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SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Note by the Executive Secretary

The Conference of the Parties, in decision II/17, requested the Executive Secretary to prepare a report based on the information contained in national reports and other relevant information and containing also suggested next steps. As noted below, most national reports were received by the Secretariat after the deadline established by the Conference of the Parties. The Executive Secretary has been informed by a number of Parties that their reports will be submitted on the occasion of the fourth meeting, and by others that their national reports will be submitted after the fourth meeting. Accordingly, the following note has been prepared by the Executive Secretary as an interim document, on the basis of information available in mid-March 1998. A final note, as requested by the Conference of the Parties and based on those national reports received by mid-March, is being prepared and will be issued at the fourth meeting.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Article 26 of the Convention requires that each Contracting Party shall, "at intervals to be determined by the Conference of the Parties, present to the Conference of the Parties reports on measures which it has taken for the implementation of the provisions of this Convention and their effectiveness in meeting the objectives of this Convention".

* UNEP/CBD/COP/4/1.

2. Decision II/17 of the Conference of the Parties concerning the form and intervals of national reports by Parties', specifies that the first national reports will be due at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and that they "will focus ... on the measures taken for the implementation of Article 6 of the Convention,... as well as the information available in national country studies". Suggested guidelines are annexed to the decision.

3. Decision III/9 of the Conference of the Parties, concerning the implementation of Articles 6 and 8 of the Convention, specifies that the first national reports referred to in decision II/17 should be submitted no later than 1 January 1998, taking into account decision III/25 of the Conference of the Parties that the next meeting would take place in Bratislava, Slovakia, in May 1998.

4. Other decisions of the Conference of the Parties also have explicit implications for national reporting. These include the following:

(a) Decision II/8, which encourages Contracting Parties to identify priority issues specifically related to those components of biological diversity under threat within their national reports;

(b) Decision III/6, which urges developed country Contracting Parties to submit information on their financial support for the objectives of the Convention in their national reports;

(c) Decision III/11, requesting Contracting Parties to identify issues and priorities [concerning conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biological diversity that need to be addressed at the national level and to report back to the Conference of the Parties;

(d) Decision III/14, which urges Contracting Parties to supply information about the implementation of Article 8 (j) and related articles and to include such information in national reports; and

(e) Decision III/18, which invites Contracting Parties to share experiences on incentive measures and to make relevant case studies available.

II. NATIONAL REPORTS RECEIVED

5. By the deadline established by the Conference of the Parties (1 January 1998), the Secretariat had received 16 national reports. By 30 March 1998, 86 national reports had been received (as indicated in Annex I). These 86 reports constitute a representative geographical basis for the analysis requested by the Conference of the Parties - there are at least ten reports from each of the five regions and a representative number of reports from least developed countries and small island developing States.

6. The format and content of the reports vary very widely. While the majority have been submitted as final reports, 21 are identified as interim reports, six are identified as drafts, four are in the form of executive summaries only, and two Parties have submitted their national biodiversity strategies in lieu of preparing specific reports for the Convention.

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7. Of these 86 reports, 58 have been submitted in English, 14 in French, 12 in Spanish and one in Russian. One Party has made available an advance draft in its national language, not a working language of the Conference of the Parties, pending translation into English.

8. The final reports vary widely in size, ranging from a few pages to hundreds of pages in length. Some were written for a wider audience, while others were written only for submission to the Conference of the Parties.

9. In order to ensure that the reports are widely accessible, the Secretariat is making available on the Convention's website as Adobe Acrobat PDF files those reports submitted in electronic form. As of 27 March 1998, 26 reports have been available in this format. Where reports are available on national clearing-house mechanism websites, the Secretariat has established the necessary links to make these reports accessible from the Convention's website. Three such links have so far been made.

III. SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS

10. Decision II/17 requests the Executive Secretary to prepare a report based on the synthesis of information contained in national reports and other relevant information and containing also suggested next steps, for consideration by the Conference of the Parties.

