

UNFF7 HIGHLIGHTS: FRIDAY, 20 APRIL 2007

On Friday, 20 April, the seventh session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF7) convened at UN headquarters in New York to discuss the non-legally binding instrument (NLBI) on all types of forests, and the Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) for the period 2007-2015. Delegates convened in two working groups throughout the day: Working Group I completed the first reading of a draft composite text on the NLBI; and Working Group II continued discussions on a proposed matrix for the MYPOW on themes and cross-cutting issues. In the afternoon, delegates reconvened in plenary to take stock of the week's work and discuss the way forward.

WORKING GROUP I – NLBI

MONITORING AND REPORTING: The US recommended moving to the MYPOW language: on inviting the CPF to report on its initiatives; and, with Brazil, on synthesis reports. On capacity building, MEXICO, with SWITZERLAND, the US, the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC and the EU, opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP, said technical assistance should not come from the Secretariat. The EU, opposed by ECUADOR, MALAYSIA and INDIA, suggested deleting the paragraph.

On information exchange, the EU suggested focusing on existing organizations or networks, with Mexico specifying through “*inter alia*” existing organizations. BRAZIL, with MALAYSIA and INDIA but opposed by MEXICO, called for focusing on implementation of SFM and the Global Objectives.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER INSTRUMENTS: BRAZIL, AUSTRALIA, ARGENTINA and the US suggested deleting the section on the relationship between the NLBI and other organizations and instruments. The EU, MALAYSIA, MEXICO, COLOMBIA and others opposed deletion, stressing: the importance of international coordination for achieving SFM and the Global Objectives (EU and COLOMBIA); UNFF's role as an umbrella organization for forest-related cooperation (INDIA); the need to avoid duplication of work (EU); and the role of regional processes to provide input to UNFF (CHILE). All delegates supported a proposal by CHINA to address the issue under Means of Implementation and International Cooperation, with the former opponents to this section calling for concrete, action-oriented language.

On regional processes and organizations, IRAN, supported by many, emphasized cooperation through mutual assistance, with MEXICO and BRAZIL calling for a bottom-up relationship between regional processes and the UNFF. AUSTRALIA cautioned against

duplicating the MYPOW. INDIA suggested aligning regional input with UNFF's biennial meeting schedule.

On inviting the CPF to support the Forum's work and the NLBI, the US favored moving this language to an ECOSOC resolution. MEXICO and the US suggested that UNFF identify opportunities for synergies with CPF members, rather than review their work programmes.

INSTITUTIONAL AND WORKING MODALITIES:

BRAZIL, ARGENTINA and ECUADOR, opposed by the EU, the US and the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, suggested deleting text on the UNFF serving as the instrument's governing body. BRAZIL and AUSTRALIA suggested the UNFF monitor and assess: the instrument's implementation; provision of financial resources; and modalities for technology transfer.

On Secretariat collaboration with other bodies, the AFRICAN GROUP opposed denoting major groups. BRAZIL suggested deleting the subparagraph. ARGENTINA and MEXICO, opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP and others, proposed allowing only *ad hoc* bodies. The US suggested alternative language on bodies included in a facilitative process.

BRAZIL, with the US, proposed deleting text on assessing implementation. The EU and others favored deleting a paragraph on regional meetings. NEW ZEALAND emphasized existing processes, but COSTA RICA and others noted many existing processes are too general.

BRAZIL, with VENEZUELA but opposed by CHILE, SWITZERLAND, ARGENTINA and the EU, proposed deleting text on review of progress. On future options, delegates proposed: deleting the paragraph (COLOMBIA); noting a possible future legally binding instrument (EU); or limiting options to “amendments to this instrument” (US). MEXICO and others, opposed by the US and others, proposed a mid-term review in 2011.

ADOPTION/SUBSCRIPTION: Most delegates favored adoption by ECOSOC resolution and suggested moving numerous paragraphs to the resolution text. The EU, MEXICO and CHILE called for adoption by the UN General Assembly. The US and ARGENTINA favored subscription and, with BRAZIL, requested further elaboration on the issue.

VENEZUELA, BRAZIL and MALAYSIA, opposed by the EU, CHILE and the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, suggested deleting paragraphs on amendments, adoption of annexes, and authentic texts.

PREAMBLE: On SFM implementation, the AFRICAN GROUP requested reference to strengthening financial implementation. On reference to the CPF, the EU requested specifying that the CPF is “an” intergovernmental mechanism for SFM implementation rather than

“the key” mechanism. The EU, supported by CROATIA, suggested additional language on forest-related action for combating climate change. Several delegates expressed hesitation with the proposed language, with BRAZIL cautioning against interference with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

MALAYSIA emphasized the importance of forest law enforcement and governance in combating illegal logging and related trade. The EU stressed the importance of major group participation in achieving SFM. ARGENTINA, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION but opposed by BRAZIL, proposed deleting a paragraph on trade policy.

On financial resources, ECUADOR called for enhancing the institutional capacity of developing countries. MALAYSIA, opposed by INDONESIA, requested language expressing concern that forest fires will undermine SFM.

Instead of resolving “to respect and agree to” the NLBI, the AFRICAN GROUP, opposed by the EU, proposed to “agree to adopt.” CHINA stressed “sustainable management of all types of forests” rather than SFM. ARGENTINA, with the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC and CHILE, favored denoting the NLBI as an “instrument,” which the US opposed. BRAZIL called for supporting “actions” rather than “policies and measures.”

