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HIGHLIGHTS OF BIOCOP-2 TUESDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 1995

Delegates to the second session of the Conference of the Parties (COP-2) to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) met for the second day of the two-week conference. The Plenary met briefly in the morning to consider the budget of the trust fund. The Committee of the Whole (COW) discussed the report of SBSTTA, the establishment of the clearing-house mechanism, technology transfer, and the biosafety protocol during morning and afternoon meetings.

PLENARY

COP-2 President Kusumaatmadja (Indonesia) announced that, in their first meeting, the Bureau agreed that Dr. Avrim Lazar (Canada) would serve as Chair of the COW and Suzana Guziová (Slovakia) as Rapporteur. Mr. Augustine Bokwe (Cameroon) will conduct consultations with regional representatives on matters related to pending issues arising from COP-1 (UNEP/CBD/COP/2/4). Mrs. A.K. Ahuja (India) was appointed Chair of the Credentials Committee.

BUDGET OF THE TRUST FUND: The Executive Secretary introduced the Budget of the Trust Fund (UNEP/CBD/COP/2/3), the first attempt to make a detailed costing of the COP's medium-term programme of work. An addendum (UNEP/CBD/COP/2/3/Add.1) incorporates the financial implications of the biosafety and SBSTTA meetings and the clearing-house mechanism (CHM). The Bureau discussed the establishment of an open-ended contact group on the budget to be chaired by Mr. Peter Unwin (UK).

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Dr. Avrim Lazar (Canada) called to order the Committee of the Whole (COW), which first considered the Report of SBSTTA (UNEP/CBD/COP/2/5).

REPORT OF SBSTTA: KOREA, later supported by COLOMBIA and INDONESIA, cautioned against the proliferation of SBSTTA sub-structures and called for transparency, cost-effective coordination of work and balanced consideration of issues. He noted an undue emphasis on over-fishing relative to land-based threats to marine biodiversity. INDONESIA noted the report's recognition of NGO participation. JAPAN supported allocating more time to substantive issues, thereby allowing the SBSTTA to fulfill its advisory mandate.

INDIA noted that expert panels should be established according to subjects on which COP requires advice.

ZIMBABWE supported regional and sub-regional meetings for both SBSTTA and COP. SWEDEN proposed two or three "ad hoc technical intersessional working groups;" periodic reporting on global biodiversity based on an ecosystem rather than regional approach; and a drafting group to formulate input to the CSD on forests and biodiversity.

AUSTRALIA suggested a formal coordinating body of high-level representatives from a variety of organizations. The NETHERLANDS suggested no more than two ad hoc panels with limited, clear mandates. The BAHAMAS encouraged informal intersessional meetings organized by governments. DENMARK proposed COP-2 discussion on how COP should work in the future. NEW ZEALAND supported simultaneous consideration of SBSTTA's and COP's work programmes.

FINLAND stressed forest assessments and national forest and land use plans; underlying causes of deforestation; protection and use of traditional forest-related knowledge; and criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. BRAZIL noted that COP could offer the expertise of SBSTTA to other UN bodies. MAURITIUS suggested more than one annual session of SBSTTA. GERMANY proposed that the assessment of SBSTTA be made by an independent organization. MALAWI stressed freshwater ecosystems. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION supported international bodies' work on forests. The UK supported expert intersessional work, but called for flexibility in organizing it.

SENEGAL supported a limited number of working groups with pre-determined life spans and mandates. CHINA stressed the need for prioritization. The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF KOREA emphasized the importance of work on coastal and marine biodiversity. FRANCE noted that COP determines the mandate for the panels. CANADA suggested using telecommunications to prepare for SBSTTA, which should reduce the need for panel meetings. ARGENTINA stressed the importance of work on IPR. PERU called on the Secretariat to circulate its proposal regarding regional focal points.

The incoming chair, Mr. P.J. Schei of NORWAY, noted that the heavy 1996 workload may justify greater financial and human resources; affirmed that SBSTTA's priorities will derive from COP; and cautioned against the proliferation of sub-panels. The current SBSTTA Chair, Mr. J.H. Seyani of MALAWI, commented that SBSTTA might benefit from more time for deliberations; suggested two parallel sessions; affirmed SBSTTA's role as advising COP on scientific and technical issues, not setting priorities; and encouraged SBSTTA to coordinate with other UN bodies. GREENPEACE requested that SBSTTA review FAO's technical guidelines on agriculture vis-a-vis benefit-sharing and urged an investigation of the impact of IPR on conservation.

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CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM: The SECRETARIAT introduced a document on the clearing-house mechanism (CHM) (UNEP/CBD/COP/2/6), which defines CHM as a mechanism to promote scientific and technical cooperation. The plan has four elements: a database on CBD activities; a decentralized network; assistance in preparing national reports; and assessing national capacities.

COLOMBIA, BRAZIL, NORWAY, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, SWITZERLAND, NIGERIA, EGYPT and AUSTRALIA requested early operation and open access to CHM, and the use of existing structures and institutions in a decentralized manner, perhaps through the Internet. Several delegates underscored the necessity for capacity-building in information and communications technology, and requested that CHM priorities be demand- rather than donor-driven. BRAZIL, NORWAY and AUSTRALIA praised the report of the BIN21 Meeting in São Paulo on 16-19 October, 1995.

