMITTEE

The Main Committee held its first session yesterday afternoon. The meeting was devoted primarily to organizational matters. Chairman Tommy Koh opened the meeting by establishing a number of procedural rules to help expedite the work of the Committee and urging delegates to focus solely on issues where agreement has not been reached (bracketed text). Koh then requested that the Committee establish eight contact groups to deal with finance, technology, atmosphere; forest principles; biodiversity and biotechnology; freshwater, legal instruments; and institutions. Other bracketed text and pending issues that do not fall in these groups will be dealt with by the Main Committee. Koh added that these groups are open to any and all interested delegations and not more than two contact groups would meet at same time as the Main Committee and the Plenary. Most delegates, including Tunisia, supported the establishment of the eight contact groups.

After the Committee approved the formation of these contact groups, Koh asked the Committee to approve the following Chairs: Finance: Amb. Rubens Ricupero of Brazil; Technology: Minister Hans Alders of the Netherlands; Atmosphere: Amb. Bo Kjellén of Sweden; Biodiversity and Biotechnology: Amb. Vincente Sanchez of Chile; Freshwater: Amb. Bukar Shaib of Nigeria; Legal instruments: Amb. Nabil el-Arabi of Egypt; and Institutions: Amb. Ismail Razali of Malaysia. No Chair has been appointed for the contact group on forest principles as Koh is still holding consultations. An announcement is expected today. Koh was scheduled to meet with his extended Bureau (the Vice Chairs and the heads of regional groups) last night to finalize a schedule of contact group meetings. He said that he was sorry if he appears as a "neurotic East Asian" preoccupied with work, but unfortunately "his karma has fated him to work" and, therefore, he was compelled to ask the delegates to work on Saturday as well as during the evenings. The afternoon meeting concluded with statements from Jean Ripert, the Chairman of the INC for a Framework Convention on Climate Change, and Vincente Sanchez, the Chairman of the INC for a Framework Convention on Biodiversity, who reported on the Conventions that will be opened for signature this week.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY AT UNCED

PLENARY: The majority of speakers on today's seemingly endless list may well be addressing their remarks primarily toward their home television audiences with few surprises expected. Tomorrow's list includes Lewis Preston, President of the World Bank, who is expected to pledge bank support to help developing countries develop environmental action plans and, as well, that the World Bank will make a contribution to the IDA-10 "Earth Increment" for national environmental issues. Other notable speakers include Enrique Iglesias, President of the Inter-American Development Bank, who will probably call for regional institutions to play a greater role in the financing and follow-up of UNCED activities.

MAIN COMMITTEE: The Main Committee will begin to clean up the remaining bracketed text not being discussed in the Contact Groups. The Committee will work its way through Agenda 21 chapter-by-chapter over the next week, beginning with the Preamble this morning. Contact Groups will also begin meeting today. The schedule will be announced in this morning's Journal. What follows is a brief summary of the key problem areas to be addressed by the eight Contact Groups:

Financial Resources: It appears likely that the financial resources contact group will be divided into two sub-groups. The first one will address the actual Agenda 21 chapter on finance and the second sub-group will deal with the financial aspects of the means of implementation sections to each Agenda 21 chapter. It

is possible that the newly-appointed finance coordinator, Amb. Rubens Ricupero, will possibly chair the latter, with Brazilian Finance Minister Marcelio Marques Moreira to possibly chair the former. While agreement has been reached to base negotiations on the G-77 and China text from PrepCom IV (L.41/rev.1), several Northern countries will attempt to transfer many of the provisions of the final text that emerged from PrepCom IV (L.75) into the L.41 text. Another important issue that will arise pertains to the putative movement currently afoot to eliminate the "Means of implementation" sections in every Agenda 21 chapter and to replace them with one general statement of total estimated costs. Discussions will also focus on the mandate and operations of the GEF as the funding mechanism for the global conventions. One key issue with the GEF involves a proposal to involve developing countries within GEF decision-making subject to the proviso that donor countries cannot be overruled by a majority of developing countries. Discussions will also focus on issues regarding replenishment of existing resources for the funding of Agenda 21. A potentially contentious issue pertains to the Earth Increment to the IDA. The European Community has formally stated its commitment to IDA additionality while certain other Northern countries remain flatly opposed.

Technology Transfer: The key issue to be resolved pertains to the terms upon which environmentally appropriate technology will be transferred from North to South. The latter insists that technology be transferred on preferential or concessional terms, while many northern countries continue to insist that such technology be transferred at market rates. The European Community and the Nordics have adopted positions supportive of technology transfer on favorable terms that not only respect intellectual property rights but the special needs of developing countries as well.

Institutions: One of the key issues to be resolved pertains to the reporting process for the proposed Sustainable Development Commission. One option favored by many delegations would have the Commission reporting directly to ECOSOC, while another approach would require the Commission to report to both ECOSOC and the General Assembly.

Atmosphere: The entire chapter on Atmosphere was bracketed at the last Plenary session of PrepCom IV by Yemen, on behalf of the Arab Group. The Arabs protested not only the perceived "over-emphasis" on energy efficiency and fossil fuel consumption reduction, but the chapter's perceived prejudice of the work of the INC. The key challenge for the contact group will be to find a compromise solution to the programme area on energy. It is anticipated that the OPEC countries will insist on a clause-by-clause reworking of the document.

Biodiversity and Biotechnology: Unresolved issues deal with technology cooperation and transfer and the rights of countries that are the sources of biodiversity to share in the benefits from biotechnology development and the commercial utilization of such resources. Brackets remain in the biotechnology text on such issues as biotechnology safety and regulation and the contentious issue of fertility-related mechanisms.

Forest Principles: The forests principles document is in a state of disarray with such remaining contentious issues as: the right to develop; the global interest in forests; the likelihood of a future forest convention; historical compensation for forest loss; recognition of indigenous capacity; and trade in forest products.

Legal Instruments: Some of the more difficult issues to be resolved include dispute settlement, the global environmental protection convention, developing country compliance with international agreements; and the consideration of means to prevent deliberate large-scale environmental destruction.

CLIMATE CHANGE CONVENTION: A ceremony to mark the opening for signature of the Framework Convention on Climate Change will take place in Conference Room 2 today at 11:00 am. The ceremony will be chaired by Brazilian President Fernando Collor and will conclude with his signature of the Convention. The Convention will remain open for signature at RioCentro through 14 June and thereafter at UN Headquarters in New York from 20 June 1992 to 19 June 1993.