



Earth Negotiations Bulletin

UNFF-O
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A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

UNFF online at <http://www.iisd.ca/forestry/unff/org/>

Vol. 13 No. 69

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development

Wednesday, 14 February 2001

UNFF INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2001

On the first day of the informal consultations on the UNFF's multi-year programme of work (MYPOW), delegates agreed to the organization of work, heard presentations on the meeting documents, exchanged general remarks and began detailed discussion of programme elements relating to the facilitation and promotion of implementation.

Editors Note: As a matter of policy, the Earth Negotiations Bulletin does not directly attribute statements made by governments in informal negotiations when requested to do so.

PLENARY

ORGANIZATION OF WORK: Chair Mubarak Hussein Rahtmtalla (Sudan) presented a revised organization of work, which assigns discussion of programme elements relating to the functions of the UNFF to sessions during the informal consultations.

A group of developing countries suggested that political commitment is cross-cutting, and should be discussed at the end of the consultations. A developed country suggested that programme elements relating to fostering international and cross-sectoral cooperation, and enhancing cooperation and policy and programme coordination should be combined. She also proposed that the resumed organizational session be held on Thursday, and that Friday's meeting should focus on summary comments on the MYPOW, information for the Secretary General's report, and adoption of the UNFF-O report.

A group of developing countries recalled that the main focus of the UNFF has been on implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action, and emphasized issues related to the valuation of forest goods and services, low forest cover countries and desertification. They proposed that the Plan of Action (PoA) should: focus on ways and means of implementing the IPF/IFF proposals for action; set the framework, objectives and time-bound targets; and give emphasis to unresolved issues regarding trade, finance and technology transfer. They supported the addition of the CCD and FCCC Secretariats and the Global Environment Facility to the CPF, and called for the operationalization of the CPF by UNFF-1. They also supported a set of rules of procedure for the Bureau similar to that of the CSD, yearly elections for the Bureau and a one-year rotating chairmanship.

A developed country, stressing the UNFF's focus on implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action, said that strengthening political commitment will not be the MYPOW's central issue.

Chair Mubarak commented that the informal consultations are not expected to finalize the MYPOW, but to bring a sense of direction for future work and facilitate discussions during UNFF-1. He said that the frequency and timing of multi-stakeholder dialogues and the organization of work should be addressed. He said informal informal consultation on the location of the Secretariat and the Bureau members' terms would take place in parallel on Wednesday. In the afternoon, a revised work schedule was presented and adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF INFORMATION NOTES ON THE MYPOW AND PoA: Jag Maini introduced the information documents on the MYPOW and PoA. On "Suggestion for a MYPOW" (Information Note #1), he remarked that it suggests programme elements and a schedule for the MYPOW, and attempts to balance a number of considerations, including guidance from the resolution, a focus on implementation, enhanced regional involvement, and the timing of high-level segments and other forest-related events. He said the suggested MYPOW translates ECOSOC objectives, functions and specific actions into concrete tasks for the next five years. He underscored identifying the best timing for addressing different programme elements and not overloading the UNFF's agenda in any single year.

Regarding the high-level segment, Maini emphasized the importance of timing and topics, including topics for discussion with heads of CPF organizations. He stressed the importance of the high-level segment providing political guidance to CPF members to indicate where enhanced coordination and cooperation are desirable, and flagged the need to clarify how multi-stakeholder dialogues should be conducted.

Regarding the "Proposed Framework Towards the Development of the PoA" (Information Note #2), Maini commented that development of the PoA will require careful thought, suggested that it be considered annually, and called for early development of the parameters for monitoring. Commenting that the PoA should be based on the IPF/IFF proposals for action, he raised the question of whether it should aim to implement all of the proposals or identify priority areas. He said the PoA should focus primarily on national-level action, with some focus on the regional and international levels. He suggested identifying priority areas for the PoA at UNFF-1 and approving a PoA at UNFF-2, which would include, *inter alia*, targets, timetables, financial provisions, major actors and the CPF's contributions. Maini suggested holding a high-level ministerial segment during UNFF-2, at which time ministers should endorse and collaborate for the implementation of the PoA.

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GENERAL REMARKS: Knut Øistad (Norway) facilitated discussion on the MYPOW, inviting general remarks. A regional group stressed that the MYPOW is critical to the UNFF's success and emphasized that it should translate dialogue into action. She stressed facilitating implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action through national forest programmes (NFPs), and suggested that developing a coordinated reporting system should be among the UNFF's first tasks. She highlighted the importance of high-level segments, multi-stakeholder dialogues and the CPF, and noted the potential for raising the UNFF's profile by varying meeting venues. She proposed that an *ad hoc* working group be established to begin discussions on a legal framework.

