

GC-26/GMEF HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2011

Delegates at the 26th session of the GC-26/GMEF convened in the morning for ministerial consultations on the green economy, and for the IEG, State of the Environment and the Budget and Programme of Work in the COW. In the afternoon, delegates met in four ministerial roundtables on the green economy, while the Committee of the Whole (COW) continued discussions on the State of the Environment and the coordination and cooperation within the UN system. The drafting group met throughout the day and into the night to consider the draft decision on IEG. The Budget and Programme of Work contact group met during the day. The contact group on chemicals and waste reported it anticipated completing its work by mid-day Wednesday.

MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS

On Tuesday morning, GC-26/GMEF President Aguilar Rivero (Spain) opened the session expressing solidarity with those affected by the earthquake in New Zealand.

Describing his country's efforts on the environment, Kenya's Prime Minister Raila Odinga stressed several messages, saying that developing country concerns about green economy-related barriers to trade are legitimate and that GMEF deliberations must identify and address these trade-related concerns.

Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for the Environment, EU, emphasized that Rio 2012 provides an opportunity to accelerate progress towards the green economy and proposed endorsement of a framework to develop coherent policies for resources. Pavan Sukhdev, UNEP, presented the Green Economy Report, noting its aim of countering "myths and misconceptions" about the economics of greening.

PANEL DISCUSSION: Sherry Ayittey, Minister of Environment, Science and Technology, Ghana, moderated a panel discussion on country-level challenges of a transition to a green economy.

Denis Kellman, Acting Minister of the Environment, Water Resources and Drainage, Barbados, highlighted efforts to strengthen regulatory regimes, engage local communities and embed sustainability in public finance strategies. Jung-Ho Moon, Vice-Minister for Environment, Republic of Korea, outlined Korea's policies, institutions and visions for low-carbon green growth. Robert Watson, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK, highlighted that although concrete definitions of a green economy might be restrictive, a common understanding of the concept is needed to maximize opportunities.

SINGAPORE encouraged focusing on practical implementation strategies for, rather than definitions of, a green economy, while IRAN stressed the need for international consensus on the definition of the green economy. Hungary, on behalf of the EU, emphasized the potential of the green economy for trade, services and job creation. SOUTH AFRICA warned that the green economy should not be used to impose

conditionalities and trade barriers. VENEZUELA added concerns over potential political and social consequences of the green economy. FINLAND highlighted her government's work on indicators to replace GDP accounting methods.

On the long-term consequences of failing to implement a green economy, NORWAY stressed that these would include no economic growth or poverty reduction, and environmental degradation. IUCN expressed the view that effective participation of civil society is essential for a successful transition to a green and equitable economy.

MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLES: On Tuesday afternoon, discussions on the green economy continued in four ministerial roundtables, co-chaired by: Terezya Luoga Hovisa, Minister of State, Vice-President's Office, Tanzania, and Rashid Ahmad Bin Fahad, Minister of Environment and Water, UAE (roundtable one); Doris Leuthard, Federal Counsellor, Head of the Federal Department for Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications, Switzerland and Amedi Camara, Minister of Finance, Mauritania (roundtable two); Hasan Mahmud, Minister of the Environment, Bangladesh and Graciela Muslera, Environment Minister, Uruguay (roundtable three); and Gusti Muhammad Hatta, State Minister for the Environment, Indonesia and Jochen Flasbarth, President, Federal Environment Agency, Germany (roundtable four).

In the roundtable discussions, participants discussed, among other things: social equity in economic transitions; mechanisms for technology and knowledge transfers; examples of policy strategies employed at the national level to promote renewable energy and other environmental innovation; and definitions of the green economy.

NIGER emphasized the importance of equity in any implementation of a green economy, and CHAD stressed the need for North-South cooperation. INDIA highlighted the importance of market-led processes rather than government-based subsidies. SAUDI ARABIA recommended mobilizing incentives from financial institutions to fund research and innovation. On the global trade system, CHINA underscored the need for an economic order that is fair and environmentally friendly.

