



CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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Press Release

United Nations meeting showcases the importance of Preservation of traditional knowledge of indigenous and local communities

Montreal, December 3, 2003 -- On the morning of 8 December, at 9:30, a traditional Mohawk ceremony will signal the opening of a UN meeting focusing on the preservation, maintenance and promotion of the traditional knowledge of indigenous and local communities.

The meeting which brings together more than 300 delegates representing governments, indigenous and local communities, will commence with two traditional Kanien'kehaka addresses: the Thanksgiving and elements of the Requickening.

The official title of the week-long meeting is *Third meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended working group on Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity and related provisions*. Article 8(j) is the provision in the Convention that refers specifically to the preservation of traditional knowledge. The term "open-ended" reflects the broad representation of world governments as well as indigenous representatives and underlines the importance of the gathering as a focal point for deliberation and exchange of views from vastly different cultural perspectives. "The cultural diversity seen at these meetings is not only important in its own right but is an essential guarantor of the preservation of biodiversity and sustainable development", said Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

This meeting is organised under the aegis of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), an international sustainable development agreement, ratified by 188 Governments that agreed on a series of actions for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and equitable sharing of its benefits. One of the most important commitments undertaken by the Parties to the Convention is to respect, preserve and maintain traditional knowledge and promote its wider application. Governments have recognized the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities on biological resources, and there is also a broad recognition of the contribution that traditional knowledge has made and continues to make to conservation and wise use of biological diversity on the planet.

The Issues

Delegates will examine 4 key issues at next week's meeting.

A *Composite Report on the Status and Trends regarding the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity*. The report provides a snapshot of the world-wide situation and makes a series of recommendations for future actions to be undertaken by governments to preserve and maintain traditional knowledge at the national level. Participants in the meeting will focus on identifying ways and means to implement the recommendations.

Guidelines for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impact assessment regarding developments proposed to take place on, or which are likely to impact on, sacred sites and on lands and waters traditionally occupied or used by indigenous and local communities. The guidelines, which reflect the recognition of the need to associate indigenous populations in the development of such sites, propose more comprehensive assessment of the impacts of new developments including the impact on local culture and society.

Indigenous and local community participation in decision-making processes regarding the preservation, maintenance and utilization of traditional knowledge. Case studies and best practices including information sharing, legislation, projects and processes will highlight how indigenous people are preserving, maintaining and using their traditional knowledge.

Protection of traditional knowledge, innovation and practices. Finally, the meeting will focus on existing and proposed systems for the protection of traditional knowledge, innovation and practices. These include analysis of existing systems for handling and managing innovations at the local levels, including intellectual property rights.

The conclusions of the meeting will form the basis of the expert advice, which will be submitted to the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP), the decision-making body of the Convention on Biological Diversity. This report will guide the COP decisions that will further the work of the Convention in the area of Traditional Knowledge and the conservation of Biodiversity.

More than 2,000 delegates will attend the seventh meeting of the COP, which will take place in February 2004 in Kuala Lumpur.

Additional information for Journalists

- (1) The Convention on Biological Diversity was adopted at the Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. It is the first global agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Since the recent accession of Thailand, there are 188 Parties to the Convention, including the European Community.
- (2) The three objectives of the Convention are: *the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of the components of biodiversity, and sharing the benefits* arising from the commercial and other utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way.
- (3) Article 8, In-situ Conservation, of the Convention on Biological Diversity states that “Each Contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate: ...
(j) Subject to its 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;”
- (4) 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 Convention which has been ratified by 188 countries. 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.
- (5) In addition to the work on the five thematic programmes initiated by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP), there are a number of other items on the COP's agenda addressing key cross-cutting issues of relevance to all thematic areas. Essentially these correspond to the issues addressed in the Convention's substantive provisions in Articles 6-20. Traditional knowledge, innovations and practices (Article 8(j)) is one of these.
- (6) 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

representatives of indigenous and local communities play a full and active role in its work. Traditional knowledge is considered a "cross-cutting" issue that affects many aspects of biological diversity. Thus it is addressed by the Conference of the Parties and other working groups as an integral part of the thematic work programmes.

- (7) *The Composite Report on the Status and Trends regarding the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity* is the result of a massive research undertaking involving experts in different regions of the world and leading to a compilation of a report on the status and trends of traditional knowledge on a planetary scale. It examines the State of retention of traditional biodiversity-related knowledge: causes of loss and threats to preservation, noting that "all regions covered under the composite report produced examples of traditional knowledge having either disappeared or at risk of disappearing. This is due to a series of interlinked threats that, to different extents, seem to affect traditional knowledge in all indigenous groups analyzed in the reports." Further sections examine the Problems and challenges of existing measures to maintain and protect traditional knowledge; Measures to enhance the recognition of traditional knowledge, assess its loss and promote appropriate uses; and a number of concrete Recommendations covering a range of issues such as indicators, incentive measures and capacity building, education, legislation and international-level activities.
- (8) *Guidelines for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impact assessment regarding developments proposed to take place on, or which are likely to impact on, sacred sites and on lands and waters traditionally occupied or used by indigenous and local communities* The guidelines reflect an increased interest and respect of governments for sites, such as burial grounds, forest groves and other natural features, held to be of particular importance to indigenous and local communities because of religious or spiritual significance. The guidelines propose more comprehensive assessment of the impacts that new developments may have on the territory as they, in addition to the effects on the environment, also refer to the consequences the development may have for local culture and society. Cultural impact assessment will look at the potential effects, both beneficial and adverse, of a proposed development on the values, belief system, customary laws, languages, customs, economy, the relationship with local environment and particular species. Social impact assessment will address the effects on the well-being, vitality and viability of an effected community, including health, welfare, education, availability and standards of housing and accommodation, infrastructure and services.

Additional information about the Third meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended working group on Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity and related provisions is available at the following CBD Web sites:

Meeting documents: <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=WG8J-03>

The CBD Press Room: <http://www.biodiv.org/press/default.aspx>

Traditional Knowledge and the Convention on Biological Diversity:
<http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/socio-eco/traditional/>

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