



**Convention on
Biological Diversity**

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BUREAU OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE
PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. EST
18 March and 1 April 2021

**MINUTES OF THE SIXTEENTH TELECONFERENCE OF THE BUREAU OF THE
CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES IN THE INTER-SESSIONAL PERIOD HELD JOINTLY
WITH THE BUREAU OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODY ON SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL AND
TECHNOLOGICAL ADVICE**

1. The sixteenth inter-sessional teleconference of the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties since the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties and concurrent meetings of the Parties to the Protocols in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, 2018, took place on 18 March and 1 April 2021 via Microsoft Teams. The sessions were held jointly with the Bureau of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice.

2. The teleconferences were attended by the following members of the COP Bureau and substitutes. In the case that a person did not attend both sessions, attendance is indicated by a or b respectively:

Presidency: Mr. Hamdallah Zedan (Egypt);

Africa: Mr. Eric Okoree (Ghana); Mr. Melesse Maryo (Ethiopia) (b);

Asia and the Pacific: Mr. Vinod Mathur (India); Ms. Leina El-Awadhi (Kuwait);

Latin America and the Caribbean: Ms. Helena Jeffery Brown (Antigua and Barbuda); Ms. Eugenia Arguedas (Costa Rica – representing H.E. Minister Meza Murillo); Mr. Joaquín Salzberg (Argentina, substitute for Costa Rica for matters related to the Nagoya Protocol);

Central and Eastern Europe: Ms. Teona Karchava (Georgia); and Mr. Dilovarsho Dustov (Tajikistan, substitute for Georgia for matters related to the Nagoya Protocol);

Western Europe and Others: Ms. Gabriele Obermayr (Austria); Ms. Rosemary Paterson (New Zealand); and Ms. Marie Haraldstad (Norway, substitute for New Zealand for matters related to the Nagoya Protocol);

Ex-officio: Ms. Charlotta Sörqvist (Sweden), Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation; Mr. Hesiquio Benítez (Mexico), Chair of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice; Mr. Basile van Havre (Canada) and Mr. Francis Ogwal (Uganda), Co-chairs of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework;

Observers: Mr. Liu Ning (China) and Ms. Yueyu Zou (China), COP 15 host representatives; Amb. Mohamed Gad (Egypt)(a), Mr. Ayman Amin (Egypt)(a) and Mr. Omar Choukry (Egypt), COP 14

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host representatives; and Ms. Laura Juliana Rojas (Colombia) and Mr. Jorge Murillo (Colombia)(a), WG2020 3 host representatives.

3. The meetings were attended by the following members of the SBSTTA Bureau and substitutes:

Chair: Mr. Hesiquio Benitez (Mexico);

Africa: Ms. Marie-May Muzungaile (Seychelles); Mr. Larbi Sbai (Morocco) (b); Mr. Moustafa Fouda (Egypt, substitute for Morocco on matters related to the Nagoya Protocol);

Asia and the Pacific: Ms. Gwen Sisior (Palau);

Latin America and the Caribbean: Mr. Adams Toussaint (Saint Lucia); Ms. Helena Jeffery Brown (Antigua and Barbuda, substitute for Saint Lucia on matters related to the Nagoya Protocol);

Central and Eastern Europe: Ms. Senka Barudanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Mr. Volodomyr Domashlinets (Ukraine); and Ms. Tatsiana Lipinskaya (Belarus, substitute for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine for matters related to the Nagoya Protocol);

Western Europe and Others: Ms. Tia Stevens (Australia); Ms. Marina von Weissenberg (Finland)(b); and Mr. Gaute Voigt-Hanssen (Norway, substitute for Australia on matters related to the Cartagena and Nagoya Protocols);

4. The Secretariat was represented by: Ms. Elizabeth Mrema, Executive Secretary; Mr. David Cooper, Deputy Executive Secretary; Ms. Jyoti Mathur-Filipp, Director of Implementation Support Division; Mr. Alexander Shestakov, Director, Science, Society and Sustainable Futures Division; Ms. Wadzanayi Mandivenyi, Head, Biosafety Protocol Unit; Mr. Taukondjo Shikongo, Head, Nagoya Protocol Unit; Mr. Wataru Suzuki, Global Coordinator for the Japan Biodiversity Fund; Mr. Worku Yifru, Senior Legal Officer; Ms. Gudrun Fosse, Head of Administration, Finance and Commercial Services Division (a); and Ms. Catalina Santamaria, Senior Programme Officer.

ITEM 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

5. The teleconference was opened on 18 March at 7:00 a.m. EST by Mr. Hamdallah Zedan, representative of the President of the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The Chair began by welcoming the members of both Bureaux, as well as representatives from Colombia as host of the third meeting of the Working Group on Post-2020 as observers. He thanked both Bureaux for their hard work in leading the Convention process and congratulated the Chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies on the successful informal sessions they both recently concluded. He also thanked the Secretariat for all their work. He then invited the Executive Secretary to provide brief opening remarks.

