

UNFF-6 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2006

On Monday, 20 February, the sixth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-6) resumed negotiations on the international arrangement on forests (IAF). In the morning, Working Group I (WGI) discussed the preamble. In the afternoon, WGI addressed the preamble and the general mandate, while WGII addressed means of implementation.

WORKING GROUP I

Co-Chairs Perrez (Switzerland) and Doig (Peru) proposed working in the morning on the ECOSOC resolution and on the instrument in the afternoon. The EU proposed beginning negotiations on the voluntary instrument, based on proposals made by themselves and others during the first week. SOUTH AFRICA, for the AFRICAN GROUP, supported by BRAZIL, for the AMAZON GROUP, SWITZERLAND, INDONESIA and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, proposed finalizing the ECOSOC resolution before discussing the instrument. INDONESIA, with CAMEROON, requested clarification on the status of proposals from the EU, BRAZIL, the US, CANADA and AUSTRALIA. NORWAY requested that the Chair provide text combining these proposals.

ARGENTINA, with COSTA RICA for the CENTRAL AMERICA INTEGRATION SYSTEM (SICA), while supportive of commencing with the resolution, suggested that substantive action would require the development of a voluntary instrument, and expressed concern about having insufficient time to complete negotiations.

MEXICO proposed beginning with the ECOSOC resolution before discussing elements of the voluntary instrument. The AFRICAN GROUP argued that discussing the instrument before the resolution was akin to “putting the cart before the horse.” IRAN noted that consensus had not been achieved regarding which was the cart and which was the horse, and suggested Wednesday afternoon to debate the instrument’s elements.

PREAMBLE: On means of implementation, BRAZIL suggested merging the two working groups to clarify issues of means of implementation. The EU reiterated his concerns with looking at the ECOSOC resolution without also discussing the instrument, particularly with regards to issues related to means of implementation. The US, supported by SICA, the AFRICAN GROUP and CHILE, proposed merging paragraphs on partnerships to read: “also recognizing the important contribution of voluntary public-private partnerships and private sector initiatives at all levels to achieve effective SFM, and support national strategies, plans and priorities related to

forests.” The EU, supported by MEXICO, proposed adding reference to the General Assembly resolution on partnerships, rather than quoting selectively from it.

On strengthening political commitment, SWITZERLAND, opposed by INDONESIA, preferred retaining text on implementing SFM and conserving, maintaining and restoring the values of all types of forests. IRAN, supported by the EU, proposed shortening this to “in order to effectively implement SFM.” INDONESIA, supported by the AMAZON GROUP, the US, the EU and MALAYSIA, proposed merging paragraphs on recognizing the need to strengthen political commitment and collective efforts to effectively implement the sustainable management of all types of forests. BRAZIL suggested referring to the “management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.” The AFRICAN GROUP questioned whether the proposal by Indonesia was based on internationally agreed language. COSTA RICA, supported by CHILE, noted that language from ECOSOC Resolution 2000/35 specified “management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests,” while the US said this differed from other agreed language. The EU, supported by the US and IRAN, noted that SFM encompasses management, conservation, and sustainable development of forests.

The EU proposed, and delegates agreed to, deleting a paragraph on the need to strengthen the IAF to make it more effective in advancing its objectives and in contributing to effective implementation of SFM.

On emphasizing the importance of the UNFF as the high-level intergovernmental body on forests within the UN, the AFRICAN GROUP, supported by INDONESIA and the EU, proposed replacing “high-level” with “highest level.” MEXICO, supported by ARGENTINA and SICA, but opposed by SWITZERLAND, BRAZIL and AUSTRALIA, requested retaining brackets around “emphasizing the importance of the UNFF” until discussions on the Chair’s text were concluded. BRAZIL cautioned that doubting the importance of the UNFF and its position as the highest level intergovernmental body on forests would lead him to reconsider his outlook on the whole text. AUSTRALIA and the AFRICAN GROUP noted that that this was a relatively straightforward paragraph and encouraged delegates to accept the language. ARGENTINA, supported by MEXICO, but opposed by the US, suggested agreeing *ad ref* to the paragraph. However, there was no agreement and the paragraph remains bracketed.

GENERAL MANDATE: Regarding chapeau text on “strengthening the IAF,” the AMAZON GROUP, with the AFRICAN GROUP and ARGENTINA and opposed by the EU

and SWITZERLAND, proposed retaining reference to “new and additional resources.” SWITZERLAND suggested that if that reference is kept, it should refer to “private, public, domestic and international sources.” The AFRICAN GROUP countered that reference to domestic sources was inappropriate in an international agreement. The US agreed to delete this but noted that, to date, the US has contributed 85% of UNFF Trust Fund resources.

