

GC-24/GMEF HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2007

Delegates at the 24th session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC-24/GMEF) convened in the morning for the opening ceremony, followed by consideration of organizational matters and a panel discussion on globalization and the environment in a reformed UN. In the afternoon, delegates convened in ministerial consultations to hear UNEP Executive Director's policy statement. The Committee of the Whole (COW) also met in the afternoon to consider the budget and programme of work for the biennium 2008-2009.

OPENING CEREMONY: Eric Falt, Director of Communications and Public Information, UNEP, welcomed participants to Nairobi, highlighting that for the first time the GC is being attended by heads of six UN agencies.

Rachmat Witoelar, Indonesia's State Minister for the Environment and outgoing GC/GMEF President, welcomed Achim Steiner as UNEP's fifth Executive Director. He stressed the need to maintain the new strategic focus of UNEP in the context of UN reform following the 2005 World Summit. Highlighting GC-24/GMEF's main theme, he encouraged delegates to consider ways in which globalization can contribute to environmental protection.

In his message to GC-24/GMEF, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the world has reached a critical stage for exercising responsible environmental stewardship, stressing that action on climate change will be one of his priorities. Highlighting the crucial link between environmental and economic policies, he said UNEP has a key role to play in addressing environmental challenges through closer cooperation with UN partners.

Anna Tibaijuka, UN-HABITAT Executive Director, noted that globalization has led to accelerated urbanization. She stressed that the respective mandates of UNEP and UN-HABITAT are now more relevant and complementary than ever, and pledged UN-HABITAT's support to implementing UN system-wide reform.

Moody Awori, Vice-President of Kenya, highlighted Africa's environmental challenges against the backdrop of globalization. He called for a strengthened, more focused and result-oriented UNEP, and for empowering the UNEP Executive Director to implement GC/GMEF decisions.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: The plenary elected Roberto Dobles Mora, Costa Rica's Minister of Environment and Energy, as GC-24/GMEF President. Other Bureau members elected were: Rejoice Mabudafhasi (South Africa), Faisal Saleh Hayat (Pakistan) and Jan Dušik (Czech Republic) as Vice-Presidents; and Elfriede-Anna More (Austria) as Rapporteur. GC-24/GMEF President Dobles said a strong UNEP requires

an adequate mandate and sustainable and predictable funding, to enable it to provide leadership and promote cooperation in the field of the environment. The plenary then adopted the draft agenda without amendment (UNEP/GC/24/1 and Add.1) and agreed on the GC-24/GMEF's organization of work.

The Czech Republic, speaking for the EASTERN EUROPEAN GROUP, highlighted recent developments in the region, and singled out GC-24/GMEF discussions on: UN reform; the Bali Strategic Plan on Technology Support and Capacity-building; and SAICM and mercury.

Indonesia, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, emphasized, *inter alia*: strengthening UNEP and its scientific base; full and immediate implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan, in particular through UN regional offices; and adoption of a decision on South-South cooperation.

Germany, on behalf of the EU, supported the Paris Conference for Global Ecological Governance initiative to transform UNEP into a UNEO. He underscored legally binding, rather than voluntary, measures in support of worldwide sound chemicals management, and called for synergies among the MEAs.

PANEL DISCUSSION ON GLOBALIZATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN A REFORMED UN: Introducing the panel discussion, UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said the presence at GC-24/GMEF of key individuals in UN international environmental policy reflects a commitment to address UN system-wide coherence.

World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General Pascal Lamy pointed to the latest scientific evidence of the global scale of climate change, and said that sustainable development lies at the heart of the WTO. He urged continued support from the environmental community in bringing the WTO Doha Round of negotiations to a successful conclusion. Lamy emphasized the potential of the negotiations to enable a more efficient global allocation of resources as well as, *inter alia*, to reduce: barriers to trade in clean technologies and services; and damaging agricultural subsidies that lead to overproduction.

UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Kemal Dervish noted increased partnership with UNEP. He suggested taking a fresh look at measuring human development, by introducing depletion of natural resources and other essential components. Citing the example of climate change, he highlighted the issue of uneven distribution of impacts of human activities, with the most vulnerable countries most affected.

UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) Director-General Kandeh Yumkella spoke of the challenge of implementing policies at the factory level, particularly in developing countries. He reaffirmed UNIDO's cooperation with UNEP in the SAICM process, and referred to the importance of biofuels and focusing the energy sector on the needs of the poor.

Francesco Frangialli, Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), described global growth in tourism, noting it is both a vector and victim of climate change. He said tourism can result in both increased pressure on biodiversity and communities, and poverty alleviation.

Tibaijuka underscored the human environment perspective, noting that global environmental objectives cannot be achieved without addressing the needs of communities at the local level.

MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS

POLICY STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE

DIRECTOR: UNEP Executive Director Steiner said that environmental issues, notably climate change, have increasingly become a question of economics, security and energy. Steiner urged ministers to help overcome the current impasse in environmental negotiations and assume their collective environmental responsibility, stressing that UNEP is a product of the collective will of its member states.

Noting strategic challenges at the programmatic and managerial levels, Steiner highlighted the establishment of UNEP task teams to address: programmatic cohesion and coordination; management reform; human resources; implementation of UNEP's Gender Plan of Action; and improvement of UNEP's communication and internal infrastructure. He stressed the need to improve cooperation with other environmental organizations and UN institutions and build on the momentum of UN reform. He urged ministers to use the GC platform to provide guidance on the environmental governance system necessary to achieve cohesion and synergies.

