

FOURTH TELECONFERENCE OF THE BUREAU OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES IN THE INTER-SESSIONAL PERIOD

Briefing on the measures taken in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic

23 March 2020, 7:00am EST

Participants

Presidency: Mr. Hamdallah Zedan (Egypt);

Asia and the Pacific: Mr. Vinod Mathur (India);

Latin America and the Caribbean: Ms. Helena Jeffery Brown (Antigua and Barbuda);

Central and Eastern Europe: Ms. Teona Karchava (Georgia); Ms. Elvana Ramaj (Albania); 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. Francis Sabino Ogwal (Uganda) and Mr. Basile Van Havre (Canada), Co-chairs of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework;

COP 15 Presidency: Mr. Liu Ning and Ms. Jing Xin (China);

Secretariat: Ms. Elizabeth Maruma-Mrema, Acting Executive Secretary; Mr. David Cooper, Deputy Executive Secretary; Ms. Jyoti Mathur-Filipp, Director of Implementation Support Division; and Mr. Alexander Shestakov, Director of Science, Society and Sustainable Futures Division

Key Points

- The teleconference was opened by the Chair, Mr. Hamdallah Zedan, representative of the President of the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The Chair expressed concern, sympathy and solidarity for the ongoing global crisis relating to COVID-19. He informed the Bureau members that the main purpose of the teleconference was to provide a briefing on the measures the Secretariat has taken in light of the ongoing pandemic (updating the note to the Bureau sent last week and the subsequent notification) and more measures proposed. He acknowledged that these measures are subject to change based on how the situation with COVID-19 evolves with time. He then invited the Acting Executive Secretary to provide the briefing.
- The Acting Executive Secretary also expressed her sympathies and solidarity with the ongoing health situation. She then indicated that the Secretariat is constantly keeping the situation under review therefore everything mentioned should be taken as proposals for now, as things may change. She informed the Bureau that the Secretariat had moved to full telecommuting and had put in place measures to ensure work continues. She also emphasized that the Secretariat had taken quick action, in consultation with the Bureau, to convert a number of upcoming meetings into virtual meetings, for example the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group Meeting on Digital Sequence Information that was held last week, which went very well. It had connected over 30 different locations and it was a good test on the Secretariat's side for other meetings that will be held virtually (Meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Risk Assessment, 31 March-3 April 2020; Seventeenth meeting of the Compliance Committee under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, 15-17 April 2020; Fourteenth meeting of the Liaison Group on the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, 20-23 April 2020; and Third

meeting of the Compliance Committee under the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing, 21-23 April 2020). The Secretariat had decided to proceed with original dates for these meetings to maintain momentum in the preparations for COP 15. The Acting Executive Secretary expressed her appreciation to the participants for their flexibility and patience to work through the virtual meeting with such short notice and across time zones.

- With regards to other meetings, she indicated that some had been cancelled or postponed indefinitely and these include a.) in consultation with UNEP, the follow-up workshop of biodiversity related conventions on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (Bern II), scheduled for 25 to 27 March 2020, Bern, Switzerland; UNEP was following up concerning alternative arrangements for this meeting; b.) the Thematic consultation on Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, scheduled for 30 March-1 April 2020, Bern, Switzerland had been cancelled. However, the Secretariat was exploring whether or not these can be replaced by online consultations; and c.) the Global Taxonomy Initiative Forum, scheduled for 7 – 9 April 2020 in Berlin, Germany has been postponed indefinitely.
- The Acting Executive Secretary then advised the Bureau that with regards to SBSTTA and SBI, which were due to be held in Montreal in the second half of May, they would have to be postponed as indicated in the information that had been provided the previous week. The Secretariat had considered options for alternative dates in late August and early September.
- Regarding the venue, at the time of the teleconference there was no availability in Montreal either at ICAO or Palais de Congres during this period, therefore facilities in Ottawa were explored and a suitable venue as well as equipment and interpretation had been secured for the dates as follows: a.) Twenty-fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 24): 25-30 August 2020; and b.) Third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI 3): 1-6 September 2020.¹
- The Acting Executive Secretary emphasized that these arrangements were subject to change given the uncertainty over the pandemic, but that indicating these new dates could provide an anchor for ongoing preparatory work as well as provide some more time to catch up on the delays in the preparatory work caused by the change in working arrangements. She indicated that with the Bureau's agreement, the Secretariat would prepare a notification specifying the dates and revised timelines for registration and funding of travel.
- The Acting Executive Secretary highlighted that as a consequence to these changes, the dates for the third meeting of the Working Group on Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, as well as the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (and concurrent meetings of the Parties to the Nagoya and Cartagena Protocols) would need to be adjusted. The Secretariat, in consultation with the COP Presidency and the Co-chairs, was exploring alternative dates with the Host Governments and would provide further updates in due course.
- Members of the Bureau expressed their appreciation to the Secretariat and the Co-chairs for the swift action taken for organizations of virtual meetings, as well as the search for alternative dates and venue for SBSTTA and SBI. The Co-chairs of the WG2020 assured the Bureau that as long as they had 9 weeks between meetings to prepare the documentation, they can make any scenario work. They also suggested that even though it was good to have new tentative dates for these intersessional meetings, caution must be exercised as it is not known how this will impact different countries, must make sure everyone is ready and ensure the process is respected. Some members of the Bureau asked the Secretariat to look at the possibility of holding SBSTTA and SBI in Nairobi as well, as this could provide easier access for some delegates.

