

CSD 17 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 4 MAY 2009

The 17th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 17) opened on Monday morning, 4 May 2009, at UN Headquarters in New York. Delegates adopted the agenda and began discussing the thematic cluster for which they will negotiate policy options: Africa, desertification, drought, agriculture, land and rural development.

OPENING PLENARY

Opening the meeting, Gerda Verburg, CSD 17 Chair and Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the Netherlands, said agriculture must be included in climate change negotiations if fundamental mitigation and adaptation goals are to be met. She noted that biofuels are only a limited part of the solution towards sustainability, and highlighted that negotiations should be guided by the principle that we are here to play a role in “making poverty history.”

Asha-Rose Migiro, UN Deputy Secretary-General, stressed the need to, *inter alia*, ensure revival of long-term investments in agriculture and shift from ecologically unsustainable agriculture toward sustainable practices, including help in adapting to climate change.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK: Chair Verburg noted that the CSD had not yet elected Vice-Chairs from three regional groups. Delegates elected, by acclamation, Kaire Mbuende (Namibia), Tania Raguz (Croatia) and Ana Bianchi (Argentina) as Vice-Chairs, with Raguz as Rapporteur. Delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work without amendments (E/CN.17/2009/1). Tariq Banuri, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), reported on DSD’s efforts to facilitate the session.

Delegates then heard reports on three intersessional meetings. Vice-Chair Javad Amin-Mansour (Iran) reported on the Capacity Development Workshop for Improving Agricultural Productivity, Water Use Efficiency and Rural Livelihood, which convened from 28-30 January 2009, in Bangkok, Thailand. Vice-Chair Mbuende presented the outcome of the high-level meeting on African agriculture, held from 9-10 February 2009, in Windhoek, Namibia. ISRAEL reported on a meeting organized with UN DESA on 22-30 March 2009, on the role of native and desert-adapted species for slowing desertification.

OPENING STATEMENTS: Sudan, for the G-77/CHINA, called for global cooperation to increase agricultural productivity, create fair trade regimes, conserve natural resources and invest in infrastructure. He expressed hope for reaching time-bound policy

options, with implementation mechanisms. The Czech Republic, for the EU, proposed that the outcome document address such priorities as sustainable agriculture, food security, sustainable production of bioenergy, access of developing countries to markets, sustainable land use, desertification and land degradation, integrated water resource management (IWRM), achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially in Africa, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable production and consumption.

Mexico, for the RIO GROUP, prioritized restoration of land, technology transfer, access to financial schemes, and vulnerability to disasters and climate change. Grenada, for the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), said the draft negotiating text did not capture the urgency of the global crisis and climate change impacts, which are an issue of survival for small island developing States (SIDS).

United Arab Emirates, for the ARAB GROUP, stressed: increasing investment in the agricultural sector; South-South and triangular cooperation; and transferring advanced technology. He said occupation of Palestinian lands has led to deterioration in agriculture, rural development, water and land in those areas. Nauru, for the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), highlighted the need to: increase local food production and procurement; encourage local ownership of land conservation and rural development strategies; and identify cross-cutting climate adaptation strategies.

Sudan, for the AFRICAN GROUP, highlighted ensuring land policy reforms while guaranteeing women’s full rights to land. The US stressed: agricultural sustainability; expanded support for science, research and education; empowerment of local communities; creative use of communication technology to make information widely available; and new practical and realistic ideas.

JAPAN stressed its role in agriculture-focused official development assistance (ODA) and urged the CSD not to debate subjects already dealt with in other fora with clear mandates. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said the draft text could serve as a good basis for moving toward consensus on all issues in the thematic cluster. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA said the current world crises call for coordinated responses. PALESTINE said the CSD recommendations should take into account the special needs of people living under foreign occupation. ISRAEL highlighted the importance of maintaining a non-political approach.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES: The Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) cautioned that growth must be transformational growth. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) discussed African cooperation in devising more

innovative agricultural policies, and the Pan African Land Development Framework. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) said the region needs to invest in better water resource management, land use planning, conservation and river basin management, as well as a drought early warning system. The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) highlighted the challenges of urban sprawl, informal settlements and the impacts of the current world financial crisis. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) underscored policy options, including increasing investments in agricultural production.

During the ensuing dialogue, VENEZUELA said ECLAC's diagnosis of agricultural development in the region was too negative. LEBANON said UNECE should place greater emphasis on agricultural and rural areas and asked UNECA about the regional land policy. IRAQ said ESCWA should focus on water re-use and land conservation. KYRGYZSTAN underscored the urgency of the melting of glaciers. UNECE noted that the measures discussed can apply to agricultural and rural lands and agreed that melting glaciers are a social and security issue. ECLAC said several countries have provided inputs for an alternative agricultural model. UNECA said it is not proposing a regional land policy, but rather a framework prepared with bottom-up inputs. ESCAP said agriculture and management are a key priority.

