

GC-24/GMEF HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2007

On Thursday, GC-24/GMEF ministerial consultations considered reports from the ministerial roundtables on globalization and UN reform. The COW continued consideration of draft decisions, and addressed implementation of the UNEP programme of work, and WSSD follow-up. The drafting group, numerous contact groups and a Friends of the Chair group also met during the day and late into the night to finalize draft decisions.

MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS

In the morning, Marina Silva, Brazil's Minister of Environment, and Sigmar Gabriel, Germany's Minister of Environment, presented the summaries of the ministerial roundtables on globalization and the environment (UNEP/GG/24/CRP.3) and UN reform (UNEP/GC/24/CRP.4).

Silva outlined options for activities to be undertaken by governments, UNEP and the international community. Gabriel highlighted emerging consensus on the need to reform the institutional framework for UN environmental activities, also stressing strengthening UNEP and ensuring that the future UN body provides leadership in the field of the environment.

Discussing the Chair's Summary of the ministerial consultations in the afternoon, many delegations expressed satisfaction with the progress made and the format of the ministerial roundtables.

ARGENTINA said that an understanding of market mechanisms is required to formulate appropriate policies for governments and multilateral entities. ETHIOPIA cautioned against bringing complicated trade issues such as intellectual property rights into UNEP discussions. INDIA said many countries are not ready for new legally binding instruments and cautioned against excessive centralization and bureaucratization of UNEP. KYRGYZSTAN called for increased UNEP representation in Central Asia.

Referring to delegates as the custodians of their countries' environment and to GMEF as the global environmental custodian, UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said sound environmental governance requires an understanding of the driving forces in other arenas, including trade, and identified the WTO's presence as a highlight of GC-24/GMEF.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

DRAFT DECISIONS: International center for judicial capacity building in environmental law in Cairo: The G-77/CHINA supported the draft decision (UNEP/GC/24/CW/CRP.3) introduced by EGYPT. CANADA and the EU opposed the draft decision, noting that the draft had been tabled at a late stage. NIGERIA cautioned against "killing the subject." Discussion was referred to a contact group.

In the evening, EGYPT withdrew the draft decision, noting that its offer to host the center will be recognized in the GC-24/GMEF report.

Intensified environmental education for achieving policy goals and targets: The draft decision (UNEP/GC/24/CW/CRP.4) was agreed with amendments proposed by the EU and NIGERIA requesting the UNEP Executive Director to: make adequate resources available to support environmental education activities in developing countries; and keep governments informed of progress.

Small island developing states: NEW ZEALAND, INDIA and INDONESIA supported the draft decision (UNEP/GC/CW/CRP.8) introduced by TUVALU. On preambular text, INDIA and the US requested deleting reference to the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change. On the establishment of a special SIDS desk at UNEP, the Secretariat elaborated on relevant UNEP activities. The EU supported the Secretariat and cautioned against "micro-managing" UNEP's work programme. A contact group was established.

In the afternoon, the contact group presented a compromise text, which includes provisions on: enhancing UNEP's activities on SIDS to identify further efforts on the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy; mainstreaming the Strategy into UNEP's work; enhancing UNEP's efforts on adaptation to the impacts of climate change in SIDS and low-lying states; and strengthening links with UNFCCC and other relevant agencies.

Committing resources towards the implementation of decision 23/11: SOUTH AFRICA introduced the draft decision (UNEP/GC/24/CW/CRP.9). Citing resource implications, the US opposed a paragraph on strengthening capacity of the Global Network of Women Ministers of the Environment. Following SOUTH AFRICA's clarification that anticipated support was technical, the COW agreed to compromise language noting the important cooperation between UNEP and this Network, and approved the draft decision.

World environmental situation: Delegates approved the draft decision with minor amendments. Earlier, in the Friends of the Chair group, discussion focused on UNEP's mandate and governance issues in the context of the draft decision. The group succeeded in finalizing the draft decision by making a general reference to various scientific assessments instead of their specific findings. The paragraph inviting financial contributions to the "assessment of assessments" was also removed.

Updated water policy and strategy: ARGENTINA introduced various amendments to UNEP's updated water policy and strategy (UNEP/GC/24/4/Add.1), notably references to payment for ecosystem services. In relation to regional and sub-regional cooperation mechanisms, language was added on creating or strengthening capacity to evaluate, manage and coordinate the environmental management aspects of the transboundary resources. The decision was approved with amendments.

Provisional agendas, dates and venues of GCSS-10/GMEF and GC-25/GMEF: Delegates approved the draft decision (UNEP/GC/24/CRP.10) with minor amendments.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNEP PROGRAMME OF WORK: UNEP Deputy Executive Director Shafqat Kakakhel described UNEP's activities and achievements to date (UNEP/GC/24/6, UNEP/GC/24/INF/5 and UNEP/GC/24/INF/11). Among areas for improvement, he highlighted capacity building, training and support to developing countries. The US and the EU urged UNEP to internalize environmental considerations into its procurement policies.

WSSD FOLLOW-UP: Kakakhel introduced the agenda item, highlighting: cooperation with the CSD, UNDP, IUCN, the Global Renewable Energy Network, and governments. Participants urged increased cooperation with UNDP, UNIDO and UNFCCC.

OTHER MATTERS: Atlas of Our Changing Environment: Mick Wilson, UNEP, presented on the UNEP "Atlas of Our Changing Environment: One Planet, Many People," now featured in Google Earth, noting it is a powerful tool for showcasing environmental change, and helps bridge the North-South information gap.