11. In view of the fact that only a few reports were received by the deadline and that a sufficiently representative number of reports, covering all regions, has only recently been received, the Executive Secretary was not in a position to begin preparation of the report requested in decision II/17 until mid-March. The synthesis report is currently under preparation and the Executive Secretary intends to make this available in time for the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

12. The following points should however be borne in mind. First, while 84 reports is a significant number, it is less than 50 percent of all Contracting Parties (of which there are currently 172). Second, the reports vary widely in size, format and content, making systematic comparison a demanding task. Third, it is inevitable that some of the richness and detail provided by individual reports will be summarized in the synthesis report, and that its general discussion and the conclusions it draws could mask the achievements or problems highlighted in some reports. Finally, given the continuing arrival of many of the reports, and thus the relatively limited time available for review of the reports before the Conference of the Parties, only a preliminary synthesis can be made available at the moment.

13. A list of reports received will be included as an annex to the revised note to be distributed at the fourth meeting.

IV. NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

14. Decision II/17 specified that the first national reports should focus in so far as possible on the measures taken for the implementation of Article 6 of the Convention. This Article, "General measures for conservation and

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sustainable use", requires Parties to develop or adapt national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and to integrate the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies.

15. Decision II/17 also urged the financial mechanism to make available financial resources to developing country Parties to assist in the preparation of their national reports and commended the guidance provided in key documentation relating to national country studies and national biodiversity planning, as relevant to the implementation of Article 6 and the preparation of national reports.

A. Financial assistance

16. During the period from July 1996 to December 1997, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), as the institutional structure operating the financial mechanism, approved enabling activity projects for 93 developing country Parties. Those projects included, *inter alia*, assistance to Parties with the implementation of Articles 6 and 8 of the Convention, including the preparation of a national biodiversity strategy and action plan (NBSAP) and of the first national report.

17. Details of these enabling activity projects are contained in the report of GEF to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (document UNEP/CBD/COP/4/15).

B. Monitoring national biodiversity strategies

18. While the Secretariat is able to monitor the development of national biodiversity strategies and action plans in developing countries through information provided by the Secretariat of GEF and its implementing agencies, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank, it has not been possible to identify with accuracy where NBSAPs are being or have been developed in developed country Parties (or in developing country Parties that have not sought the assistance of the financial mechanism).

19. It is hoped that more reliable information will be available in the national reports of these Parties and that, on the basis of such information, together with the results of surveys being undertaken under other processes, a list of Parties with national biodiversity strategies and action plans (completed or under way) can be included in the revised note under preparation.

C. Biodiversity planning workshops

20. Three recent intergovernmental workshops on biodiversity strategies and action plans have been held, namely:

(a) "Planning for Biodiversity" workshop, organized by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, through the United Kingdom Environmental Know How Fund, with the participation of representatives of 25 Central and Eastern European countries (Bristol, 4-7 November 1997);

(b) "Regional Expert Workshop on Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans", organized by UNDP, with the participation of representatives of 17 African countries (Nairobi, 19-21 November 1997); and

(c) "Regional Expert Workshop on Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans", organized by UNDP, with the participation of representatives of 28 Latin American and Caribbean countries (Santo Domingo, 14-16 January 1998).

21. The participants in these workshops were predominantly the national focal points for the Convention and the coordinators of the NBSAPs and national reports. The Secretariat attended all three workshops. The two workshops organized by UNDP formed part of its activities under a Project Development Facility (PDF) Block B grant from GEF for the development of a proposal for a biodiversity planning support programme.

22. As part of the PDF-B project, UNDP also sought, by questionnaire, the views of NBSAP coordinators and relevant implementing agency staff on their experiences of the NBSAP process, including the identification of constraints and unmet capacity-building requirements.

