

# Earth Negotiations Bulletin

A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

Vol. 4 No. 62 Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) Monday, 16 January 1995

## INCD HIGHLIGHTS FRIDAY, 13 JANUARY 1995

The INCD met in Plenary on Friday morning to review the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds (A/AC.241/31 and Add.1). In the afternoon, the Plenary was not in session so that regional groups could meet. At 4:30 pm, the Chair met with the group of heads of regional and interest groups to begin negotiations on the work programme for the interim period.

### REVIEW OF THE SITUATION AS REGARDS EXTRABUDGETARY FUNDS

Executive Secretary **Arba Diallo**, in his introduction of A/AC.241/31, said the document is forward looking, covers activities recommended by the INCD for the interim period, and reviews the status of the pledges and contributions to the voluntary and trust funds. The document is divided into two parts: the status of pledges and contributions to the trust fund, indicating staff resources and the costs to be incurred by the Interim Secretariat (IS) and a review of the status of the funds paid into the special voluntary fund for the participation of developing countries.

As of 31 December 1994, the trust fund had received US\$1,958,297, of which the US\$200,000 estimated for staff was almost exhausted. The Swiss Government has granted an additional US\$500,000 to cover information activities, NGO participation and one staff member. The WHO and FAO have supported a consultant and specialist, respectively. The Secretariat has 16 officials, seven of whom are funded through extrabudgetary funds. This staff is needed during the interim period due to the Secretariat's increased responsibilities, at an estimated cost of US\$1,720,000.

With regard to support for the INCD sessions, the IS will require consultants and may also need to compile and communicate reports on measures adopted by members during the interim period, which is an activity without precedent in other Conventions. He noted that in line with the 49th General Assembly's programme budget implications (PBI) document, the cost of financing consultations will be revised downwards from US\$417,000 to US\$70,000.

The proposed public awareness programmes will target both policy-makers and the general public in order to ensure a better understanding of the Convention and will hopefully be undertaken in collaboration with the Climate Change information bureau and NGOs. In addition to invitations from other regions, and in order to play a catalytic role, the IS may, on request, facilitate the implementation of the resolution on urgent action for Africa by providing various forms of assistance at the regional, subregional and national levels, consistent with Article 18 of the African Annex.

There is a balance of US\$500,000 from the US\$2,169,859 contributed to the Voluntary Fund. Diallo noted that Portugal's contribution should be US\$15,000 and that Austria's contribution of US\$10,000 has been received. He said that while US\$900,000 is required to finance 70 developing country participants, or US\$550,000 for a participant from each of the least developed countries, the fund only has US\$330,000.

The **PHILIPPINES**, on behalf of the G-77 and China, gave a detailed outline of the tasks to be undertaken during this interim period that have been allocated to the IS by the INCD. He argued that these tasks require a corresponding financial contribution. Thus, the Secretariat's funding proposals are realistic.

On behalf of the EU, **FRANCE** made five comments on the document. 1) The INCD sessions should be financed from the regular UN budget and the Secretariat cannot allocate money to a scientific group before the Committee has agreed on whether there should be one. 2) The Secretariat should play a substantive role in public awareness, but funds are already available elsewhere. 3) Regarding the implementation of urgent action for Africa, funds are also available from bilateral donors, and UNDP could also support the Secretariat in the role that General Assembly resolution 49/234 has assigned to it. 4) Case studies should not be funded, since there is no longer any need for examples. 5) Regarding personnel, it would be useful to have more information on the amounts involved, the intentions of donors and the availability of staff. To conclude, France noted that document A/AC.241/31 should have been more explicit about extrabudgetary funds and the timetable.

**Diallo** referred to General Assembly document A/C.2/49/L.54, which includes the INCD budget. The posts themselves were accepted as part of the budget last year. In L.54, the total budget is approximately US\$500,000. He added that the Secretariat has noted what it receives from the general budget and what it expects from voluntary contributions. INCD Chair **Bo Kjellen** noted that although delegates were not being asked to pledge funds, this discussion is complex due to the fact that the document was prepared before the conclusion of the General Assembly's discussions last December; the delegates to the INCD and General Assembly are different; decision makers on financial issues are in the capitals; the UN system's weaknesses; and there were contributions from other UN agencies.

**UGANDA** expressed the hope that the pre-Convention political goodwill would prevail and that additional support would be provided from the regular UN budget, in order to enable the affected countries to live up to their expectations.

The **US** noted that when considering the budget: 1) due to the resource situation, the Committee should be cautious about duplication of efforts; 2) activities related to this Convention should be based in the field as much as possible; 3) caution should

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also be exercised when comparing this Convention to others, since this Convention has a bottom-up philosophy; and 4) the more resources that are devoted to the center (i.e., the Secretariat), the less money is in the field. He agreed with the EU regarding difficulties in sorting out what is coming from the regular budget, in spite of having read document A/C.2/49/L.54. Regarding the scientific group, a decision is needed before allocating money.

**NIGER** proposed that there should be a special support fund for urgent action for Africa, which could help NGOs and others. This could be a flexible fund so that support could be requested when urgent action was needed and the Secretariat could assist. He added that it would be a shame if the Secretariat personnel were reduced.

**BOLIVIA** asserted that given that 900 million people are affected by desertification, the Secretariat is bending over backwards to get the job done with limited funds. The **REPUBLIC OF KOREA** noted that the proposed budget corresponds to the tasks given to the Secretariat and said that his country would be increasing its contribution. **AUSTRALIA** supported the US and requested that the linkage between A/AC.241/31 and the regular budget of the UN be shown and that there be some coordinated information on the contributions of agencies.

