

“High-level” climate meeting hotly debated

Bonn, 14 June (Lim Li Lin) – Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed to not mandate the holding of a Ministerial meeting before the next climate change conference in Mexico.

This issue was finally resolved at the closing plenary of the 32nd session of the UNFCCC’s Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) on 9 June after long debate that started in April.

The controversial proposal, discussed under ‘Arrangements for intergovernmental meetings’ was made by Papua New Guinea for a high-level meeting. This is aimed at taking decision making to a political level, a matter that causes concern among the majority of developing countries as the climate negotiations involve many complex technical issues. There are also issues that have serious implications for the development prospects of developing countries but are couched in technical terms.

There is a high degree of unease and even suspicion among many developing countries after the experience last December in Copenhagen, when heads of states and governments of many countries attended the 15th meeting of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties, and a selected number agreed to the controversial “Copenhagen Accord” outside the procedures of the UN.

The idea of an extra ministerial meeting was raised at the last climate change talks in April, where both the Ad hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) and the Ad hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA) “took note of a proposal for the SBI to consider the option that a high-level session be held between the thirty-second sessions of the SBI and the SBSTA (Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice) and the sixth session of the

CMP (Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol)/sixteenth session of the COP (Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC) to provide guidance”.

At the recently concluded June session, the SBI contact group on arrangements for intergovernmental meetings was unable to resolve the issue. Therefore, at the closing plenary of the SBI on 9 June, the draft conclusion proposed by the SBI Chair, Robert Owen-Jones from Australia, in paragraph 5 simply stated that: “The SBI considered the option that a high-level session be held between the thirty-second sessions of the SBI and the SBSTA and the sixteenth session of the COP and the sixth session of the CMP. The SBI noted the views of Parties on this issue”.

(COP 16 and CMP 6 will be held in Cancun, Mexico in December 2010.)

Initially, this proposal had been reflected in the draft conclusions as:

“The SBI requested that a high-level/ministerial level session be organized to focus specifically on ‘crunch issues’ under the AWG-LCA, as determined by the Chair of the AWG-LCA. It noted that this session should be arranged in advance of the usually scheduled pre-COP high-level meeting, taking note of the ongoing negotiations under the AWG-LCA and chaired by the [Executive Secretary] [Chair of the AWG-LCA]. In order to promote transparency and broad participation, ideally the session should involve all interested Parties. However, given past experience, logistical challenges and financial limitations, at the discretion of the [Executive Secretary] [Chair of the AWG-LCA], the session should reflect balanced representation of geographic party groupings and other relevant party groupings (such as Small Island

Development States, Least Developed Countries, Coalition of Rainforest Nations, etc.), while remaining open to any Party wishing to participate as an observer in support of their nominated party-grouping representative. If appropriate, a Chair's Summary would be prepared for the Parties, including any proposed compromise text, where relevant, for the Parties by the [Executive Secretary] [Chair of the AWG-LCA] to facilitate ongoing negotiations under the AWG-LCA."

(The text in square brackets indicate options.)

At the closing plenary of the SBI, Papua New Guinea proposed that the last sentence of paragraph 5 of the draft conclusions read as: "The SBI noted the views of Parties and recommended that such a session to be organized after the conclusion of the fourteenth session of the AWG-KP and the twelfth session of the AWG-LCA in view of addressing the list of topics then agreed by Parties in the work of the AWG-KP and the AWG-LCA as prepared by the Chairs of the AWG-KP and the AWG-LCA respectively at the fourteenth and twelfth sessions. It further invited the Bureau of COP 15 to make arrangements for the high-level session. The SBI further agreed that, in order to ensure transparency and broad participation, the session shall involve all Parties and reflect balanced representation of geographic party groupings and other relevant party groupings. The meeting shall be subject to funding availability."

Papua New Guinea also proposed that in the preceding paragraph 4 on the high-level segment during the Cancun COP meeting itself, the following sentence be added at the end: "It further invited the Bureau of COP 15 to make arrangements for the organization of high-level contact groups in view of addressing the list of topics then agreed by Parties in the work of the AWG-KP and the AWG-LCA as prepared by the Chairs of the AWG-KP and the AWG-LCA respectively at the fourteenth and twelfth sessions".

(The 14th session of the AWG-KP and the 12th

session of the AWG-LCA will be held in October 2010 in China, the last meetings before Cancun. The list of topics referred to could mean the 'Indicative list of related topics addressed by Parties in the work of the AWG-KP and the AWG-LCA' that has been prepared by the Chairs of the two working groups. This was done upon request from some Parties at the AWG-KP and AWG-LCA sessions in Barcelona, last November. The list was updated at the June Bonn session.)

Papua New Guinea indicated that its proposal had the support of 12 countries including Panama, Paraguay, Cameroon, Suriname, Guyana, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of Congo and the Dominican Republic.

Many countries including Bolivia, Pakistan, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and Egypt opposed this proposal and spoke in favour of maintaining the Chair's draft conclusions.

The EU proposed compromise language on paragraph 4.

Papua New Guinea then withdrew its proposal on paragraph 4 and 5, and instead proposed that the following language be added to paragraph 4: "It further invited the bureau of COP 15 and CMP 5 to make arrangements for the high-level segment in order to enhance high-level participation".

However, Venezuela insisted on clarification of what "enhanced level of participation" means, and what budgetary implications it would have.

The meeting was suspended while informal consultations on this matter were conducted.

Finally, the Chair came back with a proposal on paragraph 4 that was accepted by consensus: "It further invited the bureau and the incoming presidency to make arrangements for the organization of the high-level segment".

The final outcome is thus a high-level meeting as part of the Cancun COP 16 agenda, with no ministerial level meeting mandated under the UNFCCC between now and Cancun.