

GC-25/GMEF HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2009

On Wednesday morning, GC-25/GMEF delegates convened in ministerial consultations and the Committee of the Whole (COW). In the afternoon, deliberations continued in the COW, and ministers also attended a meeting on climate change organized by the Government of Denmark. Two contact groups, on the budget and programme of work for 2010-2011 and on chemicals management, as well as the drafting group, met throughout the day. An informal group on support to Africa also convened in the afternoon.

MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS

This session consisted of three keynote presentations and a panel discussion on “Global crises: national chaos? Coping with multiple challenges and capturing opportunities.”

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS: Robert Watson, University of East Anglia, UK, highlighted key linkages between climate change and other environmental issues. On the global context of food security, he pointed to trade distorting policies, OECD subsidies and land policy conflicts. He outlined the multifunctionality of agriculture, suggested hunger can be addressed with appropriate use of existing tools, and emphasized the need to eliminate perverse subsidies and internalize externalities. Watson underscored cost-effective and equitable solutions to address issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss, stressing political will and moral leadership.

Khalid Al-Irani, Minister of Environment, Jordan, emphasized investment at the ecosystem level to keep the resource base functional, and said the benefits of technologies such as biofuels and genetically modified organisms are debatable. Al-Irani highlighted his country’s efforts as part of the environmental reform process and its paradigm shift in terms of energy policy planning.

Ligia Castro de Doens, Minister of Environment, Panama, discussed the challenge of setting strategic objectives for a new model of environmental management that reduces poverty, improves income distribution, maintains economic growth, and strengthens democracy and citizen participation.

PANEL DISCUSSION: Batilda Burian, Minister of State for Environment, Tanzania, outlined her country’s key environmental challenges, noting the preparation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action and mobilization of resources at the national level.

Erik Solheim, Minister of Environment and Development Cooperation, Norway, emphasized the carbon market is the most effective means of generating financial resources, and the need for broader thinking on payments for ecosystem services.

Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK, discussed the “crisis of sustainability,” explaining the credit crunch is a product of unsustainable lending and that climate change is caused by unsustainable emissions of carbon dioxide. He emphasized the need to invest in low carbon agriculture, proper storage and transport.

Jean-Louis Borloo, Minister of Ecology, Energy Sustainable Development and Land Planning, France, highlighted the EU’s climate package consisting of a commitment to a 20% cut in emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020, compared with 1990 levels; a 20% increase in the share of renewables in the energy mix; and a 20% cut in energy consumption.

Jos Delbeke, Deputy Director-General, EC, highlighted the EU emissions trading scheme and the harmonization of policies on products such as clean cars and fuels.

Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC, acknowledged positive signs evident in financial crisis recovery packages, which include consideration of climate, energy and sustainability. He urged delegates to use the nine months in the lead up to the climate change talks in Copenhagen to “unlock the financial puzzle” so that the pieces can fall into place.

During the ensuing discussion, delegates highlighted: national circumstances; food security; water and energy in the context of climate change; the role of technology, the private sector, and capacity development; mobilizing financial resources under the climate change regime; and financing as the key to addressing the ongoing challenges.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

POLICY ISSUES: State of the environment: The COW considered four reports: SIDS; UNEP’s water policy and strategy; South-South cooperation in achieving sustainable development; and waste management.

Delegates adopted the reports following general comments, before turning to the related omnibus draft decision.

Regarding South-South cooperation, delegates agreed on all but one of the operative paragraphs on resource mobilization. Chair Uosukainen invited the G-77/China, the EU, US and others to consult in an informal drafting group.

On waste management, due to the large number of amendments, Chair Uosukainen requested and delegates agreed to consult informally.

Regarding support to Africa, South Africa introduced draft text and several delegations called for the decision to be aligned more closely with the MTS. An informal group facilitated by Chair Kalibbala was established and convened in the afternoon.

Costa Rica withdrew its draft decision on the Earth Charter, to avoid overlaps with the Bali Strategic Plan.

Coordination and cooperation with major groups: UNEP Deputy Executive Director Angela Cropper presented the final review report of the long-term strategy on the engagement and involvement of young people in environmental issues. She requested delegates to endorse its second long-term strategy in which youth activities have been more closely aligned to the six cross-cutting priorities in the MTS 2010-2013. Following statements by youth representatives, delegates endorsed the new strategy.

Contribution of UNEP as an implementing agency of GEF: The UNEP Secretariat tabled a document on the status of the Environment Fund, noting that more than 400 UNEP-implemented projects have been approved since the first GEF replenishment. The Secretariat, however, reported that UNEP's share of GEF funding had fallen by 7% during the fourth replenishment. While expressing support for UNEP's activities, the US underscored the need for further GEF reform, including establishment of an independent monitoring entity, to restore donor confidence.

