

UNFF-6 HIGHLIGHTS: FRIDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2006

On Friday, 17 February, the sixth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-6) worked towards building consensus on the future of the international arrangement on forests (IAF). In the morning sessions, delegates convened in two Working Groups to continue negotiating the Chair's draft text. Working Group I (WGI) discussed the preamble, while WGII negotiated several aspects of working modalities. In the afternoon, delegates met in an informal plenary session to review the week's challenges and achievements.

WORKING GROUP I

SOUTH AFRICA, for the AFRICAN GROUP, and CHILE requested, respectively, French and Spanish translations of the EU proposal on strengthening the IAF and the non-binding voluntary instrument.

PREAMBLE: On recalling ECOSOC resolution 2000/35 and General Assembly resolution 57/270B, the US withdrew its proposed amendments specifying the contents of these resolutions.

On reaffirming commitment to the principles of the Rio Declaration, BRAZIL for the AMAZON GROUP, opposed by Austria for the EU, and the US, insisted on references to the principles on national sovereignty and common but differentiated responsibilities, stating that these were of particular reference to forests. SWITZERLAND, supported by the AMAZON GROUP but opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP, proposed including the full text of the principle on the responsibility of countries to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction not cause damage to other states or environments outside their jurisdiction. The US had reservations regarding "reaffirming commitment to" existing multilateral legally-binding agreements relevant to forests, to which not all countries were party, and proposed a separate paragraph "recalling" such agreements. INDONESIA, supported by VENEZUELA, restated his proposal to place "recalling the 2005 World Summit Outcome" in a separate paragraph, whereas the EU preferred to include it in the paragraph on "reaffirming commitment."

On quoting from other international agreements, the EU said that it should clearly add value and would need to be balanced. On recognizing the importance of benefits provided by forests, the US, CHINA and INDONESIA expressed concern about the possible proliferation of long lists of forest benefits, principles and SFM components, and suggested considering more general formulations. On COSTA RICA's proposal to include non-

timber forest products (NTFPs) and environmental services as benefits provided by forests, MEXICO, ARGENTINA, the EU, SWITZERLAND, CHILE, AUSTRALIA and NORWAY supported, and INDONESIA, INDIA, BRAZIL and VENEZUELA opposed. Delegates agreed on: including "trees outside of forests," proposed by the AFRICAN GROUP; poverty "eradication" rather than "alleviation," as proposed by VENEZUELA; and referring to "internationally agreed development goals, including the millennium development goals (MDGs)," as proposed by the EU.

On expressing concern about continued deforestation and forest degradation, the US, supported by IRAN and the AFRICAN GROUP, favored adding "the slow rate of afforestation and forest recovery." COSTA RICA suggested retaining forest "cover" recovery until further consideration. On the resulting impact on local and national economies, delegates debated adding "international," stating "economies at all levels," or just noting "economies." On the resulting adverse impact on the environment, the US, opposed by INDONESIA, proposed "including biological diversity." SWITZERLAND, supported by the US, preferred referring to these as "critical challenges" rather than concerns.

On recognizing the need for financing, capacity building, transfer of environmentally sound technologies and good governance, the EU clarified its proposal to add "in developing countries, in particular the least developed countries." IRAN noted that reference to developing countries should be placed before "good governance," since governance applies to all countries. INDONESIA preferred "new and additional" financing. The EU expressed concerns on whether the Chair's text related to strengthening the IAF or to the voluntary instrument.

WORKING GROUP II

MODALITIES: Underscoring the importance of creating an agreement on forests that is inclusive, strong and a "best compromise," the EU, proposed reframing the negotiated text with a view to asking the Bureau to recommend the agreement for adoption by the General Assembly, after which it would be open to subscription by individual countries. Responding to SWITZERLAND's request for clarification regarding the difference between an ECOSOC resolution and the EU's proposal, she explained that although the legal status remains unchanged, countries would be able to sign the "instrument" by diplomatic note, adding political weight to its otherwise non-binding nature.

On monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR), the AMAZON GROUP, supported by CHILE, the AFRICAN GROUP, INDONESIA and PAKISTAN, preferred the original Chair's text, while TURKEY supported the EU formulation. SWITZERLAND, supported by the EU, MALAYSIA and PAKISTAN, wished to include "voluntary sector reviews." The EU argued against the US's suggestion of adding "or" to the list of national measures, policies, actions and targets, stating that it weakened the provision. SWITZERLAND argued against formulating new terms of reference.

On the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), the EU clarified that she favors a consolidated report from all CPF members. The EU, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, stated that it is difficult to commit to goals by 2015 when their content remained uncertain. The AMAZON GROUP wished to add "and progress on means of implementation."

SWITZERLAND, supported by KENYA, CHILE and GUATEMALA, suggested that the achievement of the global goals/strategic objectives should take into account the seven thematic elements of SFM.

