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OPEN-ENDED INTER-SESSIONAL MEETING ON THE  
STRATEGIC PLAN, NATIONAL REPORTS AND  
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON  
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Montreal, 19-21 November 2001  
Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

**NATIONAL REPORTS**

***Harmonization of national reporting: report submitted by the United Nations Environment Programme***

*Note by the Executive Secretary*

1. The Executive Secretary is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the Open-ended Inter-Sessional Meeting on the Strategic Plan, National Reports and Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, a report on the harmonization of national reporting submitted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
2. The paper is being submitted in the form and in the language it was received by the Secretariat of the Convention.

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\* UNEP/CBD/MSP/1.

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## Harmonization of National Reporting

### Background:

1. Pursuant to Chapter 38 of Agenda 21 and UNEP Governing Council Decisions 17/25, 18/9, 19/9c and 20/18B, UNEP has been working to promote collaboration among, and provide programmatic support to, multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Regular meetings of MEA Secretariats have been convened since 1994 to identify and implement activities to address issues of common concern to MEA Secretariats. UNEP is working on harmonization of national reporting and information management systems under MEAs as a part of that effort: it is a concrete activity that will contribute to enhancing collaboration and synergies among MEAs in their efforts to assist countries to report effectively and efficiently on the implementation of the MEAs. Effective coordination and management of the MEAs is one of the critical issues that need to be addressed within the wider context of international environmental governance (see section on Environment Management Group).
2. In recent years the number of MEAs have increased significantly. As a first step to contribute to addressing the need to harmonize reporting processes under MEAs, UNEP is implementing a project on streamlined national reporting under biodiversity-related conventions. Pilot case studies will be carried out with six interested countries, including Belgium, Ghana, Indonesia, Panama, Seychelles, and the United Kingdom. The pilot projects will test the four main methods of streamlining national reporting that were identified in the Workshop (October 2000, Cambridge) which explored ideas for a more harmonized approach to national reporting to international agreements. The workshop was convened by UNEP. The four methods are: (i) modular reporting; (ii) consolidated reporting; (iii) linking reporting to state of the environment reporting; and (iv) information management and regional support.
3. The biodiversity conventions included in the project are the five global conventions, i.e. the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and World Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention). The Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) Protocol under the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention) will also be considered in the pilot project of Panama.
4. The project is implemented by UNEP's Division of Environmental Conventions in collaboration with UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre, which will provide the necessary technical assistance, and with cooperation of the secretariats of the relevant biodiversity-related conventions.
5. The activity also links to another key UNEP activity on development of guidelines on enforcement of, and compliance with, MEAs. National reports under MEAs are useful tools for checking the implementation of MEAs and help to advance and improve implementation. Facilitating the countries to meet the reporting requirements under MEAs by harmonizing the reporting processes at both national and international levels, thus contributes to strengthening compliance with MEA obligations.

**Status:**

6. The pilot projects have been prepared in the form of MOUs between UNEP and the participating developing countries. The two developed countries, Belgium and the UK will finance their own work and are considering supporting, both financially and substantively, the implementation of the pilot projects in the developing countries.
7. MOU has been signed by Seychelles and work has been on-going. Seven team meetings have already been held and the team is compiling the reports under the biodiversity-related conventions and carrying out the required analyses. MOUs have also been signed by Indonesia and Panama. The work should be starting in the two countries. Signed MOU from Ghana is awaited.

