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CBD COP-4 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 4 MAY, 1998

The first day of the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-4) to the Convention on Biological Diversity began with opening statements by, *inter alia*, the Prime Minister of Slovakia, the outgoing and incoming COP Presidents and the Executive Secretary of the CBD. Delegates continued to meet in Plenary throughout the day and heard reports on regional meetings and statements from conventions, institutions and organizations, and considered the report and recommendations of the third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-3). The Ministerial Roundtable convened in the afternoon and addressed eco-tourism and the private sector's role in conservation of biological diversity.

PLENARY

OPENING OF THE MEETING: COP-4 was opened by the President of COP-3, Maria Julia Alsogaray (Argentina), at 10:25 am. Vladimír Meciar, Prime Minister of Slovakia, highlighted Slovakia's fifth anniversary as an independent country and expressed appreciation for the honor of hosting COP-4. He noted Slovakia's national strategy for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development and urged the COP to acknowledge the world's common responsibility to biodiversity.

In her opening speech, Maria Julia Alsogaray stressed implementation of the CBD through: the ecosystem approach; addressing freshwater and inland waters; indigenous populations' role in plant and water management; a decentralized clearinghouse mechanism (CHM); and national reports. She outlined the ambitious agenda of COP-4 and hoped that it would take decisions towards the practical implementation of an ecosystem approach.

Jozef Zlocha, Minister of the Environment of Slovakia, was chosen as the President of COP-4. He emphasized that COP-4 must prepare and adopt a long-term work programme and focus on substantive topics including maritime, coastal and inland waterways.

Calestous Juma, Executive Secretary of the CBD, said that the CBD, with 172 Parties, has the commitment of the international community and is beginning to influence social, political and economic behavior at the national level, as evidenced by the large number of national reports that have been received. He said the national reports also show the impact of the GEF in raising the profile of the Convention and hoped this would continue with the replenishment of the GEF fund. He noted that the COP must address: a long-term work programme that builds upon the best available scientific knowledge; improved cooperation with other institutions and processes; the continuing review of institutions under the Convention to ensure their effectiveness; increased scientific and technical cooperation; and global outreach.

Mauis Iwu presented conclusions and recommendations from the Tenth Global Biodiversity Forum, which included: financial strategies to support national biodiversity plans; workshops to help the WTO address interlinkages between trade and environment; measures to ensure that genetic materials are obtained in a legal manner; processes to assist national governments implement Article 8(j); and establishment of the CHM beyond the pilot phase.

The Conference of Diverse Women for Diversity stressed: that caution is needed to prevent harm to diversity; their rejection of the World Bank, the IMF and other collusive agreements; and their support of the CBD.

Mohamed El-Ashry, CEO of the GEF, noted the recent US\$2.75 billion replenishment of the GEF trust fund. He highlighted the New Delhi Statement from the GEF Assembly held in April 1998 calling for, *inter alia*, a focus on country driven programmes, a user friendly approach to application of incremental costs and greater participation of the private sector.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Executive Secretary Juma presented the provisional agenda, annotations and organization of work for adoption (UNEP/CBD/COP/4/1). BRAZIL proposed adding a sub-item on issues surrounding taxonomy. ETHIOPIA, supported by MALI and the SEYCHELLES, proposed including a sub-article regarding the CSD's relationship with other international agreements. The agenda with the proposed additions was adopted. New regional Bureau members were announced: Philippines and Papua New Guinea for Asia; Peru and Jamaica for GRULAC; Nigeria and Algeria from Africa; and Latvia for CEE.

PRESENTATIONS BY CONVENTIONS: Izgrev Topkov, Secretary-General of CITES, highlighted recent CITES action on: adoption of new criteria; streamlining of CITES work; strengthening of enforcement; and cooperation with other bodies, including the WTO. He stressed cooperation for obtaining common funding through GEF.

Arnold Muller-Helmbrecht, Executive Secretary of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), noted similar principles and complementarities in the CMS and the CBD, but distinguished between state sovereignty over resident species and the fact that migratory species are a common resource for all range states. He called for all non-members to accede to the CMS.

Mr. Delmar Blasco, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, reaffirmed his commitment to synergy with all environmental and sustainable resource use conventions, and said that many countries are incorporating the preservation of wetland biodiversity into their national programmes. He hoped that the COP will endorse the joint work plan outlined in document UNEP/CBD/COP/4/Inf.8.

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Mr. Arba Diallo, the Executive Secretary of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), reaffirmed that emphasis should be placed on conventions' abilities as legal instruments to provide better information, implementation and evaluation methods, and appealed to all countries to ratify the CCD.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: Robert Lentin, UNDP, detailed how UNDP has integrated CBD objectives into its programmes on marine and coastal ecosystems, agricultural biodiversity and forests. He also highlighted efforts to mainstream environmental concerns into all UNDP operations and projects, and stressed UNDP's support and commitment to assisting developing countries to implement the Convention. Patricio Benard, UNESCO, remarked on the Memorandum of Cooperation recently signed between UNESCO and the Secretariat of the CBD. He highlighted areas of collaboration, including the CHM, biosphere reserves, UNESCO world cultural and natural heritage site programmes, and public education and awareness.