Occupied Palestinian territories: UNEP Deputy Executive Director Kakakhel, on behalf of UNEP Executive Director, delivered an address on UNEP activities relating to environmental protection and capacity building in the occupied Palestinian territories.

DRAFTING GROUP

SUPPORT TO AFRICA: One developed country's proposal to introduce new text led to informal consultations, which were reported as nearing agreement.

WASTE MANAGEMENT: A group of developed countries introduced its proposal on the draft decision, which resulted from informal consultations. The drafting group began consideration of the revised draft decision in the afternoon. Discussions focused on preambular references to relevant processes and initiatives, as well as the scope and content of an overview report on the issue to be prepared by UNEP for future GC/GMEF meetings. Deliberations continued late into the night.

IEG: Discussions in the morning revolved around text on developing country participation in the *Ad Hoc* Joint Working Group of the Stockholm, Rotterdam and Basel conventions, with several developed countries stressing the mandate of the relevant COPs to decide on attendance. The group discussed whether the draft should refer to "synergies" or "cooperation and collaboration" between UNEP and the chemicals MEA cluster. As debate continued, one developed country emphasized that enhancing synergies on a general level has been on the agenda for a long time and that the *Ad Hoc* Joint Working Group should be welcomed as the first sectoral process in this regard.

The group also discussed options for language on UNEP's role in promoting enhanced coordination of environmental activities across the UN system, focusing on the Environment Management Group (EMG). Many developing countries said the EMG is outside the mandate of the GC, and that enhanced coordination remains a matter for the UN General Assembly, pending consideration of the results of the Informal Consultations on the Institutional Framework for UN Environmental Activities. Other countries maintained that UNEP is the appropriate forum for such coordination.

On strengthening the scientific base of UNEP, the group held a lengthy debate over proposed text on the draft Environment Watch Strategy Vision 2020, with one developed country delegation requiring clarification on financial and other implications of the Strategy's assessment pillar before being in a position to "welcome" the proposal, emphasizing it has not been approved by the GC. Following submission of compromise text from one developing country to request the Secretariat to report back to GC-25 with a revised proposal, including component cost estimates for work proposed for the 2008-2009 biennium, agreement appeared possible.

Debate on universal membership remained divisive. The group also discussed preambular text references to the World Summit Outcome on the need for strengthened environmental governance (paragraph 169) and the "Cartagena package" contained in decision 23/1.

Deliberations continued late into the night on all these issues, with small groups attempting to resolve differences.

CONTACT GROUPS

BUDGET AND PROGRAMME OF WORK: The group continued consideration of the draft decision, agreeing to compromise language on South-South cooperation, poverty and environment linkages, and the Bali Strategic Plan. Discussions also continued on the bracketed text referring to the voluntary indicative scale of contributions and the indicative figure for Environment Fund activities under the 2010-2011 programme of work. The meeting was adjourned in early afternoon, pending outcomes in the drafting group and COW outcomes on IEG.

CHEMICALS: The contact group on chemicals resumed in the morning. It approved, with several amendments, the draft text on SAICM, which had been elaborated earlier by a small drafting group.

On mercury, negotiations continued throughout the day, with small breakout drafting groups attempting to resolve specific differences on text. The contact group worked on the basis of a new Chair's draft decision tabled early in the morning. It considered the draft decision segment by segment: preamble, lead and cadmium issues, actions on mercury (track 1), and the process leading to the establishment of an *ad hoc* working group, whose mandate would include the option of an international legal instrument (track 2). Much of the Chair's draft was cleared by the evening, in particular on other heavy metals, risk reduction priorities, information gathering, and other technical points. The process towards convening the working group was discussed at length, as well as issues it should consider. However, the contact group found it difficult to resolve the controversial question of how to reference a future legal instrument, a matter of principle for several negotiators. After lengthy discussions, a delegation agreed to mention that the *ad hoc* working group will "consider enhanced voluntary measures and new or existing international legal instruments." While accepting this language, a group of countries insisted on retaining, in another part of the text, the proposition that "further long-term international action, including the option of a global legally binding regulation of mercury, is required." This raised objections from several delegations, who considered the first reference sufficient. The contact group continued its negotiations late into the night.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

On Thursday, GC-24/GMEF deliberations appeared to take "one step forward, two steps back," in the words of one seasoned negotiator. In contrast with the call, in ministerial consultations, by the Co-Chairs of Informal Consultative Process and UNEP Executive Director, to make Nairobi's message heard in New York and capitals around the world, references to UN reform processes in the draft decision on international environmental governance were teetering in the balance by the end of the day.

Meanwhile, negotiators dealing with mercury repeatedly compared the draft decision to "a Land Rover stuck in the mud." The most stalwart efforts to extricate it did not succeed as staunch opposition by some of the world's largest countries to committing now to a future legally binding instrument on mercury seemed to drive it further into the mire.

On a more positive note, delegates were pleasantly surprised by the outcome of the Friends of the Chair group on the world environmental situation. Developing country delegates appreciated references to national- and regional-level implementation and the Bali Strategic Plan, and the general spirit of compromise was reflected in one delegate's reported confession that he had stretched his brief in letting the draft decision go through.

ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS: The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of GC-24/GMEF will be available on Monday, 12 February 2007, online at: <http://www.iisd.ca/unepgc/24unepgc/>