

## UNFF-6 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2006

On Thursday, 23 February, the sixth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-6) continued with negotiations on the international arrangement on forests (IAF). In the morning, Working Group I (WGI) discussed the preamble, general mandate, voluntary instrument and legal framework. WGII discussed means of implementation and working modalities. In the afternoon, delegates convened in an informal plenary session to discuss the preamble and goals/strategic objectives. In the evening, delegates convened in contact groups on legal framework, working modalities and reporting and strengthening political commitment.

### WORKING GROUP I

**PREAMBLE:** On recalling existing international legally binding instruments (LBIs) relevant to forests, VENEZUELA said that if the general form of referencing benefits provided by forests is accepted, he would withdraw his proposal to add a reference to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD).

On referencing the important contribution of voluntary public-private partnerships, delegates discussed alternative approaches to referencing General Assembly (GA) Resolution A/Res/60/215 entitled "Toward Global Partnerships," agreeing with Venezuela's proposal to insert it as a footnote.

On recognizing the importance of the multiple benefits provided by forests, AUSTRALIA offered compromise text stating "multiple economic, social and environmental services and benefits," to replace reference to non-timber forest products and environmental services, noting that this was previously agreed language.

**GENERAL MANDATE:** On strengthening the IAF, Co-Chair Perrez presented a previously agreed formulation, "providing financial resources from a variety of sources including public, private, domestic and international sources," as an additional option for consideration.

On encouraging and assisting countries to improve their forest resources, delegates discussed merged text, offered by AUSTRALIA, who explained that new language on "deforestation" and "forest degradation" was an effort to address Brazil's request for clarification regarding the term "forest quality." BRAZIL agreed with the use of "forest degradation," but not "deforestation." SOUTH AFRICA, for the AFRICAN GROUP, supported by MEXICO, proposed "in order to maintain and improve their forest resources." GUATEMALA preferred "forest quality," but supported compromise text asking that it retain language on improving the lives of people living in and around forests. JAPAN proposed referring to reversing the loss of forest cover instead of "deforestation." AUSTRALIA, supported by BRAZIL and others, suggested compromise text stating "forest degradation and loss of forest cover," and the text was agreed.

**LEGAL FRAMEWORK:** Tony Bartlett (Australia), Chair of the contact group on a legal framework, reported on the group's progress, noting bracketed language on: either "achieving" or "advancing" the IAF's main objective; "global goals" or "strategic objectives;" the option of an LBI after the 2015 review; and whether to continue the IAF after the review. On the mid-term review, he said delegates proposed to provide either "appropriate input" or "a progress report" to the 2012-2013 cycle of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The EU noted it proposed language on an interim evaluation, which was also bracketed.

### WORKING GROUP II

Regarding preambular text on new and additional financing, the EU, supported by the US, preferred "adequate" financing, deleting reference to transferring technology on preferential and concessional terms, and retaining language on good governance. Developing countries opposed deleting reference to new and additional financing, with some proposing to replace "financing" with "resources" or "financial resources." CUBA, the AFRICAN GROUP, the AMAZON GROUP and CHINA opposed reference to good governance.

**MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION:** On a subparagraph related to official development assistance (ODA), the EU supported, and the US bracketed, language on reversing the decline in ODA and urging developed countries that have not yet done so to make concrete efforts in accordance with their commitments. The US, opposed by CUBA and the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed ODA be requested and allocated by countries for forest-related activities, and making better use of ODA resources and mechanisms. JAPAN noted language on reversing the decline in ODA was agreed *ad ref* in WGI. ARGENTINA advocated reverting to previously agreed language on text when consensus is not reached.

Regarding subparagraphs on funding mechanisms, SWITZERLAND, supported by the US, proposed a new paragraph describing existing funding mechanisms and how they would administer funds and make them available, which would replace a paragraph on creating a global forest fund. The AMAZON GROUP and the AFRICAN GROUP opposed deleting the subparagraph on a global forest fund. The AMAZON GROUP, supported by INDIA, the AFRICAN GROUP, INDONESIA and others, proposed a new paragraph on strengthening, through new and additional financial resources, provided on a voluntary basis, existing forest-related funds hosted by CPF members.

On creating an effective enabling environment for investment in SFM and developing economic incentives, the US suggested combining text on the two issues, and the Group agreed. ECUADOR voiced concern that "economic incentives" could legitimize subsidies, and it was removed. SWITZERLAND called for inclusion of "forest restoration" to a list of forest-related activities and argued that the list be non-exhaustive. The text was agreed.

On developing innovative financial mechanisms, a simplified paragraph suggested by the US was agreed, with minor amendments. It could not be agreed *ad ref* because of the US argument that it was inextricably linked to a later paragraph on developing market mechanisms. The AMAZON GROUP argued to delete the latter paragraph because it did not acknowledge efforts made, and costs incurred, by heavily forested countries. The AMAZON GROUP, supported by the EU and MALAYSIA, argued for deleting "national" in relation to "systems of payments," while CHINA urged its inclusion. No consensus was reached on these paragraphs.

On legally harvested timber and illegal logging, the Group could not agree on whether reference to either practice could be included in subparagraphs addressing capacity building. While INDIA and the AMAZON GROUP argued that inclusion of the terms was inappropriate, the EU pointed out that it is agreed language from the recently achieved ITTA agreement.

**WORKING MODALITIES:** The US supported retention of a paragraph on strengthening UNFF interaction with major groups, expressing concern over their declining involvement, and distinguished between this paragraph and another on financial support for major group involvement, noting they could live without the latter, while the EU preferred retaining it.