PANEL DISCUSSION ON GLOBALIZATION AND

THE ENVIRONMENT: Jian Zhou, China's Vice-Minister of the State Environment Protection Administration (SEPA), emphasized China's commitment to environmental protection while maintaining rapid economic growth. He underscored, *inter alia*: optimizing economic globalization through a shared international sustainable development process; strengthening global cooperation and coordination; and establishing environment-friendly production and consumption patterns.

Connie Hedegaard, Denmark's Minister for the Environment, urged delegates to agree on a process to bring about measurable outcomes on globalization and the environment by GC-25/GMEF. While lamenting WTO's poor track record, she supported Lamy's assertion that the Doha Round of negotiations is an opportunity to dismantle restrictions on trade and ensure joint consideration of environmental and trade issues. Highlighting ecosystem services, she announced Denmark's willingness to contribute financially to joint UNEP and WTO efforts in this regard.

Lamy explored the relationship between trade liberalization and environmental protection, stressing that both WTO and UNEP are driven by their respective member states, noting they should harmonize their national policies.

SENEGAL suggested targeting bilateral cooperation by indicating trade-related issues that can benefit from an environmental perspective, such as transfer of energy-efficient technologies.

Discussion continued in the six ministerial roundtables in late afternoon, which addressed, *inter alia*, opportunities and challenges presented by globalization, ranging from the social impacts of environmental degradation to strengthening environmental governance.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

In the afternoon, COW Chair Jan Dušik welcomed delegates and invited nominations for the position of Rapporteur. Several delegations opposed evening sessions, calling for activities to be concluded in a timely manner, after which the schedule of work (UNEP/GC/24/CW/CRP.1) was agreed.

BUDGET AND PROGRAMME OF WORK: UNEP Deputy Executive Director Shafqat Kakakhel outlined the proposed budget and programme of work (UNEP/GC/24/9). PAKISTAN called for the provision of stable, predictable and adequate financial resources, and expressed support for the

work programme. The EU observed that the proposed budget will require a significant increase in contributions, urging major donors to reconsider contributions to the Environment Fund in light of a reduction in voluntary contributions. Many delegations supported the Bali Strategic Plan, with UGANDA and TUVALU urging funding. CHINA announced it will increase its voluntary contribution to the Environment Fund. SWITZERLAND called for greater attention to the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy and pledged continued support to UNEP. With MEXICO, he suggested a more user-friendly format for the budget and work programme. NORWAY advocated a medium-term strategy. The US commended the proposed budget and suggested keeping new secretariat posts to a minimum.

Kakakhel responded, *inter alia*, by agreeing to present a mid-term strategy at GC-25/GMEF, and added that mainstreaming of the Bali Strategic Plan in the work programme would require significant additional resources.

The COW established a drafting group on the budget and work programme for the biennium 2008-2009, chaired by Jan Bauer (Netherlands).

INTRODUCTION OF DRAFT DECISIONS: Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) Chair Igor Liška (Slovakia) presented draft decisions prepared by the CPR (UNEP/GC/24/L.1) emanating from reports prepared by the UNEP Executive Director and member states. Presentations were also made by co-sponsors of draft decisions (UNEP/GC/24/L.2).

ALGERIA discussed the draft recommendation on declaring 2010-2020 as the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification.

CANADA outlined its draft decision on mercury, expressing concern over the negative impacts of transboundary flows of mercury, and called for the establishment of a dedicated working group. NORWAY, on behalf of the GAMBIA, ICELAND, SENEGAL and SWITZERLAND, tabled the draft decision on international action on mercury, lead and cadmium, calling for: voluntary and intergovernmental commitments; strengthening of the UNEP mercury programme; and establishing a negotiating committee to develop a legal framework. The US introduced its alternative draft decision on these chemicals (UNEP/GC/24/CRP.1), highlighting the need for further action to reduce their use, demand, emissions and supplies, and to enhance the UNEP mercury programme.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

The GC-24/GMEF started off on a high note on Monday, with a sense of expectation in the air, exuded by a record turnout that strained the seating capacity of Conference Room 2. Many delegates were hopeful that the appointment of Achim Steiner as UNEP Executive Director would inject "a new lease of life" into UNEP, guiding it into a new phase in addressing the world's increasingly pressing environmental issues. One of these issues in particular – climate change – was "heating up" the GC-24/GMEF's focus on globalization and environment, and UN reform. One delegate welcomed bringing both climate change and trade discussions into GC/GMEF, noting that these would lead to "bigger and better" policy-making. Others commented on the innovative approaches being taken such as the six ministerial roundtables based on the "Beijing format."

However, despite the excitement generated by the inspiring signals emanating from UNEP's new leadership, some old GC hands cautioned against too much optimism. At least two major issues are being mentioned as sufficiently controversial to dampen the rising spirits. The first is universal membership of the GC, on which opposing country positions seem fossilized, at least for the time being. The second concerns the proposal to establish a negotiating mandate for a global legally binding instrument on mercury, with one delegate suggesting it could gauge the success of GC-24/GMEF, while another expressed "extreme caution" at such a prospect.