D. Lessons learned

23. Conclusions drawn from the returned questionnaires and from the workshops can be summarized as follows:

(a) Biodiversity planning, in the context of the comprehensive scope of the Convention, is a new concept for which there are no prior models or examples of best practices, and for which few methodological tools are currently available;

(b) All countries, notwithstanding differences arising from the specific conditions of each, are engaged in similar learning processes;

(c) Specific problems cited included;

(i) Inadequacy or absence of political support for crucial aspects of the planning process and for the approval of actions;

(ii) Weak legislative base;

(iii) Inadequacy of existing information on biodiversity issues;

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- (iv) Lack of appropriate scientific and technical expertise and experience in biodiversity planning within Government and among stakeholders;
- (v) Lack of institutional coordination, both horizontally and vertically within Governments, and between Governments and stakeholders;
- (vi) Difficulties in access to and availability of funding;
- (vii) Direct economic pressure on ecosystems and a lack of national budget allocations;
- (viii) Need for increased public education and awareness;
- (ix) Lack of clarity among implementing agencies about the NBSAP process, its components and outcomes;
- (x) Need for recognition of the long-term nature of the NBSAP process.
- (xi) Complexity of the issues raised by the need to translate a biodiversity strategy into costed and prioritized action plans, with the requisite funding strategy, and the continued need in most countries for these to be addressed; and
- (xii) Scarcity of examples of the effective integration of biodiversity considerations into sectoral or cross-sectoral planning.

24. These conclusions are drawn predominantly from views expressed by representatives of Parties from the Central and Eastern European, African and Latin American and Caribbean regions, by staff of the implementing agencies and by external consultants assisting NBSAP processes.

25. The extent to which these problems are also identified in the case of Parties from other regions, and in particular, developed country Parties, will become apparent from the analysis under way of the national reports.

26. While it may be expected that many of the problems identified above are similarly noted in the reports of developed country Parties, some differences are expected to emerge. For example, initial analysis of reports of developed country Parties suggest that national strategies and action plans for biodiversity have drawn heavily on plans and strategies that were already in place for effective management of the environment, and some countries draw attention to the fact that relevant activities had been under way before the Convention came into force. Even in countries that have not finished development of their biodiversity strategies and action plans per se, a significant amount of relevant action is reported to be under way.

27. A key task for such countries has therefore been to integrate existing efforts (which include policies, law, programmes and guidelines) into the new strategies and actions in a meaningful and useful manner, ensuring that the new processes are integrative and additive rather than duplicative.

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V. OTHER PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS

28. Parties were asked to include within their national reports summaries of the status of biodiversity and threats to it, the legal and policy framework for conservation action and the institutions responsible for such action. Not surprisingly, the content and format of these summaries varies significantly between reports, even within fairly homogenous regions, making attempts at comparison difficult.

29. The reports provide a range of very readable summaries of the conservation status of a range of species groups and ecosystem types, sometimes supported by annexes which provide more detailed information. These reports are very general in nature, however, and serve little purpose beyond adding context to other material in the report. Where the report is intended for wider consumption within the country of origin, the purpose of such "scene setting" is obvious, but where the report is only intended for reporting under the Convention its value is less obvious.

30. Many developing country Parties note the recent approval of the enabling activity funds necessary for the development of their national biodiversity strategy and action plan and the preparation of the national report. In the majority of cases, these Parties have identified their reports as interim reports and have informed the Secretariat of their intention to submit a full report at a later date, once the NBSAP process is complete. In some cases, Parties have informed the Secretariat that they will not be in a position to submit a report, interim or final, in time for the fourth meeting, but they intend to do so at a later date.

31. In several cases the information presented is a summary drawn from other widely available documents or from a country study prepared as a precursor to development of the national biodiversity strategy and action plan. This is not always obvious from the text, however, and, if these reports are to serve a purpose in helping other Parties, it is essential that they give adequate reference to such sources of material.

32. There is great variation in the extent to which national reports cover the threats to biodiversity, possibly implying wide differences in the ways in which threats are being addressed at the national level. In the majority of cases where threats are addressed, specific threats are identified (such as pollution or habitat fragmentation), and the steps being taken to deal with these specific problems briefly discussed.

