

## **CBD COP-8 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 23 MARCH 2006**

Delegates to the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP-8) met in two working groups throughout the day. Working Group I (WG-I) addressed: marine and coastal biodiversity; agricultural biodiversity; and protected areas (PAs). Working Group II (WG-II) considered the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and reviewed the Convention mechanisms.

### **WORKING GROUP I**

**MARINE AND COASTAL BIODIVERSITY:** IUCN called for prior environmental impact assessment, sustainable practices and benefit-sharing in relation to bioprospecting; and applying the ecosystem approach and precautionary principle in regulating fishing practices. GREENPEACE called for a UN General Assembly (UNGA) moratorium on high seas bottom trawling and the development of a new implementation agreement to the UN Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS) provisions on protecting and preserving marine biodiversity. The INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB) noted that indigenous participation in UNCLOS-related processes is almost inexistent, and the indigenous peoples' concerns are not included in the current draft decision.

**AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY:** The Secretariat introduced relevant documents (UNEP/CBD/COP/8/26/Add.2).

**Food and nutrition:** The FAO and the INTERNATIONAL PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES INSTITUTE (IPGRI) reported on the initiative on biodiversity for food and nutrition. IPGRI prioritized research and awareness-raising on links between diverse diets and nutrition and policies supporting agricultural biodiversity use for better nutrition. Many welcomed the initiative and called for FAO and IPGRI to continue to lead its implementation, while COLOMBIA said the CBD should lead.

BRAZIL called for broadening the genetic base of cultivated crops. Uganda for AFRICA noted limited research on under-utilized species and called for mainstreaming agricultural biodiversity into national health programmes. CANADA suggested case studies on biodiversity for nutrition.

On the proposed framework for the initiative, ZIMBABWE emphasized promoting indigenous crops, and reviewing the impact of land reform on agricultural biodiversity. TURKEY and MICRONESIA proposed text on medicinal plants and associated traditional knowledge. AUSTRALIA, opposed by the EU, requested text on "avoiding trade-distorting measures" when establishing incentives and creating markets for crop diversification.

**Soil biodiversity initiative:** CANADA highlighted the link between soil quality and human and environmental health. MALAWI proposed a database on soil biodiversity important

for food and agriculture. The PHILIPPINES highlighted soil erosion in land management and rehabilitation programmes. NEW ZEALAND urged focus on increasing and disseminating knowledge.

**Genetic use restriction technologies (GURTs):** Malaysia for G-77/CHINA stressed multiple hazards of GURTs for farmers, indigenous peoples and local communities, particularly relating to traditional seed saving practices. Supported by ARGENTINA and NORWAY, he called for deleting paragraph 2(b) in the draft decision allowing for a case-by-case risk assessment of GURTs, stressing that "paragraph 2(b) is not to be." NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA and SWITZERLAND supported the reference to case-by-case risk assessment.

The CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH said they do not allow GURTs in their centers. The IIFB rejected case-by-case risk assessment as a violation of human and indigenous rights. A YOUTH representative refused to inherit the risks of using GURTs and called on parties to strengthen the current moratorium. A LOCAL COMMUNITY representative said farmers have been protecting crops for thousands of years and will not relinquish their rights to saving seeds. The BAN TERMINATOR CAMPAIGN said the CBD cannot allow governments to make their own decisions on field tests due to GURTs' inherent dangers to humanity.

The FOUNDATION FOR PUBLIC RESEARCH AND REGULATION said a ban on gene-switching technologies would be detrimental to modern biotechnology and food production. The US said the CBD could support capacity building and information sharing on GURTs. An INDUSTRY representative noted that many of these technologies result in seeds that can be saved.

Noting the possibility to adopt the SBSTTA-10 recommendation on GURTs which does not include reference to a case-by-case risk assessment, WG-I Chair Matthew Jebb announced he will establish a Friends of the Chair group on the issue on Friday morning.

**PROTECTED AREAS:** The Secretariat introduced relevant documents (UNEP/CBD/COP/8/8, 29 and 39, and INF/6, 16, 21, 26, 27 and 34). Callum Roberts, University of York, presented on the need to establish PAs on the high seas and in intact forests.

**Review of implementation:** ICELAND, with many, supported holding a second meeting of the PA Working Group, with MICRONESIA proposing to focus on financial issues and the EU highlighting progress evaluation, improved implementation, funding and ecosystem services evaluation. Tuvalu, on behalf of SIDS, and the IIFB requested recognizing and supporting indigenous and local communities and customary practices in PA management. BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL suggested agreements with indigenous peoples and NGOs to ensure effectiveness. AUSTRALIA, NORWAY and INDIA

highlighted the limited number of national reports, with several requesting a more flexible reporting system. INDIA emphasized identifying challenges and obstacles in the reporting process. Liberia for AFRICA, supported by many, called for increased financing and capacity building.

The PHILIPPINES, with many, supported convening regional workshops. Mongolia for ASIA AND THE PACIFIC urged intensification of efforts for reaching the targets on PA networks. VENEZUELA called for CBD national focal points to conduct implementation of the work programme. THAILAND supported strengthening public-private partnerships. ARGENTINA stressed threats to PAs, including monoculture, agricultural encroachment, invasive alien species and mining. The INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MINING AND METALS noted its commitment not to mine or explore in World Heritage sites.

