

SBSTA starts work, debates adaptation, technology, forests

Bonn, 1 June (Hilary Chiew) -The 32nd session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) opened in Bonn on Monday, 31 May under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Among the highlights of SBSTA's first plenary was a debate on carbon capture and storage (CCS), with several countries opposing the inclusion of this technology (which they described as costly and problematic) in the Clean Development Mechanism, while others advocated it.

Africa called for a work programme on adaptation and a technical group to assess adaptation costs. Developing countries also asked for a cautious approach to the UNFCCC's relation with the civil aviation and maritime organisations in relation to climate issues.

Parties called for progress on the many outstanding scientific, technical and methodological issues which are crucial to the full implementation of the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol. Many of the issues were carried forward from the 31st session last December in Copenhagen to make time for the two Ad-hoc Working Groups on long-term cooperative action and on Kyoto Protocol which were striving to produce outcomes.

Among SBSTA's agenda items are the Nairobi work programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change; development and transfer of technologies; reducing emission from deforestation in developing countries; emissions from fuel used for international aviation and maritime transport; and standardised baselines under the Clean Development Mechanism.

Speaking on behalf of **G77-China, Yemen** said effective development and transfer of technologies from developed countries to developing countries determine the extent to which developing countries are able to meet their commitments under the Convention. It added that finance mechanism linkage is the main issue and key to the achievement of the ultimate objectives of the Convention.

Representing the **African Group, Democratic Republic of Congo** said adaptation is a priority for Africa that is facing drought, desertification, salination of ground water in coastal zone. Therefore, particular emphasis should be placed on adaptation planning based on sound science for implementation of practical adaptation activities. It suggested a work programme and the establishment of a technical expert group on adaptation to assess adaptation costs in developing countries and other issues.

On mitigation, the African Group firmly supported the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol where Annex-1 countries commit to deeper and meaningful cuts that give a chance to attain not more than 1.5 degree Celcius rise in temperature.

Nicaragua said it was important that Parties talk about adaptation in real terms and how much it will cost for developing countries. "Up until now, we hear figures without scientific back-up. We need a mandate so we don't bat around figures that don't give us the real cost," said the representative.

The **European Union, represented by Spain**, said Parties have to seize the opportunity in these two weeks to make progress in key technical issues to be able to produce some results in good time so as to strengthen confidence in the Convention and build the future regime.

Grenada, representing the **Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)** said despite the need to accelerate the rate of work owing to the heavy workload, it has reservation over chairs of the contact groups being encouraged to table draft conclusions at the beginning of the informal consultations. It preferred that draft conclusions be developed after an initial round of discussions and joint contact groups with the Subsidiary Body on Implementation should be established to address similar issues.

Guyana said though it supports modalities that improved efficiency, "there must be balance and transparency and bottom up approach. The draft conclusion should only be presented after an initial round of discussion."

Bolivia said it was important to ensure that studies are carried out at global level to identify the cost of adaptation and the benefits of carrying out adaptation activities before more suffer from climate change.

Ambassador Pablo Solon of Bolivia said it is fundamental that proposals relating to forests in mitigation should preserve the sovereignty of states. "Forests are not plantations but they are places where indigenous communities live", he added.

"It is fundamentally important to respect their rights and ensure their participation; avoiding the merchandising of nature. This mechanism should not lead to a weakening of commitments of developed countries in the reduction of their greenhouse gas emission and transferring this commitment to the developing countries," he said the Ambassador further.

Nicaragua said forests represent more than a mere opportunity to capture the carbon but must be recognised for their other ecosystem services that are important for human survival.

On transfer of technology, **Jamaica** said it is extremely relevant to balance the level of research towards mitigation and adaptation that include ways to link up with traditional technology which need to move beyond conceptualisation to concrete implementation.

Several parties especially the small island states like Barbados, Micronesia and Jamaica opposed the inclusion of the carbon capture and storage (CCS) in geological formations as clean development mechanism (CDM) project activities under the Kyoto Protocol. They said the technology is unproven, costly and saddled with technical challenges like leakage and impermanence.

Jamaica said developed countries (which are pushing for the adoption of the technology) should seriously reconsider their emission pledges so far. "Unless there are ambitious targets, they should not consider CCS in CDM further," it said. **Barbados** said CCS do not mean long-term avoided emissions and faulty CCS will lead to poor results.

Countries like Norway and Australia had submitted proposals for the inclusion of CCS as a mitigating mechanism and are supported by Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Norway said inclusion of CCS under CDM could ensure uniformity and integrity of the project and that CCS would not be a substitute but an option for low emission countries which might lead to negative emission.

Saudi Arabia said studies had shown the potential of CCS and delaying a decision on this technology would affect the commitment to achieve objectives of the Convention. It said further discussion would enrich knowledge of everyone on this technology and allay some of the fears of this technology.

Micronesia, Barbados, and Jamaica objected to the setting up of contact group for this topic in view of the high number of contact groups created for informal discussion of issues under the SBSTTA in this session. They also pointed that it would be unfair to small delegations.

The Chair, Mama Konate of Mali said these are valid diverging views on this matter and a compromise is needed to make headway. "I suggest the consultation takes place in a few meetings. If we can identify point of major concerns, then we can refer these concerns to scientists and not to abandon it," he added.

On the inclusion of reforestation of lands where forests have been exhausted, **Nicaragua** said that it disagreed with projects that could bring in alien species to be planted on those lands that are increasingly being bought up by private enterprises for plantation development.

Burkina Faso and Saudi Arabia said it was difficult to assess what constitute forest in exhaustion as there are no clear guidelines. "It's premature to include this in CDM until clear and unequivocal evidence and pilot projects are undertaken to show result. There is no need for a contact group as this is not the only place where deforestation will be discussed," added Saudi Arabia who suggested deferring the issue to the next session.

On fuel used in aviation and maritime transport, some Parties cautioned that any decision on emission reduction targets must be made under the UNFCCC.

China said discussion at the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the International Maritime Organisation must be guided by the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. "We believe our Convention is the principle channel to fight climate change and we oppose any unilateral action. It is necessary to set up an informal contact group and discuss how UNFCCC should conduct its cooperation with IMO and ICAO," said China.

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) called on the Parties to entrust it to develop an international mandatory regime to ensure shipping industry contribute its fair share in combating climate change.

Saudi Arabia said it is of the view that the issues are still being discussed at the two organisations and they are qualified entities and should be allowed time to conduct their work until such time that it warrants UNFCCC's attention. "The issue has not yet matured at these two organisations. The UNFCCC remains the umbrella for this matter to ensure consistency," it added.

Uganda said it is prudent to ensure the information is sufficient and any decision to reduce emissions (in the two sectors) has to be included in the legitimate process and made under the Convention.

Contact groups were established and are to submit their respective draft conclusions for consideration at the closing plenary on 9 June.