33. In a few reports there are systematic reviews, sector by sector, of the potential impacts of "other" sectors, such as agriculture or transport, on biodiversity. This is an interesting approach, which moves from looking at the pressures themselves towards an initial assessment of the so-called "driving forces".

34. Most reports provide a summary of the key environmental legislation in force in the country. In some cases this is tied to particular conservation actions or problems, and in most cases the agency responsible for implementation is clear. Of particular interest are the arrangements (both

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legal and institutional) in those countries that have a federal structure, as this entails discussion of the extra steps needed to ensure coordination at the national level.

35. While many of the reports cover international obligations, only a few make any real attempt to integrate the discussion of national legislation with that on international agreements.

36. The range of ongoing programmes described is very broad, and includes both new actions as a result of ratification of the Convention, and actions that have been ongoing prior to ratification. Some reports stress research and monitoring, others place more emphasis on conservation action, but the main message would appear to be that there are initiatives to build on in nearly every case. Reference is made to international programmes and to the work of a range of international organizations working to build collaborative programmes across a number of countries.

37. One potential concern that was not expressed explicitly within the reports, but is apparent from review of a range of reports, is that more emphasis appears to be placed on the species and ecosystem components of biodiversity, than on the genetic component. This suggests that it is not simply a conservation issue, but also one of research.

38. The amount of information provided on institutional responsibility varies considerably: some identify the persons responsible for particular pieces of legislation while others indicate carrying out particular programmes. The relationships between organizations is not always clear. As one of the purposes of national reports is to foster the exchange of information and experiences between countries, it would be helpful if institutional arrangements were made rather clearer in future national reports.

39. One national report stresses the steps taken by a developed country Party to assess the impact of all of its activities, past and present, on the world's biodiversity. This type of assessment of a nation's "ecological footprint" serves not only to demonstrate the extent of a developed country's impact on the world, but also the dependence of that country's citizens on biodiversity and the products and services that biodiversity provides. Further studies of this sort would be valuable and should be encouraged.

40. Some reports refer to objectives and actions related to cross-border issues. For example, several reports refer to cross-border protected areas, where international collaboration leads to an increase in protection for given species and habitats, increased opportunities for managers to cooperate and share experience and an enhanced profile for conservation action.

41. Virtually every report stresses the importance of protected area systems in national programmes for implementing measures for the conservation of biological diversity, either directly or indirectly. Thus, while reporting on the implementation of Article 8 was not explicitly required, it appears that a substantial volume of information is to be found in the reports submitted.

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42. Significant efforts appear to have been made to include all stakeholders in the development of the strategies, and in the implementation of the action plans that have arisen.

43. In many cases a steering or coordination group has been set up, usually under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment or its equivalent. These groups tend to comprise representatives of the relevant ministries, research institutes and non-governmental organizations. Some countries mention the involvement of different levels of government (local/national), and others stress the involvement of trade, industry and the private sector.

44. Many reports discuss the integration of environment into other specific sectors, in particular, agriculture and forestry. Some reports make explicit mention of the role of the defense sector in biodiversity conservation, including, for example, conservation reviews of military areas.

45. Mechanisms for the management of the information arising from assessment and monitoring programmes are not always mentioned, but where they are it is to suggest that improvement in coordination of information management is required.

46. Few reports include case studies, notwithstanding the recommendation in the annex to decision II/17 to that effect.

VI. HARMONIZATION OF REPORTING

47. Various biodiversity-related instruments and processes require the submission of periodic national reports, the format, content and periodicity of which are usually specified through agreed guidelines. A synthesis report is usually compiled by the convention or programme Secretariat, with the aim of assessing progress in implementation and ensuring that lessons learned are shared amongst Parties and Member States.

48. Relevant instruments and processes include the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the preparation of the review by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) of the state of the world's plant genetic resources.

49. The fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development considered the recommendations of the Secretary General for the streamlining of national reports (see document E/CN.17/1997/6). The special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 concluded that national reports on the implementation of Agenda 21 have proved to be a valuable means of sharing information at the international and regional levels and, even more important, of providing a focus for the coordination of issues related to sustainable development at the national level within individual countries.