On the review of the IAF, KENYA, supported by SWITZERLAND and MALAYSIA, suggested moving this to the end of the section.

On strengthening the UNFF Secretariat, the US, supported by CHILE, suggested this be done "through voluntary extra-budgetary resources to better fulfill its function," while the RUSSIAN FEDERATION suggested this should occur "within existing resources." SWITZERLAND and the EU requested that this text be bracketed.

On encouraging voluntary contributions to the trust fund, the US, supported by SWITZERLAND and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, suggested this be targeted at "donor countries, other countries in a position to do so, and other entities interested in the effectiveness of the IAF."

The US, supported by GUATEMALA, requested that the Secretariat make available a list of trust fund contributors and the types of activities that the trust fund has supported.

On the role of the CPF, SWITZERLAND, with INDONESIA, supported the deletion of "under the guidance of FAO," suggesting this should be left up to the CPF. The AFRICAN GROUP cautioned against repetition of the ECOSOC resolution.

The EU urged valuing the CPF and its role in the future IAF, and the AMAZON GROUP suggested "recognize and strengthen."

The US, supported by SWITZERLAND, suggested that member states that are also members of the governing bodies of the CPF should encourage the integration of forest-related programmes.

AFTERNOON PLENARY

Chair Judith Mbula Bahemuka introduced the new compilation text, complimenting delegates for their cordiality, transparency and recent flexibility in identifying the key problems and moving their resolution forward. She said delegates must now: agree on the chapeau to the goals negotiated at UNFF-5; draft a strong ECOSOC resolution on strengthening the IAF; and decide whether to negotiate a voluntary instrument, accord or understanding that includes at least an indicative list of elements and a clear process to finalize the instrument.

The EU said his proposal on indicative elements of a non-binding instrument incorporates proposals offered by Brazil and the US, and includes, *inter alia*: global goals; national commitments; working modalities; MAR; technology transfer; and capacity building. He proposed that remaining negotiations be based on this architecture.

The AMAZON GROUP identified common ground between delegations and groups, welcomed progress made towards a strong ECOSOC resolution and a clear-cut instrument on SFM, and urged renewed efforts in the following week.

The AFRICAN GROUP, supported by SENEGAL and CAMEROON, congratulated delegates on their spirit of willingness to make progress.

ARGENTINA hoped that progress made during this Forum will form the basis of a new forest process and, with the EU's proposal, result in a strong voluntary agreement.

AUSTRALIA argued that if agreement was not reached by the end of UNFF-6, an inter-sessional meeting should be scheduled to avoid UNFF-7 being used to finalize the resolution and agreement.

SWITZERLAND, INDONESIA and IRAN noted the good spirit of the progress and constructive engagement.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, supported by the US, underscored that he would welcome the incorporation of ECOSOC resolution language in the draft voluntary agreement, with the US adding that any additions would only be agreed to on a case-by-case basis.

GUATEMALA, on behalf of the Central American Integration System, stressed that she reserves the right to renegotiate any text currently agreed upon *ad ref.*

SENEGAL requested a French translation of the Chair's compilation text. INDIA said that the strengthened IAF should address financial resources, capacity building and technology transfer. PAKISTAN noted that the needs of many stakeholders had to be considered in an IAF, and called for an *ad hoc* expert group to negotiate a code based on the conceptual framework developed at this meeting. CHILE hoped that negotiations would not get mired in detail. CHINA hoped to agree on a resolution at this meeting, and encouraged maintaining the spirit of cooperation. CAMEROON suggested focusing negotiations on the resolution, and requested that the Co-Chairs streamline the Chair's text. SAUDI ARABIA said that achieving an LBI on forests is extremely important. JAPAN noted that UNFF-6 was the most productive of the two UNFF meetings he had attended. CAMBODIA called attention to forest clearing and land encroachment as causes of forest degradation.

On Chair Bahemuka's proposal to have the Bureau streamline the text, Brazil requested that the compilation text remain on the negotiating table as an alternative. CAMEROON, supported by VENEZUELA, suggested keeping the compilation text as a background document, while using the streamlined document as a basis for negotiation.

IN THE CORRIDORS

In the afternoon plenary, Chair Bahemuka characterized the day's prevailing mood as enthused with "winds of flexibility." While delegates were united in welcoming progress towards a strong ECOSOC resolution and voluntary agreement, they were divided over the EU's proposal to ask the Bureau to recommend the agreement for adoption by the General Assembly. One delegate welcomed the move, arguing that it would strengthen the future instrument. Another delegate remained skeptical regarding commitment to an agreement that remains inherently voluntary. Several delegates have cautioned that increasing forest-related commitments required of developing countries, in the absence of improved means of implementation, may prove to be fruitless.

Will the winds of positive change flow into the second week of negotiations? Given the unpredictability of the recent weather outside the UN, it is anyone's guess.