

GC-24/GMEF HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2007

On Tuesday, GC-24/GMEF delegates convened in ministerial consultations and the Committee of the Whole (COW). Two contact groups, on the budget and programme of work for 2008-2009 and on chemicals management, also met throughout the day.

MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS

PANEL DISCUSSIONS: Response Options: This panel discussion focused on ways for the multilateral system to respond to country needs. UNIDO Director-General Kandeh Yumkella highlighted supporting developing countries in meeting global environmental norms and standards through: capacity building; supporting coherence between different ministries; and technical and financial assistance for national implementation plans.

Emphasizing unprecedented biodiversity loss and dramatic “knock-on effects” from introducing alien invasive species, CBD Executive Secretary Ahmed Djogla said a new phase of implementation engaging all stakeholders was born at CBD COP-8.

Olav Kjørven, UNDP, said that, as the cross-cutting value of all UN agencies, sustainable development is the ideal starting point for discussing strengthening environmental governance. Referring to UNEP-UNDP collaboration, Kjørven highlighted the potential of: carbon finance; sustainable land management as a solution in carbon sequestration; and market-driven solutions to internalize environmental costs.

AUSTRIA highlighted innovative approaches and public-private partnerships in technology transfer. MALDIVES stressed the importance of strengthening SIDS’ capacities to deal with emerging challenges, while TUVALU said SIDS lack access to the benefits of globalization. BRAZIL noted that environmental efforts depend on technical investments, financial means, access to information, and ethical commitment. UGANDA lamented that the economic returns of sustainability efforts such as biofuel production are insufficient incentives for their expansion. HUNGARY called for tax reforms. A CIVIL SOCIETY representative emphasized the environmental impacts of war. In closing, UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner suggested focusing on opportunities rather than challenges.

Feedback Session: Sigmar Gabriel, Germany’s Minister of Environment, emphasized raising awareness of the security and economic implications of ecosystem destruction. He stressed the need to transform UNEP into a UNEO, noting it should advise the WTO, IMF and the UN Security Council on efficient use of resources.

José Diaz Duque, Cuba’s Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Environment, reflected on environment and globalization from the SIDS’ perspective, calling for a globalization of solidarity, knowledge exchange, and commitment to development assistance.

Jürg Gerber, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, called for, *inter alia*: creation and enforcement of international standards in relation to environmental impacts; strong public-private partnerships; and building a strong business case for ecosystem conservation. Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Director-General, The World Conservation Union (IUCN), stressed the need for the conservation community to understand globalization-environment linkages, in particular under biodiversity loss and climate change beyond 2012. Jacqueline McGlade, European Environment Agency Executive Director, highlighted a “sea-change” in perceptions of environmental issues and proposed that UNEP’s role should include ensuring environmental security. The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives Secretary General Konrad Otto-Zimmermann noted that urban lifestyle increases the environmental burden, and described cities’ initiatives on climate change and “environmental budgeting.” Guy Ryder, International Trade Union Confederation, called for the creation of “green” economies and jobs. He underscored UNEP’s role in encouraging political leaders to take immediate environmental action to secure long-term change. A CIVIL SOCIETY representative lamented “brain drain” and “ecological migration.”

ROUNDTABLE REPORTS: The rapporteurs of the six ministerial roundtables on environment and globalization presented their groups’ discussions, focusing on opportunities, challenges, and respective roles of UNEP and governments.

Among opportunities, they highlighted: new markets for ecosystem services; innovative financial mechanisms; poverty eradication; public-private partnerships; and development and transfer of traditional knowledge and new technologies.

Among challenges, they cited: maintaining cultural diversity and indigenous knowledge; strengthening national capacities; promoting cross-sectoral coherence; addressing equity; involving all stakeholders; capacity building and technology transfer; and identifying barriers to ecosystem valuation.

They suggested that UNEP’s role involve: contributing substantially to the global trade dialogue, including through strengthened collaboration with the WTO; playing a leading role in inter-agency coordination; supporting broader-based civil society participation; creating incentives for sustainability; promoting environmentally sound financing mechanisms; and ensuring equity and sharing of benefits of globalization.

They suggested environment ministers focus on: cross-sectoral integration; appropriate financing for the environment sector; identification of barriers to integration of ecosystem services; full MEA implementation; integration of globalization considerations into national development strategies; incentives for the development of clean and efficient technologies; and greater financial resources for UNEP to assume its facilitating role.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

CHEMICALS MANAGEMENT: UNEP Deputy Executive Director Shafqat Kakakhel introduced the agenda item (UNEP/GC/24/7 and UNEP/GC/24/INF/15-17), highlighting, *inter alia*: UNEP's cooperation with other MEAs on chemicals; SAICM; lead and cadmium; and UNEP's mercury programme.

Many commended UNEP's work on chemicals. The US stressed that it supported further action on mercury, noting that partnerships are more effective than legally binding mandates. NORWAY said voluntary actions are insufficient, and urged development of a legally binding framework on mercury. Uganda, on behalf of the AFRICA GROUP, voiced its support to the proposal, saying that the binding commitment on mercury should include lead and cadmium. JAPAN spoke in favor of separate action on mercury and suggested establishing an international expert group to consider further action.

Germany, on behalf of the EU, reiterated the importance of a legally binding instrument, and said that voluntary initiatives have not led to reduced use of mercury. BRAZIL suggested examining a fund within a legally binding instrument to assist developing countries. AUSTRALIA proposed making a full analysis of possible responses. CANADA said it sees no need for additional work on lead and cadmium, and prefers concentrating on mercury.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION said a legally binding instrument may be adopted after alternative technologies are found, and cautioned against adverse consequences of a total ban. The GAMBIA said voluntary commitments cannot restrict trade. COLOMBIA referred to the proliferation of MEAs that lack proper funding, and indicated that there is insufficient scientific information for a legally binding instrument on lead and cadmium. SWITZERLAND stressed that increased cooperation with developing countries needs a strong legal framework. Discussions continued in a contact group.

STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT: On this agenda item (UNEP/GC/24/5, UNEP/GC/24/10, and UNEP/GC/24/INF/2-8), many delegations expressed appreciation and support for UNEP's assessment activities. TUVALLU urged UNEP to take a strategic approach and implement a special programme on SIDS as enunciated under the Mauritius Strategy as well as developing vulnerability assessment tools. The EU suggested consultations with end users of information to ensure accessibility and relevance. The US cautioned against the proliferation of global environmental assessments. Indonesia, on behalf of G-77/CHINA, called for the strengthening of UNEP's scientific base, and for improving environmental governance structures in developing countries.

COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITH THE UN SYSTEM: On this agenda item (UNEP/GC/24/INF/9 and UNEP/GC/24/INF/13-19), NEW ZEALAND called for closer collaboration with the GEF and the UN Development Group. CHINA urged improved cooperation between UNEP and the World Bank. The AFRICA GROUP highlighted the relevance of the Bali Strategic Plan in the context of NEPAD's capacity-building objectives. UNESCO identified areas for increased synergy between UNEP and UNESCO, including: scientific, technical and technological issues; disaster preparedness and mitigation; and capacity building. UNDP highlighted the scaling up of the UNDP-UNEP Poverty Environment Initiative and the creation of a UNDP-UNEP Poverty Environment Facility to support mainstreaming of poverty environment issues in national development plans. The INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION noted it is developing an environmental damage assessment tool and highlighted cooperation with UNEP-administered MEAs. UN OFFICE FOR COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS (OCHA) noted joint UNEP-OCHA efforts on disaster and risk reduction, coordinated humanitarian response, and longer-term rehabilitation.

COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY: Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF) Co-Chair Michael Koech reported on the outcomes of GCSF-8, noting recommendations to UNEP on globalization, gender, water, chemicals management and war and militarism. The EU expressed satisfaction regarding UNEP's cooperation with civil society (UNEP/GC/24/INF/10/Add.1-6). WOMEN'S ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION urged full implementation of UNEP's Gender Plan of Action.

IPCC REPORT: IPCC Chair Rajendra Pachauri presented key findings of the report "Climate Change 2007, The Physical Science Basis." He noted a significant increase in global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide as a result of human activities since 1750, stressing that the warming of the climate system is "unequivocal." Pachauri called for translating intense media attention into specific policy actions.

CONTACT GROUPS

BUDGET AND PROGRAMME OF WORK: Contact group Chair Jan Bauer (Netherlands) opened discussions on the proposed budget and programme of work for 2008-2009 (UNEP/GC/24/9). The EU and G-77/CHINA expressed overall satisfaction with the proposed budget and programme of work. The group discussed, *inter alia*, staffing issues, Bali Strategic Plan activities, South-South cooperation, and results-based management.

On budgetary issues (UNEP/GC/24/9/Add.1, UNEP/GC/24/9/Add.2, and UNEP/GC/24/INF/6), David Hastie, UNEP, noted, *inter alia*: the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions' endorsement of the proposed programme of work and budget; an increase in Environment Fund contributions in 2006 and optimistic projections for 2007; and a possible US\$10 million budget shortfall in 2008-2009 based on an estimated income of approximately US\$150 million.

The group then considered the draft decision (UNEP/GC/24/L.1). Bracketed references include: the voluntary indicative scale of contributions; medium-term strategy; and the overall figure for the programme of activities for 2010-2011. Discussions will continue on Wednesday.

CHEMICALS: The contact group, co-chaired by Donald Hannah (New Zealand) and Abiola Olanipekun (Nigeria), met in the afternoon to consider three draft decisions tabled by the US (UNEP/GC/24/CRP.1), Canada (UNEP/GC/24/CRP.2), and by the Gambia, Iceland, Norway, Senegal and Switzerland (UNEP/GC/24/L.2). Discussion focused on further global action on mercury. Preferences ranged from deciding on an immediate negotiating process towards a legally binding instrument, to incorporating mercury into existing agreements, or concentrating on voluntary actions, especially through partnerships. One delegate questioned whether enough political support exists at GC-24/GMEF for such an instrument. Several delegates urged considering all current options, with one stressing that, pending further assessment by UNEP, a final decision on a legally binding instrument is premature.

A new draft decision on heavy metals was circulated by the EU, which proposes the establishment of an *ad hoc* working group to address mercury issues through a legally binding regulation, and to report to GCSS-10/GMEF with recommendations on the format and content of a legally binding regulation, with possible extension to other chemicals of global concern.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

Following the elation of the GC-24/GMEF opening, on Tuesday negotiators had the first opportunity to sink their teeth into the draft decisions. The majority of these decisions had been through the Committee of Permanent Representatives grind. However, as some GC veterans pointed out, draft documents developed in Nairobi are likely to undergo substantive changes once diplomats from capitals have arrived. At the same time, some last-minute submissions by member states and consideration of draft decisions late in the day caught some delegations unawares, generating much commotion in the COW. Procedural frictions and deep-seated disagreements on substance challenged the Chair to "walk the tight rope of diplomacy," resulting in deferral of draft decisions to Wednesday. However, once the discussion on chemicals was moved into a contact group, some insiders saw light at the end of the tunnel with respect to mercury, speculating that an *ad hoc* expert group on the issue may be established by the conclusion of GC-24.

Despite general satisfaction with the proposed budget and programme of work, the voluntary indicative scale of contributions soon emerged as a sticking point in the contact group. Still, some participants were betting on a record-breaking early completion of the group's work.