



THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODY FOR SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE AND THE FIRST INTERSESSIONAL MEETING ON THE OPERATIONS OF THE CONVENTION 21 - 30 JUNE 1999

The fourth session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-4) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will meet in Montreal, Canada from 21-25 June 1999. The first intersessional meeting on the Operations of the Convention (ISOC-1) will convene in Montreal from 28-30 June 1999.

SBSTTA delegates are expected to meet in two working groups. Working Group I will consider the main ecosystem topic, conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial biological diversity (drylands), as well as the prevention of impacts of alien species and the Global Taxonomy Initiative. Working Group II will discuss the new technology for the control of plant gene expression (e.g. "terminator technology"), the sustainable use of biological resources, including tourism, and the incorporation of biological diversity considerations into environmental impact assessments. The Plenary will discuss establishing the terms of reference for *ad hoc* technical expert groups.

The fourth Conference of the Parties to the CBD (COP-4) invited the Chair of SBSTTA-3, Zakri Hamid (Malaysia), to remain in office until the end of SBSTTA-4. This change in election timing allows SBSTTA Chairs to organize the meetings they oversee. COP-4 also invited the Chair-elect of SBSTTA, Cristián Samper (Colombia), to participate *ex-officio* in the Bureau of SBSTTA with immediate effect. Samper will subsequently chair SBSTTA-5.

ISOC-1 will address institutional issues regarding the CBD's operations. This meeting is based on Decision IV/16 of COP-4, which called for an open-ended meeting to consider possible arrangements to improve preparations for and conduct of the meetings of the Conference of the Parties. ISOC-1 will also hold preparatory discussions on the COP-5 agenda item of access to genetic resources and benefit sharing, *ex situ* collections acquired prior to the Convention's entry into force, and the relationship between intellectual property rights and the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights and the CBD. The President of COP-4, Lazlo Miklos (Slovakia), is expected to open and preside over the meeting, with support from the COP-4 Bureau.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SBSTTA AND ISSUES DISCUSSED UNDER THE CBD

The Convention on Biological Diversity, negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), entered into force on 29 December 1993. To date, more than 170 countries have become Parties. Article 25 of the CBD establishes a Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) to provide the COP with "timely advice" relating to implementation of the Convention. SBSTTA has convened three times, during which it has developed 28 recommendations for COP consideration. Negotiations for a biosafety protocol to the CBD began in 1996 and are still ongoing.

COP-1: The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties took place in Nassau, the Bahamas, from 28 November - 9 December 1994. Some of the key decisions taken by COP-1 included: adoption of the medium-term work programme; designation of the Permanent Secretariat; establishment of the Clearing-house Mechanism (CHM) and SBSTTA; and designation of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as the interim institutional structure for the financial mechanism.

SBSTTA-1: SBSTTA-1 met from 4-8 September 1995 in Paris, France. Recommendations on the *modus operandi* of SBSTTA affirmed its subsidiary role to the COP and requested flexibility to create two open-ended working groups to meet simultaneously during future SBSTTA meetings, *ad hoc* technical panels of experts as needed, and a roster of experts. Substantive recommendations included: alternative ways and means for the COP to consider components of biodiversity under threat; ways and means to promote access to and transfer of technology; scientific and technical information to be contained in national reports; contributions to UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) meetings on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; and technical aspects of the conservation and sustainable use of coastal and marine biodiversity.

COP-2: COP-2 met in Jakarta, Indonesia, from 6-17 November 1995. Some of the key decisions taken by COP-2 included: designation of the permanent location of the Secretariat in Montreal, Canada; agreement to develop a protocol on biosafety; operation of the CHM; adoption of a work programme funded by a larger budget; designation of the GEF as the continuing interim institutional structure for the financial mechanism; consideration of marine and coastal biodiversity; and agreement to address forests and biodiversity, including

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the development of a statement from the CBD to the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

SBSTTA-2: SBSTTA-2 met in Montreal, Canada, from 2-6 September 1996. Agenda items included: monitoring and assessment of biodiversity; approaches to taxonomy; economic valuation of biodiversity; access to genetic resources; agricultural biodiversity; terrestrial biodiversity; marine and coastal biodiversity, biosafety; and the CHM.

COP-3: COP-3 met in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 4-15 November 1996. Delegates adopted: a work programme on agricultural biodiversity and a more limited one on forest biodiversity; a long negotiated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the GEF; an agreement to hold an intersessional workshop on traditional knowledge (Article 8(j)); a decision instructing the Executive Secretary to apply for observer status in the WTO Committee on Trade and the Environment; and a statement from the CBD to the UN General Assembly's Special Session (UNGASS) to review implementation of Agenda 21.

SBSTTA-3: At its third meeting, held in Montreal, Canada from 1-5 September 1997, SBSTTA delegates considered the implementation of the pilot phase of the CHM and a progress report on the work of SBSTTA and the effectiveness of its advice. Additional decisions were adopted on: biodiversity in inland waters; marine and coastal biodiversity; agricultural biodiversity; forest biodiversity; and biodiversity indicators. SBSTTA-3 also adopted a recommendation on participation in SBSTTA by developing countries.