### INFORMAL PLENARY

Delegates agreed to preambular text on "further recalling the 2005 World Summit Outcome." On reaffirming commitment to the Rio Declaration, the AMAZON GROUP requested retaining the principles on the sovereign rights of countries over their natural resources, and common but differentiated responsibilities. VENEZUELA withdrew its proposal to recall the CBD.

On recognizing the importance of the multiple benefits of forests and trees outside forests, CANADA, with COSTA RICA, for the Central American Integration System (SICA), the EU, SWITZERLAND, MEXICO and ARGENTINA, opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP, the AMAZON GROUP, CHINA and INDIA, insisted on retention of reference to environmental services. BRAZIL said "environmental services" is a defined term under the WTO and its use is inappropriate in this context. CANADA said the WTO has not agreed on a definition, noted that previous UNFF documents use the term, and proposed compromise text that refers to environmental benefits provided by forests and trees outside of forests, and associated services. VENEZUELA said they could accept environmental services in an operative paragraph, but not in the preamble. A contact group was established to resolve this, and the group agreed to use the Canadian proposal as a basis for negotiation.

Regarding preambular text on new and additional financing for effective implementation of SFM, delegates asked the Co-Chairs to provide a streamlined text for further consideration.

On strengthening the IAF, the AFRICAN GROUP, supported by the AMAZON GROUP and MALAYSIA, preferred a proposal adding "through increased new and additional resources and voluntary contributions." The US, supported by SWITZERLAND, preferred deleting reference to resources in this paragraph, but if retained, supported including a reference to private, public, domestic and international sources. Delegates agreed to retain a proposal by the AMAZON GROUP, stating "including through increased resources and voluntary contributions from all sources," and deleted all other options, but the text remains bracketed.

On the chapeau to global goals/strategic objectives, the AFRICAN GROUP, the AMAZON GROUP, the US and IRAN preferred "affirms" the shared global goals/strategic objectives, with SWITZERLAND, the EU, MEXICO and GUATEMALA preferring "decides to set."

The EU said it was more important to have a common understanding than debating whether to use "goals" or "strategic objectives," and stressed that the goals/objectives be shared and global.

The AMAZON GROUP, supported by INDONESIA, but opposed by the EU, MEXICO, CANADA and GUATEMALA, opposed reference to a timeline for achieving the strategic objectives.

MEXICO noted that language on achieving the goals by 2015 was essential if the Forum was to be considered the highest-level body on forests in the UN. The US, opposed by CANADA, suggested compromise text stating "aims to work collectively towards their achievement by 2015." MALAYSIA, supported by INDIA, suggested "strives" rather than "aims" to work collectively. Noting this was weak language, NORWAY suggested "will" work collectively.

Delegates debated whether or not to reopen the content of the global goals/strategic objectives in order to clarify language, but could not agree.

### CONTACT GROUPS

**WORKING MODALITIES AND REPORTING:** This contact group, chaired by Irena Zubčević (Croatia), addressed whether the Forum should operate on the basis of a multi-year program of work (MYPOW), and the frequency and length of meetings. The Group decided that the Forum should meet biennially with regional meetings convened in the intervening years. On the length of meetings, delegates decided upon "for a period of up to two weeks." Delegates agreed that the Forum should operate on the basis of a focused MYPOW, to be adopted at UNFF-7 in 2007.

On reporting, the group agreed, with minor amendments, to text suggested by the Chair on reporting progress on national policies, actions and measures towards achieving global goals/strategic objectives. They subsequently deleted wording from a subparagraph on reporting. Within the same paragraph there was polarization over peer-reviewing, and calls for "new and additional" financial resources.

**LEGAL FRAMEWORK:** The contact group, chaired by Tony Bartlett (Australia), discussed reviewing the IAF's effectiveness and whether to elaborate possible options to be considered, but there was no agreement, particularly on whether to reference the LBI option. Delegates also debated the nature of the Forum's input to the 2012-2013 CSD cycle, some noting that forwarding a complex interim evaluation was not appropriate. Some delegates said it was unrealistic to expect agreement on an interim review at this session, and that it would be better discussed during MYPOW discussions at UNFF-7.

**STRENGTHENING POLITICAL COMMITMENT:** The contact group, chaired by Stephanie Caswell (US), made progress on defining a process to complete a voluntary instrument at UNFF-7, involving, *inter alia*: efforts to develop the instrument within UNFF itself; intersessional meetings of government representatives; country-led processes to generate ideas and build political consensus; and utilizing the contents of the country proposals and Secretariat's summaries, annexed to the report as a starting point for further developing the instrument.

### IN THE CORRIDORS

With numerous evening contact groups meeting in parallel, and the final day's 6:00 pm deadline looming, delegates seemed to be getting down to business in the all-too familiar late-night, crowded-room settings familiar to former UNFF participants. Doling out some of the more contentious issues to smaller contact groups seems to have had a positive effect, as paragraphs on issues such as the frequency and duration of future UNFF meetings were quickly agreed to, and some euphoric delegates noted substantial progress on reporting and the voluntary instrument.

Despite vociferous exchanges in plenary, and the same entrenched negotiating positions revisited daily, in light of gains achieved during evening contact groups, there appears to be the possibility of a resolution on the final day of negotiations. Delegates ended the day hopeful that the Chair may have succeeded in creating the sense of urgency necessary to move things forward.

**ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS:** The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of the sixth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF-6) will be available online on Monday, 27 February 2006 at: <http://www.iisd.ca/forestry/unff/unff6/>