STATEMENTS BY MAJOR GROUPS

Chair Verburg invited representatives of each major group to make a one minute statement. The US said major groups should be given three minutes, noting that governments are not able to undertake sustainable development without them and the importance of their ideas.

Women underscored the role of women as food producers and environmental managers. Children noted that true collaboration helps local communities deal with global challenges. Indigenous Peoples said governments must shift toward valuing ecosystems, fisher folk, pastoralists and land-based producers. NGOs noted the need to address current unsustainable agricultural models. Local Authorities recommended an immediate examination of the effects of the current global financial crisis and climate change. Workers and Trade Unions highlighted the need for agriculture to become sustainable. Business and Industry noted six interlinked imperatives for sustainable development. Scientific and Technological Community underscored that critical gaps of knowledge must be addressed through interdisciplinary research. Farmers emphasized, *inter alia*, the need for a long-term global plan for agriculture with clear objectives and strong stakeholder participation.

COMMENTS ON CHAIR'S DRAFT NEGOTIATING TEXT

The G77/CHINA noted that more emphasis is needed on: least developed countries and Africa's special needs; challenges faced by people under foreign occupation; the role of women; strengthening the role of national authorities in land management; and desertification as a global phenomenon. The EU praised the text section on Africa and offered suggestions on: integration of climate change considerations; harmonized standards for sustainable agricultural production; international sustainability criteria for bioenergy; IRWM in the transboundary context; and promoting ecosystem services. AOSIS, supported by PSIDS, expressed regret that the Chair's text did not reflect the current turmoil in the global economic system and called for a separate section on SIDS.

CHINA emphasized food security, enhanced international cooperation on desertification and drought, and support for Africa. BRAZIL highlighted the role of sustainable biofuel production in restoring degraded lands and providing income

opportunities, and welcomed FAO's World Summit on Food Security to be held later in 2009. SWITZERLAND highlighted its support for the formulation and national implementation of the right to food. INDIA said climate change is a major issue for sustainable development. NORWAY highlighted the need to reference the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, and women's equal rights to own and inherit land. MEXICO said substantive policy recommendations should be part of the main text, not in the annex. INDONESIA said the current section on agriculture, rural development and land has not fully captured the current challenges.

The US suggested including specific tools to promote work on: pollinators; land-use based on ecological capacity; post-harvest loss; farmer cooperatives; and public-private partnerships. AUSTRALIA emphasized the impact of the economic down-turn in relation to food security and the role of sound government structures. COTE D'IVOIRE emphasized using all the resources available to support agriculture, and the importance of access to water. The AFRICAN GROUP stressed need for a green revolution in Africa, capacity building and official development assistance. LEBANON emphasized encouraging small farmers. ARGENTINA stressed eliminating agricultural subsidies in developed countries. JAPAN stressed partnerships. MOROCCO highlighted a role for public investment to improve living standards, suggested establishing an adaptation fund for combating desertification, and called for increasing ODA.

CANADA stressed good governance, women in agriculture, and combating desertification through poverty reduction efforts. PERU called for prioritizing restoration of lands in the process of desertification, and said it would be offering a proposal on innovative approaches to conservation and natural resource management and agricultural diversification.

UN-HABITAT supported a holistic approach that recognizes that urban and rural development are connected. The UN Environment Programme highlighted the Global Green New Deal, and stressed attention to sustainable agriculture. The International Fund for Agricultural Development emphasized targeted support to small-scale producers, the empowerment of poor women and men, and efforts to contribute to secure access to land. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization suggested assigning responsibility for agencies in following up on the recommendations.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As delegates assembled for the opening of CSD 17, one frequently asked question was whether Gerda Verburg, the dynamic Chair, supported by the new DSD Director Tariq Banuri and the CSD Secretariat, can really succeed in transforming the Commission into a truly collaborative negotiating forum that would take meaningful decisions. By the close of the first day, comments varied. A delegate was heard observing that the Chair's efforts to "discipline" the CSD, at least getting it to start on time and stick to time frames for speeches, are making headway. On the other hand, some major groups thought that restricting their contributions to "TV-style" one-minute sound-bites defeats the idea of deeper involvement in CSD proceedings. However, most participants felt ready to give credence to new beginnings. Cutting down on prepared statements (to overcome the traditional "dialogue of the deaf"), involving delegates, especially ministers, in a freer exchange of ideas, bringing in the UN system and stakeholders as genuine discussion partners, reaching out to the research community, making broader use of advanced communication tools and real-time computer screen drafting – all these innovations were being cited as promising signs.