

## UNFF-6 HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2006

On Wednesday, 22 February, the sixth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-6) continued with negotiations on the international arrangement on forests (IAF). Working Group I (WGI) discussed the preamble, general mandate, voluntary instrument, and legal framework. WGII discussed working modalities, Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and monitoring, assessment and reporting (MAR).

### WORKING GROUP I

**PREAMBLE:** In recognizing the multiple economic, social and environmental benefits provided by forests and trees outside forests, SOUTH AFRICA, for the AFRICAN GROUP, supported by CHINA, INDIA, and BRAZIL, for the AMAZON GROUP, cautioned against listing specific benefits. SWITZERLAND, supported by many, said they could support including “non-timber forest products and environmental services.” The US said either was acceptable but that the general formulation was the best way forward.

Delegates agreed to a paragraph on expressing concern about continued deforestation, forest degradation, and the slow rate of afforestation, forest cover recovery and reforestation, with minor amendments suggested by Costa Rica and the US.

**GENERAL MANDATE:** On the future IAF’s principal function of enhancing the contribution of forests to achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, the US, opposed by MEXICO, proposed inserting “to the implementation of” the Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Implementation “and” the Monterrey Consensus. MEXICO, supported by COSTA RICA, the AFRICAN GROUP and the AMAZON GROUP, but opposed by the EU and the US, proposed a separate paragraph on the Monterrey Consensus. Delegates agreed to “bearing in mind the Monterrey Consensus,” in the same paragraph.

On encouraging and assisting countries to maintain and improve their forest resources, PAKISTAN, INDIA and CHILE requested retaining reference to forest quality. AUSTRALIA, supported by the US and the AFRICAN GROUP, suggested transforming the language into a reference to reducing forest degradation.

After debating whether to use “Indigenous Peoples and local communities” or “indigenous and local communities,” delegates agreed to “indigenous peoples and local communities.”

BRAZIL, opposed by the US and the EU, requested retention of text on taking into account fair and equitable benefit sharing. PAKISTAN requested reference to land tenure.

### GLOBAL GOALS/STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

Regarding the chapeau, MEXICO noted the link to the section on voluntary code/guidelines/international understanding. Turning to the latter section, BRAZIL proposed deleting the 2007 timeline for adoption of an instrument. MEXICO said most questions of process and substance have been left to the annex, which has not yet been discussed. The EU proposed deleting references to 2007 and UNFF-7, as they want to finalize an agreement at UNFF-6.

On a legal framework, delegates discussed key outstanding issues on an interim evaluation, a 2015 timeframe for the evaluation, a sunset clause linked to the evaluation, and whether to keep the LBI option open. The EU said all these relate to ensuring the effectiveness of an IAF by evaluating its results in 2015, discontinuing it if it is ineffective, and keeping open the option of an LBI. The AFRICAN GROUP, with the AMAZON GROUP, the US, INDONESIA and INDIA, opposed using a sunset clause. INDIA supported an evaluation or review but said a sunset clause is “overly negative.” The AMAZON GROUP agreed to a thorough review in 2015, but said delegates should not prejudge what will happen. COSTA RICA, with IRAN, GUATEMALA and MEXICO, said 2012 would be better, given Commission on Sustainable Development’s (CSD) focus on forests that year. INDONESIA, with MEXICO, said the UNFF had not created a link with the CSD as called for in ECOSOC Resolution 2000/35. ARGENTINA, supported by MEXICO, expressed concern over lack of agreement on what will be assessed, with only two days and many brackets remaining. The US said the resolution, which the UNFF-6 will agree to, is what will be reviewed in 2015. CHILE, the AMAZON GROUP, and the EU said that the UNFF, not ECOSOC, should conduct the review, noting, *inter alia*, that unlike the UNFF, ECOSOC does not have universal membership. Co-Chair Perrez established a contact group composed of interested parties, with Tony Bartlett (Australia) as Chair.

Co-Chair Doig presented the Co-Chairs' compiled list of common indicative elements that could be considered in developing an instrument. The AFRICAN GROUP noted that this was a draft list. BRAZIL requested that the list have a “non-status,” and noted that some of the “common” elements had not been proposed by his delegation and thus could not be

considered common. MEXICO said that the 2015 review date noted in the list had not been agreed to by all delegates, despite it being common to all the annexed proposals. The EU said that one of the principal added values of an instrument on forests is a statement of political will that would put the UNFF and the IAF back at the center of international forest policy.

## WORKING GROUP II

**ENHANCED COOPERATION AND CROSS-SECTORAL POLICY AND PROGRAMME COORDINATION:** The EU emphasized the importance of close collaboration and coordination between the governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements, instruments, processes and UN bodies. SWITZERLAND supported this, but urged deleting “mechanisms to facilitate” SFM.