COP-4: The fourth COP met in Bratislava, Slovakia from 4-15 May 1998. Delegates discussed agenda items on: inland water, marine and coastal, agricultural and forest biodiversity; the CHM; biosafety; implementation of Article 8(j); access to genetic resources and benefit sharing; a review of the operations of the Convention; national reports; administrative and budgetary matters; and a review of the financial mechanism. A Ministerial Roundtable discussed integrating biodiversity concerns into sectoral activities, specifically tourism.

NEGOTIATIONS OF A BIOSAFETY PROTOCOL: Article 19.4 of the CBD provides for Parties to consider the need for and modalities of a protocol on biosafety. At COP-2, delegates established an Open-ended *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Biosafety (BSWG), which held its first meeting in Aarhus, Denmark from 22-26 July 1996. Over the course of four subsequent meetings, delegates identified and elaborated elements for the draft Protocol including: objectives; general obligations; use of terms; procedures for transfer of living modified organisms; risk assessment and management; minimum national standards; unintentional transboundary movements and emergency measures; handling, transport, packaging and labeling; information sharing and a CHM; capacity building; public awareness and participation; role of non-parties; non-discrimination; illegal traffic; liability and redress; financial mechanism and resources; and assessment and review of the protocol.

Delegates expected to complete their negotiations during BSWG-6, which convened from 14-22 February 1999 in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, but they did not agree on a text. The main areas of contention centered on products to be covered by the Protocol, trade issues, treatment of commodities, and domestic vs. international regulatory regimes. The first Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (ExCOP) to the CBD convened from 22-23 February 1999, also in Cartagena de Indias, with the expectation that it would adopt the Protocol. Instead, the ExCOP adopted a decision to suspend the meeting and requested the ExCOP President and the COP-4 Bureau to decide when and where the session would resume, no later than COP-5, which is scheduled for May 2000.

RECENT MEETINGS RELATED TO SBSTTA-4

CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (CCD): COP-2 of the CCD met in Dakar, Senegal from 30 November to 11 December 1998. The CCD's Committee on Science and Technology (CST) met in parallel to the COP on 1 to 4 December. The CST discussed traditional knowledge in-depth and recommended establishing an *ad hoc* panel to identify successful experiences and conclusions relating to: threats and other constraints, including socio-economic impacts confronting traditional knowledge and practices; strategies for integrating traditional knowledge and local knowledge with modern knowledge based on specific case histories; and mechanisms for promoting and exchanging successful approaches. The decision also requests the Secretariat to explore ways to link the CST work on traditional knowledge with that under other conventions. The CST also recommended that the CCD's work on benchmarks and indicators be harmonized with the approaches taken by other conventions and relevant organizations.

SUSTAINING AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY AND AGRO-ECOSYSTEM FUNCTIONS: The CBD Secretariat and FAO, with the support of the Government of the Netherlands, organized an international workshop on agricultural biodiversity from 2-4 December 1998 in Rome, Italy. This workshop followed up the June 1997 joint CBD-FAO technical workshop on agricultural biodiversity "Farming Systems Approaches for the Sustainable Use and Conservation of Agricultural Biodiversity and Agro-Ecosystems." Over 60 participants attended from 20 countries. The workshop helped to identify the main elements required to provide enabling environments and technical, policy, institutional and legal incentives, from global to local levels, for the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity. Participants proposed prioritizing four sets of actions: information, assessment and indicators; research and development; awareness raising and capacity building; and development of policies and instruments.

EXPERT MEETING IN PREPARATION FOR SBSTTA-4: An informal scientific expert workshop was convened by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation on the Isle of Vilm from 13-15 April, 1999. The meeting aimed to condense topical information on the agenda for SBSTTA-4. Twenty-one participants, including members of the CBD Secretariat and SBSTTA Bureau, national experts and NGOs, mostly from the EU, attended. Participants addressed the Global Taxonomy Initiative, alien species, sustainable use, "terminator technologies," drylands, biodiversity impact assessment and *ad hoc* technical expert groups.

THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: The CSD met in New York from 19-30 April 1999. CSD delegates discussed tourism, among other items, and developed an international work programme on sustainable tourism development. This work programme includes an invitation to the CBD COP "to further consider, in the context of the process of the exchange of experiences, existing knowledge and best practice on sustainable tourism development and biological diversity with a view to contributing to international guidelines for activities related to sustainable tourism development in vulnerable terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems and habitats of major importance for biological diversity and protected areas, including fragile mountain ecosystems."

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

OPENING PLENARY: The meeting is expected to commence at 10:00 a.m. Delegates are expected to consider organizational matters and hear reports from recent meetings, including the Global Biodiversity Forum and workshops on the Global Taxonomy Initiative.

PLENARY: The Plenary is expected to consider the SBSTTA work programme and the terms of reference for *ad hoc* technical expert groups during an afternoon meeting.