



COMMUNIQUÉ

President Pohamba of Namibia opens the African Ministerial Conference on Access and Benefit-sharing

Montreal, 9 March 2010. African ministers of the environment and high-level officials are gathered in Windhoek, Namibia, this week to consult on the international regime on access and benefit-sharing (ABS) currently being negotiated under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This major ministerial conference is being held under the stewardship of President Hifikepunye Pohamba of Namibia who, in his opening address to representatives of over 43 African countries, said, “There would be no better gift to the people of the world in this International Year of Biodiversity than an agreement on a fair and equitable international regime on Access and Benefit Sharing.”

The conference has been convened under the ABS Initiative for Africa – a multi-donor capacity-development initiative implemented by Germany’s GTZ – with financial support from the Government of Denmark. Also speaking at the opening were the Honourable Rejoice Mabudafhasi, Deputy Minister of the Environment of South Africa, Chair of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) and Head of the Network on Women and Biodiversity; the Honourable Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, the Minister of Environment and Tourism of Namibia; and the Honourable Karen Ellemann, the Danish Minister for the Environment, who expressed her country’s full support for the negotiation of the international regime. At the initiative of Namibia’s Minister, the participants marked the opening of the meeting on 8 March 2010 with a celebration of International Women’s Day.

The fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources is one of the three overall objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. This Ministerial Conference is being held only a couple of weeks before the final meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing (the negotiating body established by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity) which is to finalize the negotiation of the international regime in Cali, Colombia, at the end of this month in preparation for its adoption at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to be held in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010. The Windhoek Conference will benefit from the presence of Tim Hodges and Fernando Casas, the Co-chairs of the Working Group, who will be in attendance for the duration of the meeting.

Negotiations have been ongoing since 2004 further to the call for action by Heads of State and Government at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, to negotiate an



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international regime to promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

The international regime would ensure that biodiversity-rich developing countries obtain a fair and equitable share of benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources originating from their territory by setting out clear and transparent rules for access and benefit-sharing.

The sharing of benefits, through technology transfer, research results, training and profits can contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development in biodiversity-rich developing countries.

Access to genetic resources in exchange for fair and equitable sharing of benefits can contribute to further research and development, contributing to human well-being through the application of the results in pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, agriculture and many other sectors. It is also essential to ensure a better understanding of the world-wide web of life through taxonomic research.

This Ministerial Conference is the last opportunity for ministers from African countries to bring their efforts together to ensure that the international regime responds to the needs of Africa and its people and that all efforts are made to ensure the adoption of the international regime at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Reflecting on the importance of the meeting, Ahmed Djoghlaif, the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, said in his opening address, “History will recall that it was here in Windhoek, in March 2010, that, under the leadership of Namibia, the first political step towards the Aichi-Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing was taken... History will recall that the first world leader to be personally engaged in the negotiation of this new legal instrument for the tomorrow’s future is you, Your Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia.”