**Plans:**

8. The pilot projects are to be completed by the end of the year 2001 or early 2002.
9. Each pilot project will produce the following:
  - (a) A report (or reports) that satisfy the reporting requirements under the biodiversity-related conventions to which the country is a Party for a selected period.
  - (b) A report on the national reporting mechanisms (institutional frameworks and information/data flow) for the biodiversity-related conventions and in some cases, state of the environment (SOE) reporting, including:
    - (i) Description of the reporting mechanisms that exist and the information management systems used for the preparation of each report;
    - (ii) Description of the linkages between the reporting mechanisms for the biodiversity-related conventions (and in some cases SOE reporting mechanisms);
    - (iii) Gaps in information and data existing in the country;
    - (iv) Recommendations, including the necessary actions to be taken by the Government, on how to streamline the national reporting under biodiversity-related conventions and, in some cases, including the linkages with SOE reporting mechanisms, can be ensured or improved;
    - (v) Recommendations on how the information management system for the reporting can be improved, including possible information support from outside the country.
10. Based on the outcome of the pilot projects the following outputs will be produced:
  - (a) Preliminary consolidated reporting format for the global biodiversity-related conventions.
  - (b) A set of guidelines on establishment of a coordinated national reporting mechanism for the biodiversity-related conventions.
  - (c) A report on regional mechanisms for supporting the countries to fulfill the reporting requirements under biodiversity-related conventions: the case of Panama and Central America.
11. A paper on available results will be prepared for submission to the Global Ministerial Environment Forum in early 2002 with a view to further refining the paper as a part of UNEP's contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

**Environment Management Group and the International Environmental Governance:**

12. The Environmental Management Group (EMG) was established by the UN General Assembly at its fifty-third session, as a mechanism for enhancing inter-agency coordination in the field of environment and human settlement in the context of the overall reform effort of the UN Secretary General. As stipulated in its terms of reference, the EMG adopts an issue management approach to address selected issues that are not satisfactorily addressed through other coordination mechanisms and issues of common concern to majority of its members. Three meeting of the EMG has so far been convened.
13. At its First Meeting (22 January 2001), the EMG discussed the issue of harmonization of national reporting and agreed to establish an Issue Management Group (IMG) on this subject. UNEP was invited to serve as task manager, focusing on biodiversity-related conventions while considering the relevance of biodiversity-related aspects of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). The IMG was asked to look at this issue comprehensively, taking into account issues such as the best use of lessons learned, the composition of the group and the number of the countries to be used in a pilot phase. UNEP was asked to provide EMG with its recommendations at its next session. In accordance with the decision of the EMG, a paper entitled, "Harmonization of Information Management and Reporting for Biodiversity-Related Treaties" was prepared by UNEP. The First Meeting of the IMG was convened through a teleconference on 7 June 2001 to discuss the paper which was subsequently finalized incorporating the comments of the participants at the IMG teleconference. The paper was then discussed by the EMG at its meeting on 15 June 2001 and further substantive input was received and incorporated.
14. The paper will provide an input to a report to the UN Secretary General as part of the preparation of documentation and other preparatory activities called for in UN General Assembly resolution 55/198 on enhancing complementarities among international instruments related to environment and sustainable development. This is in preparation for the review of implementation of Agenda 21 to be carried out in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Effective co-ordination and management of MEAs is one of the critical issues that need to be addressed under international environmental governance, which will be discussed in depth at the WSSD. WSSD is seen as a critical opportunity to advance further international co-operation for sustainable development on the basis of concrete commitments at the highest level.
15. In preparation for the summit, the UNEP Governing Council has established an open-ended intergovernmental group of ministers or their representatives, to undertake a comprehensive policy-oriented assessment of existing institutional weaknesses, as well as future needs and options for strengthened international environmental governance. The report of the group of ministers will be reviewed by the next session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum to be held in February 2002, which will provide guidance to the tenth session of the CSD (the preparatory body for the WSSD) on future requirements of international environmental governance in the broader context of multilateral efforts for sustainable development.
16. One of the key basis for the discussion of the intergovernmental group of ministers or their representatives is the report of the UNEP Executive Director on International Environmental Governance. Inputs of the MEAs form an important part of the Executive Director's report. Harmonization of national reporting is one of the concrete activities undertaken by MEAs and UNEP in an effort to enhance coordination, collaboration and synergies among MEAs.