MALAYSIA, supported by COLOMBIA and INDIA, requested an expanded function for CHM to explore joint research ventures — including the private sector in biotechnology and bioprospecting — to facilitate access to and transfer of technology in accordance with article 16. INDIA, supported by PERU and a group of NGOs, added that the IPR of communities must be respected if traditional knowledge is shared through the CHM. SOUTH AFRICA anticipated the need for regional capacity-building in taxonomic expertise.

CANADA said the focus and budget should be narrowed to emphasize capacity-building and training for Parties currently without Internet access as components of a CHM based on electronic networks. KENYA commended the Secretariat's budget as reasonable and encouraged Parties to provide funding. MALAWI said COP should further elaborate the pilot phase and CHM should address copyright or other IPR. NEW ZEALAND suggested modifying the Secretariat's proposal to establish CHM incrementally, using existing networks and evolving in response to needs.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, on behalf of several Eastern and Central European countries, emphasized regional level cooperation and the examination of legal aspects of regulating access to data. ZIMBABWE, on behalf of the African Group, said that CHM should be geared toward national implementation through information exchange, capacity-building, collaborative research and joint ventures, including technology transfer. MAURITIUS said CHM should assist in producing national reports or surveys of biological resources.

SPAIN, on behalf of the EU, said CHM should be decentralized and based on existing centres of excellence. It should start with information and referral services, becoming more active if demand exists. SWEDEN said COP could consider instructing GEF to finance capacity-building and development of CHM. The Indian Institute of Public Administration, on behalf of several NGOs, said CHM should be accessible to all, including NGOs, through electronic and other media.

The UK said that he did not share the vision of a proactive approach in the early stages beyond training, advice and sign-posting users to information sources. He suggested a limited pilot phase involving a smaller number of countries.

The FAO said it has arranged to second an officer for agricultural biodiversity beginning in January 1996. UNESCO's recruitment of a marine ecologist to be seconded to the Secretariat is underway.

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER: The Secretariat highlighted sections of the SBSTTA report (UNEP/CBD/COP/2/5) on facilitating access to and transfer of technology, noting emphasis on identification, assessment and selection of technologies, access and financing issues, and technology development. He said SBSTTA proposed that the COP consider three issues: the role of SBSTTA regarding both access to and transfer of technology; the role of SBSTTA regarding the clearinghouse; and terms of reference for an interessional group on technology transfer.

Many countries, including AUSTRALIA, COLOMBIA, the EU, GERMANY, and the UK, stressed the importance of the private sector. The relationship between technology transfer and CHM was noted by a number of delegates, including BANGLADESH, INDONESIA, the EU, GERMANY and the UK.

AUSTRALIA also noted the role of IPR in technology transfer. SWITZERLAND, supported by the UK and BRAZIL, noted the need for a background document identifying needs with respect to technology transfer. The NETHERLANDS announced that it will sponsor, with SWITZERLAND, a CSD-related conference next year on international needs assessment.

BIOSAFETY: The Vice-Chair of the Open-ended *Ad Hoc* Group of Experts on Biosafety presented the results of the meeting (UNEP/CBD/COP/2/7). The Chair then opened the floor to proposals for COW action.

The G-77/CHINA recommended that a protocol on biosafety be established and called on the COW to create an open-ended working group for its elaboration. The EU supported a two-track approach involving consideration within the CBD of a protocol and attention to UNEP's efforts to develop guidelines. He proposed that COP-2 vote on a protocol and start work immediately.

NORWAY, supported by SWITZERLAND, proposed the formation of an open-ended drafting group, to report back to the COW on terms of reference. EGYPT called for a briefing from UNEP on its work on international guidelines. MAURITIUS noted the fragile biodiversity of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). PERU indicated its desire to be a member of the drafting group. JAPAN proposed that the working group have limited membership and regional representation, and consider options such as voluntary guidelines. CHINA supported a step-wise approach. FIJI called for continued participation by SIDS in the negotiation process.

COLOMBIA stated its strong disagreement with nuclear testing. KOREA supported the EU's two-track approach, and outlined its considerations. KENYA suggested delinking funding for the protocol from CBD. ETHIOPIA desired to play a role in drafting the protocol.

IN THE CORRIDORS I

As delegates began to address the substantive issues on the COP-2 agenda, many noted the need for smaller "drafting" groups. Several delegates indicated that a logical organization of work might involve four working groups: biosafety; clearing-house mechanism; forests and marine biodiversity; and financial mechanism and resources.

IN THE CORRIDORS II

Disagreement over the importance of a global biosafety protocol is beginning to transcend the traditional North-South divide, with several delegates wondering aloud about the environmental impact of Living Modified Organisms (LMOs) relative to that of exotic species. Disagreement over the protocol exists as those countries — both North and South — nurturing nascent biotechnology industries consider whether stringent or costly biosafety regulations might hamper their development in this sector.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (COW): The COW will resume consideration of the biosafety protocol at 10:00 am in the Plenary Hall. Morning and afternoon meetings are expected.

WORLD BANK WORKSHOP: The World Bank will host a workshop on Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Development from 1:00 to 3:00 pm in Assembly Hall 2.

CIEL WORKSHOP: The Center for International Environmental Law will sponsor a workshop entitled "Implementing Article 11: Incentives for Biodiversity Conservation" from 1:30 to 3:00 pm in the Summit Room.