**High seas PAs:** ASIA AND THE PACIFIC and NORWAY said the CBD could support UNCLOS and the UNGA Working Group by providing scientific information. CANADA, MALAYSIA, COLOMBIA and ARGENTINA suggested the CBD provide scientific and technical advice. MEXICO suggested the CBD focus on defining technical criteria to identify areas for marine PAs and the ecosystem approach, in cooperation with other international and regional organizations. The EU proposed the CBD elaborate criteria and a biogeographical framework for, and a spatial database on, high seas PAs. AUSTRALIA emphasized that institutional, jurisdictional and governance issues should be addressed by UNCLOS only.

TUVALU prioritized: defining the CBD mandate; exploring MPA selection criteria; stating the undesirability of bottom trawling; and providing guidance on research. VENEZUELA, supported by TURKEY, called for a more balanced text by deleting several references to UNCLOS, and proposed text stating the CBD, within the framework of the work carried out by the UNGA Working Group, is the lead instrument regulating activities in the high seas. GHANA suggested the CBD enter in a memorandum of understanding with UNCLOS for cooperation on sustainable use of biodiversity. INDIA called for combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

## WORKING GROUP II

**MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT:** BRAZIL suggested that parties incorporate the MA findings into national strategies on a voluntary basis. MEXICO proposed that SBSTTA examine economic drivers of biodiversity change and biodiversity valuation. COLOMBIA urged parties to continue to develop sub-global assessments and, with INDIA, stressed the need to review targets beyond 2010.

**EFFECTIVENESS OF CONVENTION PROCESSES:** The Secretariat introduced relevant documents (UNEP/CBD/COP/8/16 and Add.1-4 and INF/2 and 10). The EU, supported by many, asked to reduce the number of intersessional meetings and, supported by NEW ZEALAND, opposed establishing a working group on incentives. THAILAND requested that COP-9 be held in the second quarter of 2008. ARGENTINA suggested using the SBSTTA rules of procedure for intersessional working groups.

On the consolidated SBSTTA *modus operandi*, the EU endorsed it and requested limiting the number of SBSTTA agenda items. ARGENTINA, with many, requested deleting a provision allowing SBSTTA to set up *ad hoc* technical expert groups (AHTEGs). COLOMBIA suggested that AHTEGs report to SBSTTA, rather than directly to COP.

On AHTEGs, the EU, opposed by NEW ZEALAND, asked to increase the number of experts from 15 to 20. BRAZIL proposed to eliminate the roster of experts. MEXICO noted AHTEGs should also include experts from international organizations and NGOs. An INDUSTRY representative requested parties to provide for private sector participation in AHTEGs, and the IIFB for indigenous participation.

**Retirement and consolidation of decisions:** CANADA, supported by many, expressed concerns that the proposed consolidation could lead to confusion, and asked to delete all references to future consolidation of decisions. AUSTRALIA urged parties to limit the number of COP decisions and keep them concise. The EU and NORWAY agreed to retiring decisions that have been fully implemented. BRAZIL, supported by NEW ZEALAND, asked to focus on future efforts rather than reviewing past decisions. COLOMBIA stressed the importance of, and means for, implementation of decisions. Following lengthy discussions on the group's composition, WG-II Chair Sem Shikongo (Namibia) established an open-ended informal group on the retirement of decisions.

**NGO accreditation:** The Secretariat introduced a draft policy (UNEP/CBD/COP/8/30). The EU, supported by CANADA, NORWAY and the IIFB, expressed discontent over such late consideration of the matter, noting that some NGOs were not able to be accredited to COP-8. An NGO representative requested that NGOs be able to participate in intersessional meetings and that accreditation be open also to NGOs working on benefit-sharing. Several delegates requested postponement of the issue.

**SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION:** The Secretariat introduced relevant documents (UNEP/CBD/COP/8/17, 17/Add.1, and 18). COLOMBIA stressed repatriation of information and, supported by many, collaboration with other initiatives. CANADA urged parties to provide free and open access to information and, supported by the EU, suggested reference to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. CHINA and CAMEROON highlighted supporting national clearing-house mechanisms.

**TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER AND COOPERATION:** The Secretariat introduced relevant documents (UNEP/CBD/COP/8/19, 19/Add.1 and 2, INF/9, INF/2 and INF/32). COLOMBIA underscored that COP-8 should establish a clear process to operationalize technology transfer. The EU highlighted the importance of: capacity building; long-term partnership; South-South exchange; and facilitated access to information whenever intellectual property rights (IPRs) are not exercised. The EU, supported by FIJI, suggested that the Executive Secretary explore possibilities for establishing a biodiversity technology initiative or network. CANADA emphasized, *inter alia*, conducting a technology needs assessment, and with many, strengthening the role of the clearing-house mechanism. SWITZERLAND underlined international cooperation and guidance on implementation of technology transfer activities. The PHILIPPINES stressed barriers posed by IPRs. BRAZIL noted the importance of South-South cooperation in reaching the 2010 target.

**FINANCIAL RESOURCES:** The Secretariat introduced relevant documents (UNEP/CBD/COP/8/4/Rev.1, 20 and 21). AFRICA rejected the GEF resource allocation framework as inconsistent with COP guidance, and called on delegates to accede to the Biosafety Protocol COP/MOP-3 proposal. The EU urged countries to prioritize biodiversity to receive official development assistance and private sector support.

## IN THE CORRIDORS

The long-awaited discussion on GURTs was shorter than most expected, but enough to spotlight entrenched positions between those interested in pursuing GURTs research and those rejecting them as a breach of human rights. What was expected to be a David and Goliath situation, with NGOs and indigenous representatives on one side and a few powerful governments and industry on the other, resulted instead in a majority of States resolutely affirming that case-by-case risk assessment, - 2(b) – “was not to be.” According to some, such polarization may result in the COP-8 decision on GURTs disappearing altogether.