In seeking clarification on the budget, **JAPAN** stated that the most important decision is that on the interim role of the Secretariat and the budget should be a reflection of that decision. He feared a "Catch 22" situation. Some of the proposed activities can be implemented by bilateral or multilateral organizations. He asked for an explanation regarding the discrepancies between the INCD budget adopted by the General Assembly in December and A/AC.241/31, which was prepared in November.

**SUDAN** considered it crucial to continue to give the same level of support to the Secretariat, since it is a prerequisite for future success. **MAURITANIA** wanted to know on what basis the estimated US\$1.389 million needed for urgent action for Africa (paragraph 41) was defined. His government has estimated that US\$450,000 is needed in Mauritania alone.

**CANADA** concurred with the EU and reiterated that budget estimates should correspond to the tasks given to the Secretariat. This Convention is different from others since it emphasizes decentralized activities. Canada will fund the Secretariat and countries for appropriate activities, and provide support for the legal adviser. He pointed out that the NGO support should be accounted for under the Voluntary Fund, and not the Trust Fund.

**KENYA** said that in spite of his country's political will to implement the Convention, financial constraints were the single most inhibiting factor. **TUNISIA** stated that funding should not only be provided on a bilateral basis and urged the developed country partners to show renewed commitment to the implementation of the Convention during this interim phase.

**BENIN** expressed surprise at the apparent suggestions to renegotiate a Convention in which multilateral agreements were already covered. He speculated that there seems to be squabbling outside the Plenary using the Secretariat as a scapegoat.

**BURKINA FASO** said that just because the Convention has a bottom-up approach does not imply that the Secretariat should not have any money. Decentralization does not mean that all action should happen in the field while the Secretariat does nothing.

**ALGERIA** emphasized that the budget requests are in line with the Secretariat's role during the interim period. There is no intention of expanding the Secretariat's mandate, but the INCD should not lose sight of the future role of the Secretariat in assisting affected countries and playing the role of facilitator. The Secretariat should use NGOs and others to facilitate information sharing.

In response to the issues raised, **Diallo** noted that: the activities were merely proposals by the IS and could be further discussed; the proposals for the regular budget are in accordance with the General Assembly resolution of 23 December 1994; and the IS had hoped that, upon request, they could provide funds to affected country Parties, however, they can direct them to the various donors. On the

linkages between the Secretariat's document and General Assembly document A/C.2/49/L.54, paragraph 19 of the IS document indicates that support funds may be available for consultants and other services, however, services budgeted for in the regular UN budget will not be covered by the Voluntary Fund. He said NGO support funds could not be placed under the Voluntary Fund since the General Assembly resolution says that this fund is to support developing country delegates only.

**Kjellén** then summarized the discussion. 1) There was general appreciation of the work of the Secretariat. 2) The purpose of the discussion was not to agree on the budget, since these are voluntary funds. 3) This is an important period in the Convention and sufficient funds must be available. 4) While affected countries have indicated the action needed, there are budgetary constraints. 5) It is necessary to determine a logical apportionment of work to be done efficiently and specify who would do it. 6) Although the Convention calls for decentralization, activities may need to be more centralized during the interim period. 7) There are divergent views on the document, but additional information would be provided on the funds, since there have also been indications of the amounts. 8) The question of methodology in presenting the report may require specific consideration, an issue that can be also be raised at the next session of the General Assembly.

### IN THE CORRIDORS I

An informal survey of delegations on ratification proceedings continued in the corridors and aisles on Friday. Out of 46 signatories, eight African countries and one Asian country expect to ratify the Convention within the next four months. Three developed and one developing country think they might ratify the Convention by year's end. Thirteen delegates said that the necessary documentation is under preparation or has just been submitted for action. Three European countries are awaiting official translations and 15 countries have not begun the ratification process. Of the eight countries surveyed who have not yet signed the Convention, two expect to sign it "soon" and six hope to sign the Convention before INCD-7. Some non-African developing country delegates noted that due to the priority given to Africa, they might have some difficulty getting the Convention ratified in their countries since there is little, if any, donor interest in helping them develop and implement their national action plans.

### IN THE CORRIDORS II

Apparently the NGOs' call for support for the implementation of the NGO Action Plan on Desertification has not fallen on deaf ears. Over 50 delegates attended the NGO briefing on Wednesday. Since then, the NGOs have been meeting daily with representatives from donor governments and UN agencies to discuss the mechanisms for getting funding for implementation of the NGO action programme, specifically for public awareness activities and the involvement of NGOs and community-based organizations in the implementation of the Convention. The establishment of this NGO network, and the interest of donors in supporting its work, is an indication of the effectiveness of the bottom-up approach.

### THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

**PLENARY:** The Committee will meet this morning to continue the discussion of the Chair's report to the Commission on Sustainable Development. This discussion began on Thursday afternoon when the Chair presented his outline of the report and asked delegates for comments. The Committee is then expected to discuss awareness building. In the afternoon, the Committee is scheduled to discuss the decision on organization of work and the work programme for INCD-7 and INCD-8. The basis for this discussion is expected to be the draft decision that was elaborated in the meeting of the heads of regional and interest groups on Friday evening. Look for discussions in the corridors on nominations for the bureaus of the new working groups.