Offering examples of national experiences in the green economy, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION outlined its climate doctrine and energy strategy aimed at promoting a low-carbon economy, and DENMARK described its "strict" environmental policies and support for environmental innovation. PAKISTAN asked whether the green economy is a reaffirmation of the Rio principles. ITALY highlighted the need for a global transition to an economic system that supports sustainable development, noting that the current economic model is unlikely to assist countries in achieving multiple goals, such as water, food security and climate change. The US noted that a green economy should accommodate short-term job and growth needs, which he said are politically pressing issues.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

POLICY ISSUES: International environmental

governance: On Tuesday, delegates continued discussions on IEG. JAPAN and BRAZIL said the high-level expert group on IEG should seek feedback from governments. The US expressed concerns about inadequate discussions on incremental reforms, and with the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, IRAN, ARGENTINA and EGYPT, opposed the creation of a UN Environment Organization (UNEO) for several reasons, including budgetary implications and undermining of the current international architecture. COLOMBIA, SERBIA, AUSTRALIA and Belgium on behalf of the EU supported a “highly strengthened” IEG structure. The EU proposed incremental reform and broader transformation leading to a UNEO. SENEGAL said a political compromise is needed to provide concrete proposals to the Rio 2012 PrepCom Two.

State of the Environment – sustainable consumption and production: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (UNEP/GC.26/7, UNEP/GC.26/7/Add.1, UNEP/GC.26/INF/16, UNEP/GC.26/L.1), seeking a mandate to adopt the 10-year framework programme (10YFP) at the 19th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 19).

The US supported adoption of the draft decision without amendment. ISRAEL and JAPAN recommended that UNEP continue to harness expertise of States. PANAMA said the reference to strengthening linkages among programs required clarity on how these would be achieved. NICARAGUA and FIJI called for more emphasis on technology transfer.

State of the Environment – world environment situation: The Secretariat, in introducing the relevant documents (UNEP/GC.26/4, UNEP/GC.26/4/Add.1, UNEP/GC.26/INF/2, UNEP/GC.26/INF/13, UNEP/GC.26/INF/20, UNEP/GC.26/L.1), briefed delegates on recent work, including the establishment of UNEP-Live. Renate Christ, IPCC, described progress towards the IPCC’s fifth assessment report and recommendations to improve performance on efficiency, governance, conflict of interest issues and communications. Hungary, for the EU, recommended balancing scientific aspects with stakeholder involvement. ARGENTINA and CUBA requested deletion of references to the Copenhagen climate change agreement; CUBA also requested removal of references to the UN “Delivering As One” Initiative.

On the Fifth Edition of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO-5), NORWAY and the US remarked on underfunding, while SWITZERLAND called for a chapter on policy. KENYA requested increased capacity building for the generation of policy-relevant scientific data.

State of the Environment - intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services: The Secretariat introduced documents UNEP/GC.26/6 and UNEP/GC.26/L.1.

INDIA, ISRAEL, SWITZERLAND, NORWAY, KENYA and the US expressed strong support for the establishment of an IPBES based on a resolution of the 65th session of UNGA and outcomes from the Busan intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting in 2010. INDIA proposed locating IPBES in a “mega-diverse” country. SWITZERLAND said the institutional structure should be agreed first. The REPUBLIC of KOREA said they would provide financial support to the secretariat. JAPAN requested that the first meeting of the platform be held as soon as possible.

EGYPT and CUBA emphasized that the UN General Assembly resolution did not establish an IPBES, and that a plenary meeting should decide the “final modalities of an IPBES” to be endorsed at the UN General Assembly this year. NORWAY said the UN General Assembly resolution *de facto* establishes IPBES, adding that an IPBES should work in cooperation with UNEP, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, UN Development Programme and the UN Environmental Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO declared its interest in hosting or co-hosting the secretariat.