6. The Executive Secretary also welcomed all the members of the COP and SBSTTA Bureaux. She also extended her congratulations to the Chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies on the success of the sessions, and her appreciation to the Secretariat team for all the support they offered. The Executive Secretary noted that the Government of China had confirmed the dates of COP 15, which were a result of discussions held between the Secretariat and the host country over several months. She announced a notification would be dispatched following the Bureau meeting to inform all Parties of the new dates. She highlighted that the dates and modalities of the meeting would be kept under review in light of the ongoing pandemic, but that it was necessary to move forward in a transparent and inclusive way as the challenges for biodiversity continued to be on the rise.

ITEM 2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

7. The Chair introduced the provisional agenda, and after no objections and changes from the Bureaux, the provisional agenda was adopted.

ITEM 3. FORMAT OF THE FORMAL SESSIONS OF THE SUBSIDIARY BODIES

8. The Chair made reference to the discussion paper previously circulated by the Secretariat that would support the discussions of the day. He then invited the Chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies to provide remarks.

9. The Chair of SBSTTA, Mr. Hesiquio Benitez, began by noting that the outcomes of the informal session of SBSTTA had been better than expected. He thanked his colleagues in the SBSTTA Bureau for their support and the Secretariat for the great work in ensuring a smooth running of the meeting. The SBSTTA Chair highlighted that participation had been high, almost twice the number of participants, noting that all Parties who had wanted to speak were able to do so and that a record high number of observers had been able to take the floor. He also noted that delegations were larger, with fewer one-person delegations. Although there were still two agenda items to be discussed in the formal meetings, he was pleased to see the overall positive response of the survey. He indicated that based on this experience, he fully supported to proceed with a formal SBSTTA meeting to keep momentum in time for the new dates for COP 15 and would continue to work with his Bureau colleagues to plan the organization of work.

10. The SBI Chair, Ms. Charlotta Sörqvist, thanked her Bureau colleagues and the Secretariat for the support offered during the informal session of SBI. She noted that the meeting had gone very well and was pleased that they had been able to cover all the agenda items. She also noted that all Parties who had wanted to speak were able to do so and noted that there had been more participation with very interesting interventions. The SBI Chair then proposed that they go ahead with a formal session of the SBI, recognizing the work of the Co-Chairs for the post-2020 process depended on the critical advice from SBI and SBSTTA. She concluded by noting that, since the dates of COP 15 have now been announced, we need to make sure that the SBSTTA and SBI meetings are held in time to allow for a meeting of the Working Group on the post-2020, which is scheduled for August 2021, where the first draft of the global biodiversity framework will be negotiated.

11. The Chair then invited Dr. Liu Ning, as representative of the incoming COP 15 Presidency, to provide brief remarks. Dr. Ning began by congratulating the Chairs and Secretariat for successful informal meetings. He expressed appreciation to the Bureau and the Secretariat for facilitating the preparatory road to COP 15. He noted that after consultations with the Secretariat and Bureau, China confirmed the new COP dates from 11 to 24 October 2021. He requested a notification be dispatched as soon as possible to build confidence with the international community. He noted that momentum for biodiversity could be witness around the world and ensured China would work closely with the Secretariat to monitor the current pandemic situation and develop a plan. He expressed hope that Parties would make efforts to carry out the meeting of SBSTTA, SBI and the WG2020-3 and that consultations would be held on post-2020 for the smooth convening of COP 15.

12. The Chair thanked China for confirming the dates and invited the Deputy Executive Secretary to provide the scenarios of meetings up to COP 15. The Deputy Executive Secretary introduced the document that was circulated prior to this joint meeting. He outlined the sections and made reference to the annexes that were also circulated. He noted that the document had been developed in close consultation with the Chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies and it had also received inputs from the COP Presidency and Co-Chairs of the post-2020 process. He briefly outlined the various sections of the paper and noted that it was proposed that the Bureaux should take stock of the elements and options outlined in the paper and then carry out regional consultation so as to come back on 1 April ready to make a decision.

13. The Chair thanked the Deputy Executive Secretary and proposed that they make an assessment of the experience gained from the informal meetings, and to come to a common understanding on the way forward, thereafter they could have further discussion and consultation among Parties through the regional groups. He then opened the floor for questions or comments from the members of the Bureaux.