50. The Secretariat is currently participating in a feasibility study, together with the secretariats of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on the

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Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Ramsar Convention, the World Heritage Convention and UNEP, to examine harmonized information management for the biodiversity-related conventions. Possible recommendations are currently under examination for their feasibility and, if adopted by the governing bodies of the conventions in question, these would aim to assist Parties to provide information in forms that:

- (a) Are complementary (non-overlapping), so that information is provided only once and in one consistent format;
- (b) Serve the needs of more than one convention;
- (c) Form a subset of national biodiversity information management products (i.e., part of the input to national planning and policy development);
- (d) Are produced in a cycle which suits national requirements and that is in harmony with the reporting cycles of the conventions; and
- (e) Are developed through a process supported by harmonized guidelines, nomenclature and thesauri, as well as recommended good practices and information management methodologies.

51. A meeting of the relevant Secretariats has been arranged for the last week of April to consider the feasibility of such arrangements. The report of this meeting will be made available to the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

VII. REVISED GUIDELINES

52. National focal points in several countries have informed the Secretariat of difficulties encountered in applying the guidelines for national reporting on the implementation of Article 6, contained in the annex to decision II/17. These difficulties are also apparent from the preliminary review of national reports. Such difficulties, and the variability of the national reports that have resulted, need to be assessed before the next reporting round, and recommendations on future reporting distilled from this assessment.

53. Key questions concern: the length of the report, and depth of content; the time period to be covered; apparent duplication between sections; duplication between the report and other existing documents; difficulties in providing meaningful budget figures; whether the report should only cover activities which are a direct result of ratification of the Convention; how to report on implementation of decisions of the Conference of the Parties; and what to report on sustainable use and fair and equitable sharing of resources.

54. Given that Contracting Parties vary considerably in size, biodiversity, capacity and capability, it is difficult to determine exactly what each Contracting Party should provide in its national report. The following 10 guiding principles were contained in an information paper, "Further

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guidelines for the preparation of national reports", distributed at the third meeting of SBSTTA (document UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/3/Inf.16). These may help in the development of future guidelines for national reporting:

- (a) Base the report on information that is already required by the national focal point to assess how the country is meeting the commitments taken on as a result of becoming a Party to the Convention;
- (b) Ensure that the report covers the priority areas identified by the Conference of the Parties in its decisions;
- (c) Cover what is relevant to implementation of the Convention, not just what is being done because the Convention has been ratified;
- (d) Emphasize progress in development and implementation of the national biodiversity strategy and/or national biodiversity action plan;
- (e) Summarize the current status and trends in biodiversity, biodiversity "services", use and threats, and progress in development of programmes to evaluate and monitor these;
- (f) Avoid repeating information from national biodiversity strategies and action plans, or national country studies and state of environment reports (they can be appended);
- (g) Concentrate on measurable progress since the last report, and identify the progress that is expected before the next report is due;
- (h) Use indicators to show progress in achieving targets set in the national biodiversity strategy and/or national biodiversity action plan, and in previous reports;
- (i) Emphasize information that will help other Parties in their implementation of the Convention, in particular, both good practice and bad experience;
- (j) Design reports that are useful for multiple purposes with minimal modification, for example as material for journalists, or for educational purposes.

VIII. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

55. A detailed set of recommendations will be contained in the revised document to be placed before the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The recommendations that follow derive from the interim conclusions above, and are subject to further development in the light of the synthesis of information contained in the national reports currently under review.

56. In decision II/17, the Conference of the Parties decided that, at its fourth meeting, it would determine the intervals and form of subsequent national reports. This determination would be based on the experience of Parties in preparing their first national reports and taking into account the state of implementation of the Convention.

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57. In view of the current status of submission of the first national reports, including the fact that many reports have been submitted as interim reports and that full reports will be submitted once the NBSAP process is further advanced, it would appear advisable to allow for completion of this process and full analysis of the lessons learned before taking decisions on subsequent national reports.