The OECD highlighted areas where it contributes to implementation of the CBD, including providing information on: market incentives; benefit sharing; technical information on biotech products and biosafety; coordination of biodiversity data bases; and identification of effective donor country efforts to help developing country implementation of the CBD.

David McDowell, IUCN, called for guidance and tools for protected areas and for work on addressing invasive species' role in biodiversity loss, including a holistic approach on GMOs and biosecurity, and for an expert group, including private sector representatives, to make recommendations on resource generation for *in situ* conservation. He opposed any new institutional layers under the COP for addressing implementation issues.

REPORTS OF REGIONAL MEETINGS: PERU reported recommendations from the GRULAC regional meeting, including: a regional action programme for biodiversity and a regional information exchange; joint programmes to develop relevant technologies; attention to mountain ecosystems; a mandate to GEF to facilitate implementation; and strengthening SBSTTA. MALI's report on the African regional meeting highlighted the need for: elaboration of guidelines for national strategies; increased national capacity; consideration of the action plan for implementation and GEF facilitation of this process; and synergies between agencies working on biodiversity.

SLOVENIA, on behalf of Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, stressed both the opportunity for countries with economies in transition to create and implement legislation to carry out the CBD and their need for economic assistance to do so. SLOVENIA also reported on the conclusions and recommendations of the CEE meeting, reaffirming the importance of: expediting adoption of the biosafety protocol; follow-up regional meetings to COPs and SBSTTAs; and the inclusion of costs of participation at COPs in the core budget. CHINA reported that the Asia group: considered ways to foster regional cooperation and implementation; agreed that soil erosion and deforestation are major regional threats to biodiversity; and stressed the critical role of ODA in implementing the CBD. GUATEMALA, for the Central American Commission for Environment and Development, hoped for more government support of national commissions on biodiversity. The MARSHALL ISLANDS, representing the Pacific Islands, highlighted obstacles to implementation and scheduling conflicts with Asia group meetings.

REPORT OF SBSTTA-3: A summary of SBSTTA-3 (UNEP/COP/4/Inf.19) highlighted its work and recommendations on inland water ecosystems; indicator development; the elaboration of a multi-year programme for marine and coastal, forest and agricultural biological diversity; and a progress report on the pilot phase of the CHM. He stressed the importance of scientific input

in SBSTTA, the development of technological alternatives, improved understanding of ecosystems, consensus building and realistic and viable options for future success.

MEXICO, MALAWI and AUSTRALIA reported on workshops they hosted in follow-up to SBSTTA-3. The UK, MEXICO, BRAZIL, SOUTH AFRICA and INDIA stressed the importance of working closely with the scientific community. COLOMBIA reiterated the need to maintain the scientific nature of SBSTTA. NEPAL underlined the importance of contributions from the GEF and other donor communities for building scientific capacity.

MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLE

Ministers, Deputy Ministers and special guests convened on Monday afternoon for the first plenary session of the Ministerial Roundtable, which was chaired by the President of COP-4. Participants made general statements on integration of biodiversity concerns into sectoral activities, tourism as an example for integration, and the participation of the private sector in implementing the objectives of the Convention. A number of participants applauded the new structure of the ministerial segment as an interactive dialogue instead of a two-day series of statements. Participants also: focused on several of the major ecosystem programmes central to the CBD – forests, marine and coastal areas and agricultural biodiversity; called for finalization of a biosafety protocol by the end of 1998; and stressed the importance of national reports.

The Roundtable divided into two working groups. In the working group on tourism and biodiversity, chaired by Angela Merkel, Minister for Environment, Science and Technology, (Germany), participants agreed that activities on biodiversity and sustainable tourism are needed, supported formulation of practical and specific guidelines, and called for inventories of best practices. They agreed that sustainable tourism in protected areas should be examined first. In the working group on tourism and the private sector, chaired by Shri Suresh Praohu, Minister for the Environment and Forests, (India), delegates noted the importance of sectoral integration at national levels. They agreed that the private sector should work under the guidance of and in partnership with governments, and that while the role of the private sector is important, it is in no way a substitute for the role of developed countries to provide financial resources to developing countries. A final statement on the outcome of the Roundtable will be presented to the Plenary Tuesday afternoon.

IN THE CORRIDORS:

Official plaudits aside, delegates were not pleased with the host country's flagrant "bio-piracy" in doubling hotel prices for COP-4 participants. A special DSA rate of US\$ 260 had to be established, making Bratislava, usually one of the most economical countries in Eastern Europe, one of the world's most expensive. On another financial issue, concern was expressed that budgetary concerns may be used as an excuse to block finalization of the biosafety protocol in 1998.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

Further debate over the taxonomy approach versus the ecosystem approach for future SBSTTA work; further discussions on alternative mechanisms for addressing issues of policy and implementation; and continuing controversy over the relationship between the CBD and non-environmental agreements.

The Plenary will convene from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm in Hall C. The Ministerial Roundtable will convene from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm in Hall A. Working Group I will begin discussion of its agenda at 3:00 pm in Hall C. Working Group II will begin meeting at 3:00 pm in Hall A.