**WORKING MODALITIES:** After much debate, consensus was reached on retaining brackets on reference to the Forum operating on a six year multi-year programme of work (MYPOW), as the issue will be addressed in a separate section. NORWAY suggested revisiting this discussion at UNFF-7.

The Secretariat reminded delegates that for budgetary reasons, the ECOSOC resolution must stipulate the frequency and length of future UNFF meetings. On the frequency with which the Forum should meet, SWITZERLAND warned against mimicking the CSD, which is on a two year cycle alternating between review and policy sessions, and together with AUSTRALIA, SAUDI ARABIA, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION and the AFRICAN GROUP, suggested biennial meetings. There was no agreement on the length or frequency of meetings.

On chapeau language related to working with regional bodies, mechanisms and processes to provide input to the Forum’s work, SWITZERLAND proposed deleting reference to regional and subregional levels with respect to strengthening dialogue. AUSTRALIA, with the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, proposed deleting reference to “existing” bodies so as not to limit mechanisms and processes. The EU, AUSTRALIA and NORWAY specified “forest-related” bodies, mechanisms and processes, and the EU added reference to coordination with the UNFF. The AMAZON GROUP preferred strengthening “work,” rather than “dialogue.” This paragraph was agreed with these amendments.

The US proposed an additional paragraph, taken from WGI language, on strengthening interaction with major groups at regional and subregional levels and facilitating balanced representation of major groups at Forum meetings. The EU and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION noted redundancy, and the EU suggested the WGs discuss this jointly to harmonize language. On working with existing regional bodies, SWITZERLAND suggested omitting “Forum members,” while the RUSSIAN FEDERATION urged inclusion of “interested” Forum members.

Noting redundancy, delegates agreed to delete paragraphs on regional and subregional perspectives and regional bodies and mechanisms and regional meetings. Delegates agreed to a paragraph considering inputs from regional bodies and country-led initiatives, as well as from major groups, after agreeing to delete reference to *ad hoc* expert groups.

On supporting participants from developing countries, delegates agreed to language on continuing support in accordance with General Assembly Decision 58/554. The Group debated a clause on encouraging voluntary contributions to support major group participation, with the RUSSIAN

FEDERATION opposing its inclusion, noting it was inappropriate in this context. The text remains bracketed in a separate paragraph.

On strengthening the UNFF Secretariat to enable it to fulfill its function more effectively, the US insisted this should be done within “its” existing resources, while the AFRICAN GROUP said this language was too restrictive, given the increased responsibilities being asked of the Secretariat, and that resources should be able to come from elsewhere within the UN.

On addressing topics identified in the MYPOW, SWITZERLAND, supported by the AFRICAN GROUP and the AMAZON GROUP, emphasized raising awareness of the Forum at the regional and subregional levels.

On contributions to the UNFF Trust Fund, delegates agreed to Argentina’s proposal on using similar language to ECOSOC resolution 2000/35, with minor amendments proposed by the Russian Federation and the US.

On the Forum providing guidance to the CPF, the US distinguished between the CPF as an entity and its members. The US, supported by the Group, called for deleting reference to producing joint statements and an assessment of global forest issues. The EU argued for, and delegates agreed to, retaining text allowing the Forum to request a report of scientific knowledge-based actions needed to achieve SFM. There was consensus regarding efforts to continue to strengthen the Tehran process, which addresses low forest cover countries.

Delegates agreed to reformulate language regarding a joint initiative on science and technology to clarify that it would not require new funding, and agreed to a paragraph on ensuring that forest-related priorities and programmes of CPF members are integrated and mutually supportive. The Group also agreed to delete a paragraph on establishing an account to facilitate joint initiatives of the CPF within the UNFF Trust Fund, and to replace it with a Swiss-proposed paragraph on urging support of CPF joint initiatives through voluntary financial contributions to respective lead CPF organizations, as appropriate.

**MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING:** The EU proposed that the working groups jointly address a paragraph on submitting national reports in accordance with a timetable set out in the MYPOW. A paragraph was agreed on harmonizing processes for voluntary MAR by CPF member organizations in collaboration with the Forum. On enhancing terms of reference for country reports by the Forum, references to fulfilling global goals/strategic objectives, and other voluntary reports remain bracketed, as does a paragraph on developing a process to encourage and support the achievement of global goals/strategic objectives and SFM. Three alternative formulations of a paragraph addressing CPF reporting of activities and joint initiatives will be revisited.

## IN THE CORRIDORS

Delegates remain divided on key issues within both working groups, with gains few and hard-won. As precious negotiating time slipped by, Co-Chairs huddled with major players to urge flexibility and consensus, but little of either was forthcoming. Yet most were either convinced or “cautiously hopeful” that a resolution would be finalized by Friday. Some delegates were skeptical, however, that such an agreement would deliver substantive content. On a positive note, one delegate argued that whatever the outcome, there is a consensus that the regional approach holds promise, and that if properly empowered, the UNFF could play a role in linking this to the IAF.