58. Such a course of action would provide the necessary incentives and encouragement to Parties to submit a full first national report before having to embark on the preparation of the next report.

59. The Conference of the Parties is thus invited:

(a) To postpone until its fifth meeting the determination referred to in decision II/17;

(b) To request the Executive Secretary to prepare, in time for the fourth meeting of SBSTTA, the report referred to in decision II/17 on the basis of all the first national reports received and other relevant information;

(c) To request SBSTTA, at its fourth meeting, to consider the report of the Executive Secretary and to provide the Conference of the Parties, at its fifth meeting, with advice on the intervals and form of future national reports. This advice should cover both the nature of the information needed from Parties in order to assess the state of implementation of the Convention and recommendations on improving the reporting process, through, first, guidelines on format, style, length and treatment that ensure comparability between reports and, second, options for the harmonization of reporting under this Convention with that under other relevant instruments and processes;

(d) To consider the constraints and needs, financial and otherwise, identified by Parties, in particular developing countries and countries with economies in transition, in respect of the completion of the national biodiversity strategy and action plan process and to provide appropriate guidance to GEF, the implementing agencies and other competent institutions, intergovernmental and non-governmental, as well as to Parties themselves, with a view to facilitating the completion of the strategy and planning cycle by all Parties;

(e) To request the Executive Secretary to take into full account the information provided in the national reports in the preparation of the Global Biodiversity Outlook.

Annex

PARTIES AND GOVERNMENTS WHICH HAVE
SUBMITTED NATIONAL REPORTS

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|-----|-------------------------------------|-----|--|
| 1. | Algeria | 44. | Madagascar |
| 2. | Armenia | 45. | Malawi |
| 3. | Australia | 46. | Malaysia |
| 4. | Austria | 47. | Maldives |
| 5. | Bahamas | 48. | Marshall Islands |
| 6. | Belarus | 49. | Mexico |
| 7. | Belize | 50. | Monaco |
| 8. | Bhutan | 51. | Mongolia |
| 9. | Bolivia | 52. | Mozambique |
| 10. | Brazil | 53. | Namibia |
| 11. | Burkina Faso | 54. | Nepal |
| 12. | Cameroon | 55. | Netherlands |
| 13. | Canada | 56. | New Zealand |
| 14. | Cape Verde | 57. | Niger |
| 15. | China | 58. | Norway |
| 16. | Colombia | 59. | Oman |
| 17. | Costa Rica | 60. | Panama |
| 18. | Denmark | 61. | Peru |
| 19. | Djibouti | 62. | Poland |
| 20. | Democratic Republic of the
Congo | 63. | Qatar |
| 21. | Dominican Republic | 64. | Republic of Korea |
| 22. | Ecuador | 65. | Romania |
| 23. | Egypt | 66. | Russian Federation |
| 24. | El Salvador | 67. | Rwanda |
| 25. | Equatorial Guinea | 68. | Senegal |
| 26. | Eritrea | 69. | Slovenia |
| 27. | European Community | 70. | South Africa |
| 28. | Fiji | 71. | Spain |
| 29. | Finland | 72. | Sri Lanka |
| 30. | France | 73. | Swaziland |
| 31. | Gambia | 74. | Sweden |
| 32. | Greece | 75. | Switzerland |
| 33. | Haiti | 76. | Thailand |
| 34. | Hungary | 77. | Togo |
| 35. | Indonesia | 78. | Trinidad and Tobago |
| 36. | Israel | 79. | Turkey |
| 37. | Jamaica | 80. | Uganda |
| 38. | Japan | 81. | Ukraine |
| 39. | Kazakstan | 82. | United Kingdom of Great
Britain and Northern
Ireland |
| 40. | Kenya | 83. | Uruguay |
| 41. | Latvia | 84. | Uzbekistan |
| 42. | Lebanon | 85. | Viet Nam |
| 43. | Lesotho | 86. | Zambia |