The US, with the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, opposed including elements on adoption, principles and purpose in the preamble. The US proposed an alternative preamble consisting of only three paragraphs on, *inter alia*, States reaffirming ECOSOC resolutions relating to the international arrangement on forests (IAF) and desiring to strengthen political commitment and action to achieve SFM. Many supported a shorter preamble, with the EU, BRAZIL, and INDIA calling for retention of references to relevant international outcomes and concepts, such as the Millennium Declaration and the Rio Declaration and Forest Principles.

WORKING GROUP II – MYPOW

Discussing the matrix, delegates debated whether to have two central themes for UNFF8, one focusing on means of implementation and another focusing on the ecological component of forests. The AFRICAN GROUP, supported by CUBA, INDIA, the SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY, URUGUAY and NORWAY, called for means of implementation as a principle theme, as well as a cross-cutting issue.

SWITZERLAND, backed by the AFRICAN GROUP, CUBA and NORWAY, proposed that UNFF8 have two key themes, including one on funding mechanisms. NORWAY, supported by SWITZERLAND and others, proposed UNFF8’s flagship theme be “SFM and climate change.” The AFRICAN GROUP, AUSTRALIA, CUBA and the SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY, proposed the theme “SFM and environmental sustainability.”

The US requested equal emphasis on both means of implementation and governance and law, given inter-linkages between them. The EU: preferred politically relevant themes over technical ones, and means of implementation only as a cross-cutting issue; stressed climate change as an important component of the economic-themed session; and, with BRAZIL, favored focusing on SFM and climate change. BRAZIL supported discussing forests for growth and sustainability during the first cycle.

Regarding prospective tasks under “SFM and environmental sustainability,” the AFRICAN GROUP suggested SFM and climate change, and combating deforestation and desertification. The SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY stressed climate change. Under means of implementation, the AFRICAN GROUP suggested: capacity building and transfer of technology; forest law and governance; financial resources; and, with NEPAL and CUBA, a global funding mechanism. SWITZERLAND preferred “mechanisms.”

Opposed by SWITZERLAND, the EU called for bracketing text on a financing mechanism pending NLBI discussions. The US supported

means of implementation as a key task if a portfolio approach to financing with the option of a forest fund is adopted.

For UNFF9, delegates did not reach agreement on whether the theme should be “SFM” or “forests” for people and livelihoods, with the US stressing the broader appeal of the latter. SWITZERLAND proposed governance and tenure as a subtheme of means of implementation under cross-cutting issues.

Regarding UNFF10, the AFRICAN GROUP, VENEZUELA, INDONESIA and ARGENTINA supported the theme “Forests for growth and sustainability.” The US, supported by the SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY, preferred “Mainstreaming forests in economic development” as it may help mobilize more financial resources into forests. SWITZERLAND proposed environmentally sound technologies as a means of implementation subtheme under cross-cutting issues. The EU proposed an ecological focus and possible discussion of climate change under this theme, but stressed its preference for an economic focus for UNFF8. AUSTRALIA accepted having two themes for UNFF8, but only one for subsequent session, while the EU favored only one theme for each sessions. The PHILIPPINES, NEPAL, PERU, the SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY and others called for a focus on people and communities in forests.

For UNFF11, ARGENTINA proposed that the theme reflect assessing progress towards achieving the Global Objectives and reviewing the effectiveness of the IAF. Noting the need for a broad theme, PAKISTAN proposed the theme “Future of SFM,” and placing Argentina’s proposal under key tasks. The AFRICAN GROUP, backed by CUBA, proposed “IAF: review, challenges and the way forward.” The US, supported by AUSTRALIA and SWITZERLAND, proposed “The world’s forests” instead of “IAF.”

Regarding structure of the MYPOW, the EU, opposed by CUBA, proposed deleting references to intergovernmental preparatory meetings as well as references to cycles. AUSTRALIA bracketed references to high-level segments at UNFF9 and UNFF11, and, opposed by CUBA, mid-term review at UNFF9.

Under resources in the operational text, the US proposed a new paragraph on reporting by the Forum Secretariat on the operation of the UNFF Trust Fund, including the amount and source of contributions and a description of how funds have been expended.

PLENARY

WGI Co-Chair Hamidon Ali reported on WGI’s progress, highlighting contentious paragraphs on trade in forest products and a funding mechanism. WGII Co-Chair Arvids Ozols reported on WGII’s progress, highlighting that WGII achieved a general understanding on the MYPOW’s structure. He noted that several sections of the draft MYPOW were inter-related with WGI’s deliberations. UNFF7 Chair Hans Hoogeveen complemented the delegates’ hard work, and urged them to find common ground for the remaining contentious issues. He said the Secretariat will prepare Co-Chairs’ texts on both the MYPOW and the NLBI, and that he will convene an informal group on means of implementation on Monday.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Under the warm and sunny glow of Friday’s final plenary lurked questions on whether an NLBI will be achieved and how the ongoing pursuit of a legally-binding instrument (LBI) by a group of like-minded countries may affect the outcome. Although a failure to achieve agreement here would likely spur even greater attempts by some countries to produce an LBI among themselves, delegates with this aim in mind were not waiting to find out the outcome of UNFF7. As many delegates headed outdoors this weekend, like-minded countries remained behind closed doors, engaged in intense discussions. Meanwhile, other countries are intent on forestalling any developments towards an LBI by trying to exclude any “convention language” from the NLBI itself.