14. Members of the Bureaux conveyed their congratulations to the Chairs of the Subsidiary Bodies as well as their appreciation to the Secretariat for the successful informal sessions. They thanked the Secretariat for the well written and thorough document that was circulated to them. Members of the Bureaux also welcomed and endorsed the new dates for COP 15 and thanked China for their support and flexibility on this matter. The majority of members also expressed satisfaction with how the informal sessions of SBSTTA and SBI had unfolded, noting that valuable lessons had been learned from the experience and they were ready to move ahead with the next step. They also commended the Secretariat for putting in place measures to ensure all Parties and observers could participate. One member of the Bureau highlighted that although the meetings were smooth, there were still limitations from a technical perspective for many developing countries, which compromised their ability to fully participate in the meetings, and noted that

for the survey, there was a low number of respondents from the countries and regions who experienced most issues.

15. The Bureaux then engaged in an active discussion regarding holding formal virtual meetings of the Subsidiary Bodies as a next step. The response from the majority of the members, of both Bureaux, was positive. They noted the urgency of advancing the preparations in order to arrive to COP 15 poised for success and the need to advance in a step by step manner. They acknowledged the tight timeline for the organization of the meetings and the lack of time to deliberate on this matter extensively and emphasized that the biodiversity crisis was not stopping due to the pandemic, thus it was necessary take action as soon as possible. They also provided some suggestions on how to improve the virtual experience to ensure better participation and transparency, including by considering written virtual means for interventions, rotating timings for the sessions to accommodate all time zones fairly, ensure effective participation of observers and major stakeholder groups, including by facilitating consultations for them. The Bureaux requested the Secretariat to circulate to Parties and observers the agendas for both meetings once again and asked for clarification on how it had determined the timing of the meetings. One member informed the meeting that they had held preliminary consultations with their region and there was still not a definitive position in this matter as they had a diversity of views regarding formal sessions. He noted some Parties were very positive and confident to move forward, and others felt that more options had to be studied and developed to move forward. Another Bureau member noted the increased number of international meetings and the increased difficulty for delegates to manage all these meetings. Furthermore, members of the Bureau noted the need to have a plan in place to work with the Parties that were hesitant to proceed with formal virtual meetings of the subsidiary bodies.

16. Regarding regional consultations, the Bureaux welcomed the initiative to carry out consultations with their regions. They requested for the final discussion paper to be made available as soon as possible so they could circulate with their regions, and more clarity as to how they would be conducted.

17. In response to the comments and questions of the Bureaux, the Secretariat indicated that the agendas for both meetings were already online and would include a reminder in the next notification to be sent to Parties on the COP 15 dates. The Secretariat also clarified the timing for the meetings and informed the Bureaux that these were determined working backwards from the new dates of COP 15 and complying with the nine weeks needed in between each meeting. The Secretariat also acknowledged the recommendation to use written online tools to complement the discussions and confirmed it could facilitate consultations for observers and stakeholders as needed/requested. Regarding the regional consultations, the Secretariat proposed that these be held the following week and noted the important role of the Chairs and Bureau members in these meetings. Further adjustments would be made to the document in light of the comments received by the Bureaux and it would be translated into the six official UN languages for circulation, with the expectation that it would be finalized by the weekend.

18. The Colombian representative, as host of the WG2020-3, emphasized their commitment on moving forward and echoed some of the comments made regarding the agendas of the meetings. He noted that for the consultations to be fruitful and for a decision to be made on how to move forward, it would be useful to adapt the working plan and organization of work to have a better idea on how the virtual formal sessions would look like.

19. The Chair thanked the Bureaux for their comments and for the discussion, and after confirming the schedule of the regional consultations, he informed the participants that they would resume their joint meeting on 1 April 2021 with a view to finalize the consideration of the timing and modalities of the formal meetings of the subsidiary bodies, and to come to a conclusion on this matter so as to allow the presiding officers and the Secretariat to identify a way forward.

20. After receiving no objections on the way forward and no other issues raised, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 9:06 a.m.

21. The Bureau reconvened on 1 April at 7:00 a.m. and after a brief welcome and introduction by the Chair, Bureau members who served as Chairs of the regional consultations were invited to provide a quick overview of the discussions held in their respective regions.

