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PRESS RELEASE

Biodiversity meeting seeks ways to preserve traditional knowledge

Montreal, 30 January 2002 – Hundreds of delegates from the Convention on Biological Diversity's 182 Parties, other Governments, indigenous and local community organizations and various institutions are gathering in Montreal from 4 to 8 February to explore how indigenous and local communities knowledge and practices can help conserve the world's highly threatened species and ecosystems as well as to discuss measures to preserve and maintain traditional knowledge and promote its wider application.

“Because many traditional and indigenous societies live so closely with nature, they have gained exceptional insights into how best to preserve and sustainably use the world's invaluable biological resources,” said Hamdallah Zedan, the Convention's Executive Secretary.

“For this reason, the ongoing erosion and loss of traditional knowledge, practices and technologies is of crucial concern. Working through the Convention, we need to halt and reverse this erosion so that this knowledge can be put to good use and is not lost to future generations,” he said.

The meeting is expected to prepare guidelines for conducting cultural, environmental and social impact assessments regarding development projects on sacred sites and on the lands and waters occupied or used by indigenous and local communities.

The agenda also includes the development of participatory mechanisms for indigenous and local communities in policy planning and implementation, a review of the effectiveness of existing legal instruments and other mechanisms that may contribute to the protection of traditional knowledge, and the setting up of mechanisms for information exchange, cooperation and capacity-building.

The upcoming meeting is a follow-up to the adoption of a work programme on traditional knowledge by the Conference of the Parties at its fifth meeting. Its conclusions will be conveyed to the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to be held in The Hague (Netherlands), from 7 to 19 April 2002.

Note to journalists: *The second meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Inter-Sessional Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity will be held at the ICAO building at 999 University Street, Montreal, from 10 a.m. on 4 February to 8 February. For more information, please contact Cristina Stricker, Information Officer, tel. during conference: +1-514-954-8219 Ext: 8000; permanent tel.: +1-514-287-7031, fax: +1-514-288-6588, e-mail: cristina.stricker@biodiv.org. Meeting documents and other information are available at www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/traditional/wg8j-02.asp*



PRESS BACKGROUND

Traditional Knowledge and the Convention on Biological Diversity

What is traditional knowledge?

Traditional knowledge refers to the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world. Developed from experience gained over the centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment, traditional knowledge is passed on orally from generation to generation.

This knowledge is valuable not only to those who depend on it in their daily lives, but to modern industry and agriculture as well. Traditional knowledge can make a significant contribution to sustainable development. Most indigenous and local communities are located in areas where the majority of the world's plant genetic resources are found. Since they have cultivated and used biological diversity in a sustainable way for thousands of years, their skills and techniques provide valuable information to the global community and a useful model for biodiversity policies.

The Convention and indigenous and local communities

The international community has recognized the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities on biological resources, notably in the preamble to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. There is also a broad recognition of the contribution that traditional knowledge can make to both the conservation and the sustainable use of biological diversity – two fundamental objectives of the Convention.

Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity states:

8) *"Each contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate:*

j) Subject to national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge innovations and practices;"

The Conference of Parties has established a working group specifically to address the implementation of Article 8(j) and related provisions of the Convention. This working group is open to all Parties, and indigenous and local communities representatives play a full and active role in its work.

Indigenous and local communities attach considerable importance to the Convention, which they view as a key instrument for advancing the recognition, preservation and promotion of their traditional knowledge. Consequently, their representatives have been invited to participate fully in the working group on Article 8(j).

National measures

As a result of the Convention's adoption and the work being conducted under its auspices, Governments have already undertaken to facilitate the participation of indigenous and local communities in developing policies for

the conservation and sustainable use of resources, access to genetic resources and the sharing of benefits, and the designation and management of protected areas.

Many Governments are now in the process of implementing Article 8(j) of the Convention through their national biodiversity action plans, strategies and programmes. A number of Governments have adopted specific laws, policies and administrative arrangements for protecting traditional knowledge, emphasizing that the prior informed consent of knowledge-holders must be obtained.

A growing respect for traditional knowledge has led modern science to adapt its procedures for assessing the impact of development projects on biological diversity; for monitoring of ecosystems, species, particular genetic resources and species at risk; for controlling alien species; and for promoting the in situ conservation and sustainable management of biological diversity generally, to identify but a few examples. Governments are also seeking to involve indigenous and local communities more actively, and to apply their knowledge and technologies, in the conservation and sustainable use of forests, agricultural biodiversity, inland waters, coastal and marine ecosystems, rangelands and eco-tourism.

The CBD Secretariat

The Secretariat is responsible for servicing meetings held under the Convention, including meetings of the Conference of the Parties, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA), and the Working Group on the Implementation of Article 8(j) and Related Provisions. It is also tasked with preparing documents and draft decisions for these meetings based on information provided by Parties in the form of national reports, case studies, reports of experts, and so on. Indigenous and local communities are particularly invited to contribute to the work of this process.

A programme officer in the Secretariat deals specifically with the implementation of Article 8(j), prepares documents for the relevant meetings, disseminates information, and monitors progress.

The Secretariat also cooperates with other UN agencies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, World Intellectual Property Organization, World Trade Organization, UN Forum on Forests, Commission on Human Rights Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, as well as other UN environmental Conventions. This collaboration ensures that issues concerning the protection and application of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices, and the involvement of indigenous and local communities in biodiversity-related activities, are given the widest possible focus.