

Negotiators stake their ground

More time is needed to secure a new agreement on ITTO's future

NEGOTIATORS trod a wary path during the first part of a negotiating conference for a successor agreement to the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), 1994. This agreement, which is due to expire at the end of 2007, is the treaty under which ITTO operates.

The United Nations Conference on the Negotiation of a Successor Agreement to the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), 1994 met at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland on 26–30 July 2004. The conference was held under the auspices of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and included over 160 delegates from ITTO member countries and other governmental, non-governmental and intergovernmental observers. Ambassador Carlos Antonio da Rocha Paranhos (Brazil) was nominated and accepted as President of the Conference and Jürgen Blaser (Switzerland) as Vice-President.

Over the course of the five-day meeting, delegates met in two working groups, one dealing specifically with the Preamble and chapters I–IV and the other with chapters V–XI of the draft working document (TD/TIMBER.3/4). The negotiations proceeded amicably, although it became clear by Friday morning that more time would be needed to finalise the terms of the new agreement.

There appear to be six main areas of contention.

Scope: delegates spent a considerable amount of time discussing the successor agreement's objectives. Many noted the importance of listing objectives related to certification, non-timber forest products, transparency on subsidies, fair prices for tropical timber, community forestry and ecosystem services. Some delegations suggested a change of the Organization's name—to the International Tropical Forests Organization—to reflect the broad nature of its work.

Frequency of Council sessions: On the number of Council sessions per year, Japan, Switzerland, Cameroon and the USA proposed specifying one regular meeting and one meeting of an executive board each year. Venezuela, supported by Brazil, Colombia, Nigeria and the Republic of Congo, objected. Japan expressed flexibility in maintaining current language on "at least one" regular session per year. Alternative texts specifying "at least" "one" or "two" regular sessions per year remain bracketed. An ITTA, 1994 reference to "one in a producer country" is also bracketed, reflecting the fact that countries are not in agreement on reducing the number of meetings to one per year.

Executive board: delegates discussed a proposed article on establishing an executive board. This would comprise the Council chair and vice-chair, committee chairs and vice-chairs, caucus spokespersons, a representative of the host country (Japan), and representatives of six producer and six consumer countries and would supplement the Council's work, particularly should the number of Council sessions be reduced to one per year. The content of the article was not discussed and the entire article remains bracketed.



All ears: delegates tune in to the debate during the first part of the UN Conference on the Negotiation of a Successor Agreement to the ITTA, 1994. Photo: *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*

Funding sources and mechanisms: this issue relates to the funding of the Organization's work program, including its project program. Delegates agreed to text mentioning the current structure of ITTO's accounts, which are the Administrative Account, the Special Account, the Bali Partnership Fund and other accounts "as the Council shall deem appropriate and necessary". Delegates noted that further discussion was needed on the bracketed text referring to a work program account: this would receive assessed contributions from each member country based on gross domestic product and would be used to finance the Organization's essential operational work as defined in the biennial work program.

Distribution of votes and assessment of contributions: this article was not discussed in the designated working group because delegates agreed it required the attention of a joint working group. In the current agreement, the assessment of a country's financial contributions to the Organization's administrative budget is made depending on the number of votes allocated to that country, and this, coupled with the proposal to establish a work program account, makes this an issue upon which many members place a high priority. For now the entire article remains bracketed and will be addressed at the next session of the negotiation.

Obligations and compliance: proposals were made to curtail the rights of members to participate in certain Council processes (decision-making, the submission of project proposals, etc) if they fail to meet their obligations with regard to meeting assessed contributions and information-sharing/provision of statistics. No agreement was reached on these proposals and they remain open for negotiation.

During the closing plenary, delegates decided that the conference would reconvene in Geneva on 14–18 February 2005.

This synopsis has been compiled by the ITTO Secretariat drawing on the summary text prepared by the Earth Negotiations Bulletin. The Bulletin can be obtained at www.iisd.ca/forestry/itto/itta/. Documents for the negotiating conference can be downloaded at www.unctad.org/Templates/meeting.asp?intlItemID=1942&lang=1&m=7844