State of the Environment – south-south cooperation, oceans, status of environmental treaties: The Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (UNEP/GC.26/9, UNEP/GC.26/INF/14, UNEP/GC.26/10, UNEP/GC.26/INF/8, UNEP/GC.26/L.1). ARGENTINA said precautions should be taken to ensure that projects intended to protect coastal systems do not

impact negatively on marine food chains. The PHILIPPINES urged for consultations on activities of existing coastal programmes to avoid duplication of efforts. Hungary, for the EU, underlined the importance of ecosystem-based policies.

State of the Environment – chemicals and waste management: On Tuesday afternoon, the contact group on chemicals and waste reported to the COW on their progress, saying that consensus had been reached on a merged resolution on chemical wastes and electronic wastes, and a resolution on lead and cadmium. He noted the group’s intention to complete their remaining work by mid-day Wednesday.

DRAFT DECISIONS: In reviewing draft decisions on crisis response and water monitoring (UNEP/GC.26/L.1), HUNGARY proposed language to expand UNEP’s work in water quality data collection and monitoring to include water quantity issues, and to strengthen regional partnerships. The US said that this risked diluting UNEP’s current objective to improve water quality data and monitoring, which he said was an important issue for most countries. HUNGARY clarified the intention was to achieve better coherence of the system and improve cooperation by connecting national focal points to UNEP. The Chair requested the US, Canada, Hungary and other interested parties to develop proposed text. BRAZIL proposed a series of amendments to recognize other important water-related initiatives, particularly those led by UNESCO.

BUDGET AND PROGRAMME OF WORK: The Secretariat introduced documents on the budget and programme of work for 2012-2013, Environment Fund and other budgetary matters (UNEP/GC.26/13, UNEP/GC.26/13/Add.1, UNEP/GC.26/14/Rev.2, UNEP/GC.26/INF/6, UNEP/GC.26/INF/6/Add.1, UNEP/GC.26/INF/7, UNEP/GC.26/INF/21/Rev.1, UNEP/GC.26/L.1), highlighting provisions for the six cross-cutting thematic priorities of UNEP; steps to implement efficiency measures including reduction in the travel budget; and delaying of recruitment into vacant positions.

The US and JAPAN requested UNEP to adjust its work programme in case of budget shortfalls, noting a decline in Environment Fund contributions. SWITZERLAND called on states falling below the agreed scale to increase their contributions. CHILDREN and YOUTH requested incentives for young entrepreneurs to start green businesses.

COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM ON ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS: The Secretariat presented documents on: coordination and cooperation within the UN system on environmental matters with regards to GEF instruments; implementation of MOUs between UNEP and UNDP and between UNEP and other UN agencies; joint progress report with UN-Habitat; and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on the environmental profile of the UN organizations and their in house environmental management policies and practices (UNEP/GC.26/12, UNEP/GC.26/INF/15, UNEP/GC.26/15, UNEP/GC.26/INF/9, UNEP/GC.26/INF/9/Add.1, UNEP/GC.26/INF/10, UNEP/GC.26/INF/22, UNEP/GC.26/L.1).

JAPAN and the US lauded the JIU report, with JAPAN saying it should be disseminated to non-UN agencies. The US also supported the UNEP-UNDP collaboration on the Poverty-Environment Initiative, saying its bottom-up approach responds to countries’ needs. NORWAY supported the US and urged UNEP to continue strengthening collaboration with other UN agencies.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

On Tuesday, delegates grappled with a set of draft GC/GMEF decisions, among which the IEG took a good portion of the day. Most delegates thought this text would be particularly difficult to draft, given its politicized nature. From the very start, negotiators differed on the best way to deal with the Nairobi-Helsinki consultative group’s outcome: whether to send it to the Rio 2012 preparatory process in New York, to CSD-19, or to the UN General Assembly. Some argued for a deeper examination of options for broader institutional reform by way of a new expert study or a series of workshops. As one participant ruefully observed, it was probably the best the negotiators could hope for, given the persistent doubts of some governments on the usefulness of establishing a WEO.