¹ See Update at the end of this document.

- Some Members of the Bureau suggested that it would be useful to study the possibility of holding SBSTTA and SBI completely or partially online, perhaps parts of the process could be done and matured virtually. They also emphasized that when considering holding online options for the intersessional meetings, it must be kept in mind that some developing and island countries do not have technical equipment or effective connectivity which may limit their ability to participate effectively in the negotiations. They also highlighted the issues with time zones. It was suggested to explore a hybrid option (virtual and presential) for both meetings. Finally, participants emphasized the need to have short and concise decision text in order to facilitate the deliberations.
- The Bureau also requested that annotated agendas for both meetings be updated and made available at the earliest possible, noting that these depend on the documents and outcomes of WG2020-2.
- The Chair of SBSTTA advised the Bureau that the SBSTTA Bureau would hold a teleconference meeting the following Wednesday (25 March) and was looking forward to the outcomes of the deliberations from the second meeting of the WG2020 that took place in Rome recently, in order to prepare the proper documentation required SBSTTA. The Co-chair of SBI advised that some documents would soon be ready and placed online, but that most of the items would be linked to the post-2020 process. The Co-chairs of WG2020 then confirmed they are currently working on information arising from WG2020-2. They also informed the participants that they planned to prepare another scenario note for the process onwards to WG2020-3, just as they had done before for WG2020-2 as many had found it useful.
- Members of the Bureau suggested that it would be useful to hold regular monthly teleconferences of the Bureau as a way to be kept informed and abreast of the ongoing situation.
- Members of the Bureau noted the good opportunity to increase media and communications online as more people globally are now connected and open to webinars and virtual information.
- In response to the questions and comments from the members of the Bureau, the Acting Executive Secretary informed the participants that the possibility of holding both intersessional meetings virtually was being explored, the biggest issue being interpretation. Currently ongoing consultations with the licence providers were taking place. She also confirmed that the Secretariat would look into the costs implications of holding the meetings in Nairobi. She assured the Bureau that documents for both meetings would be made available to Parties in June. Furthermore, she informed the participants that the Secretariat's communication team was currently analysing and reviewing the communication strategy to adapt to the ongoing situation.
- The Chair thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 8:00am

Update

- On 31 March, the Acting Executive Secretary informed Members of the Bureau, as well as the Bureau of SBSTTA, that further to the notification issued on 23 March, the Secretariat had subsequently been informed that facilities would be available at ICAO for the following dates: 17- 29 August 2020. Given the cost savings from holding the meetings at the seat of the Secretariat in Montreal and in accordance with decision 14/37, the Secretariat therefore proposed to hold the meetings as follows:
 - Twenty-fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 24): 17-22 August 2020
 - Third meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI 3): 24-29 August 2020
- The members of the Bureau who responded indicated their agreement with these revised dates.
- Accordingly, a new notification was issued on 31 March to inform all Parties and Observers of the revised new dates.