On enhancing the contribution of forests to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, Co-Chairs Perrez and Doig suggested, and many delegates agreed to refer to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Implementation, and the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development. PAPUA NEW GUINEA proposed adding reference to the Mauritius Strategy for small island developing States (SIDS) and SENEGAL proposed adding reference to the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). CUBA and VENEZUELA proposed referring only to the MDGs. SWITZERLAND said she could not accept this without stronger language on forests and environmental issues from other environmental agreements.

The AFRICAN GROUP and others proposed encouraging and assisting countries to “maintain and improve” their forest resources. The EU said that the IPF/IFF Proposals for Action contained agreed language on “forest quality,” but VENEZUELA proposed to keep the term bracketed. Delegates noted the existence of agreed language stating both “Indigenous Peoples and local communities” and “indigenous and local communities.” On taking into account countries’ rights to fair and equitable benefit sharing, MEXICO proposed the amendment, “deriving from access to genetic resources and traditional knowledge associated with them.” The US suggested “access to and use of their forest genetic resources and traditional forest-related knowledge.” PARAGUAY requested inclusion of benefits associated with water resources.

The AMAZON GROUP objected to a US proposal on “maintaining and enhancing benefits of forests to all people,” preferring their proposed text referring to improving the quality of life of people in and around forests. MEXICO proposed, and delegates agreed to, “benefits of forests, particularly to the quality of life of people living in and around forests.”

WORKING GROUP II

The EU noted that the Chair’s text did not reflect the EU’s proposed “two track” approach of working on an ECOSOC resolution and a voluntary instrument, and, opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP, called for commencement on discussion of the instrument.

PREAMBLE: Regarding a paragraph related to resources for implementation, ECUADOR, supported by INDONESIA, FIJI and PAKISTAN, urged inclusion of additional financing, capacity building and transfer of environmentally sound technology. The AFRICAN GROUP suggested that “capacity building” should be referred to as “capacity development.” FIJI requested reference to SIDS.

GLOBAL GOALS/STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: On reporting, the EU suggested clustering all related paragraphs, and called for the text to address global goals. The AMAZON GROUP, supported by CHINA and INDIA, emphasized their voluntary nature and the need to enhance means of implementation.

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION: On commitment and support to improving means of implementation, the US supported means of implementation for SFM, while BRAZIL

supported language to reflect the broader strategic objectives. The US said language on means of implementation for strategic objectives and global goals was contingent on WGI discussions.

Regarding a subparagraph on official development assistance (ODA), delegates debated, but did not agree on how to, or whether to, refer to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The US opposed references to other UN conferences, stating it was beyond the Forum’s mandate. The EU and the US supported language on “increasing” ODA, while the AMAZON GROUP, the AFRICAN GROUP and CHINA preferred language on “reversing the decline” in ODA. The US proposed language on increasing ODA “requested and allocated by countries,” which was opposed by CHINA, and making better use of ODA resources and mechanisms.

Delegates agreed on language for a subparagraph on mobilizing and providing new and additional resources for SFM from private, public, domestic and international sources to and in developing countries, especially least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and SIDS.

The AFRICAN GROUP, supported by INDIA, the AMAZON GROUP, PAPUA NEW GUINEA and PAKISTAN, called for the creation of a new global forest fund, adding it should be housed in an appropriate financial institution. This was opposed by SWITZERLAND, JAPAN, NORWAY, and the US, who called for strengthening existing funds. ARGENTINA questioned calls to include reference to SIDS in each subparagraph and, with support from PAPUA NEW GUINEA, suggested the issue be dealt with in the chapeau.

As an opportunity to promote the Bali Partnership Fund, SWITZERLAND, opposed by the AMAZON GROUP, suggested requesting the ITTO, in addition to the FAO and the World Bank, to support national forest programmes. ARGENTINA called for support to be extended to national development programmes.

Attempting to merge two subparagraphs on the GEF, NORWAY proposed a new paragraph inviting the GEF Council to consider strengthening GEF support for SFM, including the option of establishing a separate operational programme. Delegates supported this proposal as a basis for negotiation, but some expressed concern that this might prejudice allocation of resources to other operational programmes and proposed language reflecting this concern, with IRAN and SAUDI ARABIA specifying the area of land degradation. ARGENTINA, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION and others opposed singling out specific operational programmes and, after some debate, delegates agreed to Norway’s proposal with the addition of language to safeguard against prejudicing other operational programmes.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Friday’s optimism and the Secretariat’s weekend work were not reflected by the day’s slow start. In a morning session to debate the EU proposed approach, there was confusion over which should be addressed first, the ECOSOC resolution or the voluntary instrument, with many stressing the importance of not “putting the cart before the horse.” Delegates expressed frustration at the afternoon’s lackluster progress, bogged down in issues such as the utility of a “shopping list” approach. Many delegates are more concerned with who is going to pay for the goods, if we ever actually arrive at the checkout.

Despite many calls to focus on substance over process, much of the morning session was spent discussing the process by which the process would be discussed. One delegate hoped that the looming threat of night sessions would ignite a sense of urgency and break this impasse.