

**STATEMENT BY
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at the opening session of the
Fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body of Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice
(SBSTTA)
Montréal, 21 June 1999

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Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Permit me to add my welcome to you to the fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to the Convention on Biological Diversity and to Montreal, the Seat of the Secretariat of the Convention, to that of your distinguished Chairman.

This is possibly the most important meeting of SBSTTA to be held so far. As your Chairman has just stressed, the Conference of the Parties last year embarked upon a process of reviewing the operations of the Convention. It emphasised the need for SBSTTA to focus on the preparation of scientific, technical and technological advice of the highest quality. As the Chairman noted, SBSTTA needs to base its work on the best available science and knowledge and to provide the bridge between research and policy-making. It needs to ensure that its advice to the Conference of the Parties is specific and focused. That it clearly identifies actors, products and activities; and as such generates momentum for the implementation of the Convention.

This is the first meeting of SBSTTA to be held since the Parties to the Convention have submitted their National Reports. These reports confirm in print the general situation that we had previously anticipated. The magnitude of the problems, the complexity of the issues faced by countries, their need to build scientific and policy-making capacity, and their desperate need for scientifically based advice on what issues to address as priorities, how to address them, and what can be done. These are the issues we must address. Providing advice on these matters is the responsibility of this body.

We see from reports on the development of national biodiversity strategies that much work has started at the national level on developing strategies and action plans. However the integration of these biodiversity strategies and action plans into other sectors - agriculture, energy, planning, transport, for example - is much more complicated. It

requires political will, certainly. But political will is generated only by identifying benefits. The identification of benefits requires a reliable scientific basis. This is why the work of SBSTTA is the basis of the development of the Convention.

Mr Chairman,

Biodiversity is entering the mainstream of policy and planning on a global scale, and the relevance of biodiversity issues to trade, agriculture, health and economics is only just being realised. At each step we experience again the need for a scientific understanding on which to base our policy decisions so that we can advance in the fight against poverty and global degradation.

Your task is to design mechanisms by which we can access, comprehend and integrate the vast amount of knowledge relevant to biodiversity that is available, to identify those areas where we do not have sufficient knowledge and to propose ways by which we can fill those gaps.

The advice of the SBSTTA goes beyond the confines of the Convention process. It has an impact on many other processes and institutions and creates new opportunities for collaboration. Such collaboration is beneficial not only to the Convention, but to all countries as they seek ways to guarantee the security and well being of their people.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

Turning now to the agenda of this meeting, you have before you a challenging set of issues for which the Conference of the Parties has requested your advice.

As the Convention has grown and evolved, so also has SBSTTA. The advice that SBSTTA provides is a singular element in the process by which the Convention becomes real. The advice coming from SBSTTA, the recommendations on collaboration with other bodies and institutions, the ever expanding documentation and information being made available to all the world and the processes recommended by SBSTTA for establishing linkages with common themes and needs make SBSTTA the leading body of expertise in the world.

Building on previously provided advice and addressing emerging issues of a scientific and technical nature is therefore critical, since neither science nor knowledge remain static. It is a feature of the Convention, and the role of SBSTTA that as we move forward we must always look back to check if we are still applying those principles of scientific rigour to which we are dedicated. The Convention is always renewing itself. Indeed next week the Conference of the parties will be reviewing its own operations in an effort to improve on our ability to deliver to the Parties the ways and means to implement the

Convention. Not the least of these ways and means are the scientific assessments that come from SBSTTA.

This meeting will add to the already impressive portfolio of the SBSTTA a new thematic area which exemplifies as well as anything my earlier comment. Clearly, the considerations by SBSTTA on the issue of drylands, arid and semi-arid ecosystems will have significance to our colleagues in the Convention on Combating Desertification. The work of SBSTTA in providing clear scientific assessments of the role of biodiversity and the impacts on biodiversity in drylands will I am sure be welcome.

An innovation at this meeting, which we hope you will judge to be a useful innovation, is the initiative supported by the Bureau to invite renowned experts to address the meeting on matters related to the issues under consideration. In this way it is hoped that the latest scientific developments and thinking can be brought into the discussions and assist SBSTTA with the preparation of its advice to the Conference of the Parties. These presentations will not be prescriptive, but are intended to provide an overview of the latest developments and to identify gaps that need addressing. I believe that such presentations will be useful to SBSTTA and may become a standard feature of our meetings.

This evolution and maturing of the SBSTTA could not be possible without firm and decisive leadership. The roles of the Chairmen and the Bureaux cannot be overemphasised. I am very pleased to have had this opportunity to work with you Mr. Chairman and with your colleagues in the Bureau.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

I want to briefly touch upon a couple of key issues. This meeting of SBSTTA will be followed by an Intersessional Meeting on the Operations of the Convention, which will take place next week. The intersessional meeting will continue the review of experience of the operations of the Convention and the programme of work. The conclusions of this meeting, together with the experience gained as a result of the changes in the way the Convention operates initiated in Bratislava, will be considered by the Conference of the Parties when it meets in Nairobi in a year's time. The intersessional meeting will also address questions of access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing.

As delegates are aware, at its extraordinary meeting in Cartagena in February, the Conference of the Parties decided that more time was needed to clarify unresolved issues before the adoption of the protocol on biosafety. The extraordinary session requested its president and the Bureau of the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in close consultation with the Executive Secretary, to decide on the date and venue of the resumed session to finalize the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. I am pleased to announce that discussions on preparations for the resumed session have continued since February and

that the President of the Extraordinary Meeting, Minister Juan Mayr, and the President of COP IV, Minister László Miklós, will be with us here in Montreal next week.

Delegates will be aware that the success of SBSTTA meetings is due to many and that full participation of all Parties in the work of the Convention is essential to building a democratic, transparent and effective process. Therefore, before I conclude, I want to express my thanks to those governments who generously contributed financially to this meeting: Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce Mr. Kalemani Mulongoy. Many of you will know him as Jo Mulongoy and will remember him as a member of the interim secretariat at the first meeting of SBSTTA in Paris in 1995, and at the first two meetings of the Conference of the Parties. We are very pleased to welcome him back as head of the Secretariat's Division for Scientific, Technical and Technological Matters. This is the division within the secretariat that takes charge of all matters related to SBSTTA and Jo Mulongoy will be the secretary of this meeting.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

Allow me to repeat that, as always, the Secretariat stands ready to assist you in your endeavours. I wish you hard work and a productive week. Please count on our full support.

Thank you for your attention.