

COP/MOP 7 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2014

The seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol (COP/MOP 7) opened in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, on Monday 29 September. In morning plenary, delegates heard opening statements and reports on: compliance; financial mechanism and resources; cooperation with other organizations, conventions and initiatives; and administration and the budget, including recommendations from a functional review of the Secretariat and proposals for future meetings of the COP and COP/MOP.

In the afternoon, an informal special plenary session on implementation discussed lessons learned in implementation and approaches towards integrating implementation of the Protocol and the Convention.

OPENING PLENARY

COP/MOP 6 President Shri Ashok Lavasa, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, India, welcomed the participants and urged countries to ratify the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress, stressing its strategic importance. He then invited Yoon Sang-jick, Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy, Republic of Korea, to assume the COP/MOP 7 presidency.

COP/MOP 7 President Yoon noted the opportunity to address risk assessment and management, socio-economic considerations and transboundary movements of living modified organisms (LMOs). Underlining his country's commitment to an effective presidency, he announced the Republic of Korea's intention to launch an initiative to enhance regional capacity-building initiatives and risk assessment training. He then invited Inho Lee, Director-General for Industrial Innovation Policy, to chair the meeting on his behalf.

CBD Executive Secretary Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias welcomed the United Arab Emirates' recent ratification and urged CBD Parties to ratify the Protocol and its Supplementary Protocol. He outlined agenda items before the COP/MOP 7, including: a two-phase process of transformation of the CBD Secretariat; establishment of a subsidiary body on implementation; and integration of future meetings under the Convention and its Protocols in a two-week period.

Margaret Oduk delivered opening remarks on behalf of UNEP Executive Secretary Achim Steiner, underlining that biosafety must be considered in the post-2015 development agenda. She also highlighted UNEP's role in capacity building to allow developing countries to establish regulatory frameworks for biosafety, risk assessment and risk management, and public awareness and participation.

Expressing hope for peace in Northeast Asia, Choi Moon-soon, Governor of Gangwon province, noted that the demilitarized zone has become a unique repository of biodiversity. Shim Jae-gook, Mayor of Pyeongchang, encouraged delegates to make progress on biosafety. National Assembly Member Lee Won-wook introduced the COP 12 theme 'Biodiversity for Sustainable Development.'

STATEMENTS: SAUDI ARABIA emphasized the need to include biosafety in national development plans and relevant policy decisions and provide support for risk assessment and risk management programmes, and capacity building. Peru, for GRULAC, supported the proposal to establish a subsidiary body for implementation under the Convention. Georgia, for CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (CEE), urged mobilizing additional financial resources for implementation. Palau, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, supported an integrated approach to implementing the Protocol.

Mauritania, for the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed: the need to strengthen national frameworks on biosafety; efforts needed to advance discussions on socio-economic considerations and risk assessment; and an operational model for funding future meetings. The EU noted the importance of improving the efficiency of structures within the Protocol. The US underlined the role of agriculture in addressing population growth, changes in diet, and environmental stresses, and called for science-based risk assessment.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates elected Eleni Marama Tokadua (Fiji) as the meeting's rapporteur and adopted the meeting's agenda (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/1 and Add.1/Rev.1). Delegates then elected Francis Gwael (Uganda) to chair Working Group I (WG I) and Chawewan Hutacharn (Thailand) to chair Working Group II (WG II).

REPORTS: Delegates heard reports on: compliance (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/2); financial mechanism and resources (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/4/REV1); cooperation with other organizations, conventions and initiatives (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/5); and administration of the Protocol and budgetary matters (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/6) and the proposed budget for the Programme of Work for the biennium 2015-16 (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/6/Add.1 and UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/6/Add.5).

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) reported that total programming support reached US\$ 16, with a further US\$ 28 million in leveraged co-financing. On cooperation, the EU expressed caution regarding the budgetary implications of enhanced collaboration with the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. MEXICO urged facilitating information exchange with technical institutions and other bodies on identification of LMOs.



Chair Lee highlighted that the agenda item on the budget includes sub-items on the concurrent organization of future COP and COP/MOP meetings, and the establishment of a subsidiary body on implementation. Noting that the item also includes recommendations from the functional review of the Secretariat (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/6/Add.4 and INF/13), the EU proposed, and delegates agreed, to address these items in WG I.

CBD Executive Secretary Dias explained that the proposed plan for future meetings of the COP and COP/MOP (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/7/6/Add.2 and UNEP/CBD/COP/12/25) seeks to improve efficiency while ensuring the full and effective participation of all Parties. Many agreed that concurrent meetings could increase efficiency, with several Parties stressing the need to ensure full and effective participation of developing countries, noting that concurrent meetings will have independent mandates requiring representation of different national authorities. CUBA and GRENADA called for developing new modalities for developing countries' participation. NEW ZEALAND suggested clarifying how efficiency gains from holding concurrent meetings could be channeled to funding developing countries' participation.