A group of developing countries noted the need to distinguish between the MYPOW and the PoA, and between the UNFF as a forum for discussion and the CPF as an implementation-oriented body. Remarking that the UNFF has no operational mechanism, he said finance must be addressed as a cross-cutting issue rather than a separate agenda item as implementation requires finance and technological transfer.

A number of countries emphasized that the main focus of the UNFF should be on implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action. A developing country said the MYPOW should take into consideration Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles. He called for financial means to achieve SFM, support national implementation programmes, and assess progress toward SFM at all levels.

A developed country suggested that thematic areas must be drawn from the IPF/IFF proposals for action and that clusters of issues must be identified to better address cross-sectoral issues, such as financing, in the PoA. She noted that the CPF's success depends on the level of commitment to IPF/IFF priorities and welcomed reports from CPF representatives. She suggested that the CSD provides a suitable example for tenure of a multi-stakeholder dialogue. She supported convening the high-level ministerial segment during UNFF-3 and -5.

A country with an economy in transition highlighted national implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action and suggested developing a legislative framework for all types of forests, possibly through a special working group. He supported holding high-level ministerial segments during UNFF-2 and -5 and suggested UNFF-1 meet for two weeks in June 2001.

A developing country noted the multi-functional nature of forests, and suggested that: elements of the ECOSOC resolution that have taken shape should be implemented; UNFF discussions should focus on unresolved elements; and there should be high-level segments at each session in order to encourage political commitment.

A developed country said the UNFF should concentrate on work not undertaken by other organizations, and called for clear terms of reference for the CPF. A developing country emphasized the consideration of cross-cutting issues, and warned against premature discussion on legal arrangements. A developing country suggested the MYPOW address unresolved issues, such as the creation of an international forest fund and development of mechanisms to allow indigenous peoples and local communities to share benefits from forests. A developed country called for: raising the political profile of forestry; taking full account of the role of all types of forests; and ensuring trade and environment issues are addressed in a mutually supportive manner. Several countries supported adopting the PoA at UNFF-1. A developing country emphasized the importance of NFPs. A group of developing countries remarked that discussion of a forest convention should be avoided, so as not to distract delegates from more immediate matters.

FACILITATE AND PROMOTE IMPLEMENTATION: A group of developing countries commented that discussions on priorities would be lengthy and controversial. Some developed countries

suggested identifying thematic clusters or groupings of issues based on the IPF/IFF proposals for action. A developing country said the time-frame and available resources for implementing the IPF/IFF proposals for action must be considered.

A regional group said the PoA should support implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action primarily at the national level, and stated that countries are primarily responsible for their implementation. She said discussions on financial provisions at the national level should be linked to NFPs and financing strategies for them, and indicated that the PoA and CPF could assist with this. Regarding approaches for defining targets and timetables, she noted this is linked to monitoring and assessing progress and said provisions for assessment by third parties should be made. She said adopting the PoA at UNFF-2 would unnecessarily delay implementation. A developed country identified NFPs, criteria and indicators and low forest cover as priority areas.

A developed country stated that the role of the UNFF is to facilitate and coordinate action, identified three main actors – national governments, the CPF and groups of countries – and noted that the real issue is to determine who should undertake what action. A group of developing countries noted financial support is key for implementation, monitoring and assessment of the PoA, and highlighted the importance of the PoA as a “blueprint for objectives.”

A developed country emphasized the need to build trust prior to addressing complex issues, such as a legally binding instrument. A developed country commented that the CPF should be able to present a joint programme at UNFF-2 and that ways to integrate regional cooperation should be devised during UNFF-1. An NGO representative supported the clustering of elements and suggested two thematic issues be dealt with at each UNFF session. He suggested countries report challenges identified in implementing the IPF/IFF proposals for actions.

Drawing attention to timing and logistical matters, Maini said adoption of the PoA at UNFF-1 may not be feasible. Regarding provision of financial resources, he noted that while some say this is the responsibility of countries, many countries do not have such resources. He flagged as challenges: determining how to mobilize financial support at the country level; and identifying areas where the international community will provide support.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As the informal consultations got underway, the mood was congenial and optimistic, with delegates hoping to make the UNFF a success. While many delegates are eager to place confidence in the process, there is an underlying understanding that the UNFF must prove itself to be something different from the IPF and IFF in order to hold the interest of those who want to avoid another “talk shop” and to see implementation on the ground. Some have expressed concern that the familiar stopping blocks of the IPF and IFF may surface again, specifically matters relating to finance and the question of future legal arrangements.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS: Informal consultations on the MYPOW will resume in the Trusteeship Council Room at 10:00 am. Delegates will continue discussion of programme elements relating to the function “facilitate and promote implementation.” Following this, delegates will discuss programme elements relating to the function “monitoring, assessment and reporting.” In the afternoon, delegates are expected to discuss programme elements relating to the functions “enhance cooperation and policy and programme coordination” and “foster international and cross-sectoral cooperation.”