Coordination and cooperation with the UN system on environmental matters: The COW heard a report on UNEP's role in the "One UN" Initiative including its leadership on water, energy and climate change activities.

DRAFTING GROUP

On an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES), delegates welcomed proposals to establish a tentative 2010 deadline to report on progress and the draft decision was forwarded to the COW.

Regarding the world environment situation, the group considered additional text proposed by the EU under future global assessment of environmental change. Delegates voiced concern about the cost of integrated and thematic UNEP assessments, and sought clarification on whether such assessments would be covered under the programme of work and budget. Agreement was reached on strengthening the policy relevance of the next Global Environment Outlook (GEO-5).

On environmental law, views were polarized over the adoption of guidelines for the development of national legislation on access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters, and the issue remains outstanding.

Regarding IEG, several delegates proposed language to contextualize the follow-up to paragraph 169 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome on UN system-wide coherence. However, others felt that opening discussion on this would duplicate ongoing discussion in a parallel session and the issue was not debated.

CONTACT AND INFORMAL GROUPS

CHEMICALS: Delegates negotiated the revised draft decision on mercury paragraph-by-paragraph. On operational provisions to be developed by the INC, agreement on the use of mandatory or discretionary language in the chapeau could not be reached. Several delegations, including the US, CANADA and AUSTRALIA, but opposed by SOUTH AFRICA, preferred not to prescribe the work of the INC. Co-Chair Roberts suggested, and delegates agreed, to consult bilaterally. Delegates reached agreement that the INC is to consider several elements, but after an extensive exchange, discussion on the precise elements was deferred.

Contentious issues included: references to IEG and to common but differentiated responsibilities; according the INC the flexibility to consider an instrument that could address other substances of global concern; the need for the INC to consider priority-setting for intentional or anthropogenic sources; and the time frame for initiation of the INC. These issues were referred for discussion in a Friends of the Chair Group, comprising the US, China, the EU, India, Serbia, Nigeria, Argentina, Japan and Norway, scheduled to convene throughout Wednesday night.

In the afternoon delegates discussed the draft decision on SAICM. The section on financing and inviting the International Conference on Chemicals Management to find a solution for mid- and long-term funding were controversial. The US and JAPAN preferred to negotiate SAICM-related issues at the ICCM-2 and not at GC-27/GMEF. NORWAY and the AFRICAN GROUP, however, stressed the need to identify innovative ways to find funding for SAICM once the time-limited Quick Start Programme ends. Discussion on this issue will continue on Thursday.

BUDGET AND PROGRAMME OF WORK: The Group continued working paragraph-by-paragraph through the draft decision on the proposed biennial programme and support budget for the biennium 2010-2011. A small drafting group consisting of JAPAN, the EU, US, NORWAY and others met to work on text relating to transparency, consultations and prioritization, and delegates subsequently accepted the revised language.

SUPPORT TO AFRICA: The group chaired by Agnes Kalibbala (Uganda), reviewed the draft decision and in its first reading substantially reworked the text. A chapeau was added to clarify that the entire decision must be implemented "within the context of the approved budget and programme of work" for 2010-2011 and the MTS. The group debated whether a paragraph calling on UNEP to assist countries in implementing regional conventions was appropriate for a GC decision. A paragraph on supporting an African climate policy center at the UN Economic Commission on Africa was bracketed due to uncertainty about funding and possible budget implications. Language calling on UNEP to publish on a regular basis "Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment," was deemed impractical by many; an alternate US proposal that UNEP help African nations develop their own capacities to prepare national environmental atlases was resisted by the African Group. The group will consider a revised decision on Thursday.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

The closed ministerial meeting on climate change on Wednesday afternoon ("Head of delegation plus one from each country") left some participants with mixed feelings. The gathering, an initiative of the Danish Government, was originally placed outside the GC-25 order of business. No specific outcome was planned, with the idea seemingly being to engage ministers of environment, present in Nairobi. Attendees who expected the meeting to add value to upcoming climate negotiations were probably discouraged, but most participants said they appreciated the exchange, while others thought that organizing the meeting on UNEP's turf could benefit a resurgent UNEP.

Discussions in the breezeways indicated that group of "friendly ministers" was making good progress towards a decision on IEG and planned to consult regional groups overnight, before continuing work on Thursday.

Meanwhile on mercury, emotions ran high. As eight country representatives, and eight "friends," braced themselves for a long night of negotiations in a Friends of the Chair Group, some resented being excluded, while others contended that the group may be joined by a high-level surprise guest, keen to lend support to achieving an outcome.