The EU asked to clarify how the COP/MOP 7 discussion will inform, yet not prejudice, COP 12 discussions of these matters. COLOMBIA, CUBA, PERU and ECUADOR asked for clarification regarding the governance of the Supplementary Protocol.

SPECIAL SESSION ON IMPLEMENTATION: Chaired by Ho-min Jang, Korea Biosafety Clearing House, this informal session aimed to provide a platform to share views on, experiences with, and challenges to, implementation of the Protocol, and discuss mobilization of additional resources to advance implementation at the national level. CBD Executive Secretary Dias highlighted challenges, such as linking commitments under the Protocol with other issues dealt with under the Convention, integrating biosafety in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs); and mainstreaming biosafety.

Panelists from regional groups presented on their countries' experiences. Nosipho Ngcaba (South Africa) stressed the need for: an intergovernmental coordination and communication system; a fair, just and transparent administrative system; clear communication between the general public and technology developers; and independent public research capacity.

Ranjini Warriar (India) underscored as challenges to implementation: the difficulty of keeping pace with the fast developments in the biotechnology sector; fragmented human resource capacity, infrastructure and limited resources in existing institutions; and inadequate communication between regulatory agencies. She stressed the need to, *inter alia*: review institutional capacities; enhance capacity in tandem with biotechnological developments in the country; enhance public participation in decision making; update baseline information for integrating biodiversity management in biosafety assessment; and use the Strategic Plan 2011-2020 as a guiding tool in the implementation of national policies.

Angela Lozan (Republic of Moldova) highlighted how the EU-Moldova Association Agreement prompted her country to harmonize regulations and standards in line with EU directives on biosafety and phytosanitary control. Among the benefits of integrating biosafety into NBSAPs, she noted increased awareness, resources and coordination among relevant government agencies.

Sol Ortiz García (Mexico) presented the work of the Mexican Inter-ministerial Commission on Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms (CIBIOGEM). She highlighted the importance of awareness raising, information dissemination and national-level coordination, noting that CIBIOGEM's work includes information and communication, capacity building and cooperation with countries in the region.

Casper Linnestad (Norway) said the Norwegian Gene Technology Act requires a broad approach to LMO assessment, including information regarding the social utility of an LMO, and ethical considerations. He highlighted the challenge of reporting broadly when only limited information is available, noting that public consultation is mandatory, and that risk assessments are published.

Helmut Gaugitsch (Austria), Chair of the *Ad Hoc* Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) on Risk Assessment and Risk Management, highlighted the relevance of modern communication tools to the Protocol's implementation at the national level. He reported support for the Guidance on Risk Assessment among developing countries and countries with economies in transition that had participated in the testing of the Guidance.

During the ensuing discussion, panelists responded to questions from the floor on various issues, *inter alia*: public participation and ensuring stakeholder feedback, including from traditional knowledge holders; regional collaboration and capacity building, including through workshops with practitioners; risk assessment; the use of sectoral laws to complement general biosafety frameworks; ensuring political will; building networks among multi-centric biosafety-related organizations; and using information technologies to collect data and facilitate public participation.

Many Parties reported on their national efforts in implementation and made suggestions based on their own experience. BRAZIL suggested enhancing technology transfer and called on non-Parties to ratify the Protocol. NIGERIA highlighted science-based decision making in its development of biosafety guidelines. NEW ZEALAND said striking a balance between innovation and protection can be achieved through good planning and design, highlighting inter-agency collaboration as an important element. MALAYSIA emphasized the need for heightening awareness of biosafety among national policy makers through meetings, seminars and workshops.

CHINA said that the only way to effectively carry out the requirements of the Protocol is to build capacity on biosafety management in developing countries. GHANA focused on existing challenges, including activities by anti-GMO organizations. SUDAN noted ensuring the quality of laboratories for commercial products, and raising public awareness. BOLIVIA addressed the concept of "living well" as an alternative to markets and capitalism.

KIRIBATI, FIJI and CAMBODIA focused on capacity building and drew attention to the lack of financial resources.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The warm welcome expressed by the Korean hosts of COP/MOP 7 was in sharp contrast to the chilly temperatures inside the plenary tent, triggering comments that heated discussions would be needed to stay warm during the week.

The interest expressed during the initial exchange of views on the functional review of the Secretariat and the proposed plan for concurrent sessions of future COP and COP/MOP meetings led some delegates to speculate that the focus of this COP/MOP, and possibly also CBD COP 12, could be on streamlining the operations of the Convention and its protocols. While some considered this a long overdue initiative, given the Protocol's maturity, others cautioned against losing the opportunity to address biosafety-specific issues, noting that the coming into force of the Nagoya Protocol will likely shift attention and resources away from biosafety and towards access and benefit-sharing.

While an exchange of countries' experiences during the special session on implementation was predictably uncontroversial, one participant noted that agenda items on risk assessment and socio-economic considerations might "turn up the heat" in the nippy meeting tents.