22. The representative from Norway, on behalf of WEOG, noted that there was unanimous and full support from his region to move ahead with the formal virtual sessions of the subsidiary bodies. He also noted it was necessary to ensure all observers and stakeholders can participate effectively and more clarity on procedure was needed before the sessions began.
23. The representative from Africa informed the meeting that the African group had met the day before and after carefully studying the options, decided they were willing to move ahead with the formal virtual sessions of SBSTTA and SBI and outlined some conditions in order to proceed. This included moving in a transparent way to ensure full participation of Parties and observers, prioritize key agenda items that need to feed into the Working Group, bracketing all the outcome documents being moved to the COP and MOP for decision, and welcomed the offer by the Secretary General to utilize the United Nations country offices to facilitate access to internet and equipment.
24. The representative from the GRULAC region noted that the region held a diversity of views, where some countries agreed with moving forward while others still had major concerns on the modalities and wanted to have more time to consult.
25. The representative from the CEE region informed that her region understood the urgency of advancing work and generally supported with moving forward with formal virtual meetings of the subsidiary bodies. She noted there was only one country in her region who had initially expressed opposition but that they had not attended the regional consultation nor responded to the discussion document later circulated.
26. The representative from Asia-Pacific gave a detailed overview of the discussions held in the region, indicating the region overall agreed to move forward with the virtual formal meetings.
27. The Chair thanked the Bureau members for their support and overviews and then asked the Chairs of SBSTTA and SBI to deliver remarks. Both the Chairs of SBSTTA and SBI noted that the regional consultations had been a useful experience and welcomed the spirit expressed of working together to advance the work to the WG2020 and COP.
28. The Chair then invited the representative of China to deliver remarks. He reiterated his appreciation to the Bureau and the Secretariat for facilitating the preparatory road to COP 15. He noted that the consultations demonstrated there was momentum for biodiversity and that there was general agreement to move forward. He noted that as time was limited, he hoped that the countries that were still experiencing technical difficulties would approach the Secretariat as soon as possible. He noted China was willing to approach some countries through diplomatic channels as they wished to successfully deliver an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework this year and bring green recovery to the world.
29. The Chair thanked the Chinese representative and opened the floor for comments. Some Bureau members took the floor to reiterate the position of their regions to move ahead with the virtual formal meetings of the subsidiary bodies. The representative from the GRULAC region, substitute for the Nagoya Protocol, reiterated that there remained a diversity of views in the region.
30. After no more requests from the floor, the Chair noted that the last year had been very challenging for the continuation of the work, but that despite the delays, he believed they had made good use of time. He reminded the Bureaux it was time to consider the next steps especially now that the dates were confirmed for the WG2020-3 in August and COP 15 in October. He noted they had very thorough discussion over the past few days and weeks and refined the way they can organize virtual meetings and thanked the Bureaux for their tireless efforts. Noting the overwhelming support to move forward in a careful way, he asked the Bureaux if they agree to move forward along the lines put forward by the SBSTTA and SBI Chairs and begin the meetings on 3 May to continue the work of SBSTTA and SBI through formal virtual means, noting the exceptional circumstances and that this would not establish a precedent for future work under the Convention.
31. The member of the GRULAC region, substitute for the Nagoya Protocol, stated that as there were divergent views in his region, he could not say that the GRULAC region supported this decision. The Bureau member from Costa Rica noted however that there was a majority of Parties in the region that wished to move forward with virtual meetings. She suggested that the Secretariat contact the countries that have concerns to try to further resolve this issue.

32. The subsequent discussion resulted in the majority of the Bureaux supporting the action to decide today to move forward and to have current and incoming presidencies (Egypt and China) and/or the Secretariat consult in parallel those countries that still had concerns.
33. The Chair suggested that the Bureaux agree to mandate the SBI and SBSTTA Chairs to prepare the organization of work for both meetings and in the meantime the Presidencies and Secretariat would consult with the Parties concerned to find solutions. He noted that the Bureau had a responsibility to all Parties. A final decision on the way forward for SBI would then be taken in the next meeting of the Bureau on 8 April, and for SBSTTA by its Bureau.
34. The Bureaux agreed to this proposal but emphasized the urgency of taking a definitive decision at the next meeting.
35. There was a request to the Secretariat to ensure that all documents for the meetings be made available on time as there were some documents that were still missing.
36. Both the Chairs of SBI and SBSTTA agreed to proceed with the preparation of the organization of work and timeline and to circulate it in advance of the next meeting of the Bureau.
37. In response to the comments and questions made by the members of the Bureaux, the Deputy Executive Secretary noted the time constraints, especially with regards to the need to begin immediately logistical preparations for the meetings, as well as the need to notify Parties with sufficient time on the tentative 3 May start. He also ensured all documents would be posted in time for the start of the meetings.
38. The Executive Secretary thanked the Chair and all members of the Bureaux for their support and work. She noted that from the Secretariat's point of view, the Secretariat would continue to do its best to support the Parties through these difficult times and noted that it needed to make financial commitments with the interpreters, therefore she expressed hope the Parties would find a way forward. She also noted the need to notify Parties of the tentative dates. She ensured they would continue to deal with the concerns raised to the best of their ability and knowledge.

ITEM 4. OTHER MATTERS

39. No other issues were raised under this agenda item on the meeting of 18 March or 1 April 2021.

ITEM 5. CLOSING OF THE MEETING

40. The Chair thanked the Bureaux and all participants for the discussion and reminded the COP Bureau it would be meeting again on 8 April to further decide on this matter. The second session closed on 1 April at 8:45 a.m.