

Developing countries express concerns over arrangements for UNFCCC meetings

Bonn, 21 June (TWN) — Agendas of the next UNFCCC session, frequency of forthcoming meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COPs) and participation of non-Party stakeholders in the process have proved contentious in discussions under the agenda item on ‘Arrangements for Intergovernmental Meetings (AIM)’ under the UNFCCC’s Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI).

These issues were discussed in informal consultations over 19-20 June during the ongoing climate talks in Bonn, Germany, and Parties will continue to deliberate on these matters further in subsequent consultations.

In relation to the proposed agenda for the next UNFCCC session to be held in Santiago, Chile in December this year, some developing countries expressed surprise that the issue of adaptation was dropped from the items to be included in the provisional agenda of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA) and proposals by the Secretariat to either remove or conclude on agenda items that did not enjoy consensus among Parties for the sake of efficiency. (See further details below).

On the frequency of COPs, some developed countries were of the view that the meetings should not be held annually after a given timeframe, since the focus of work was on in-country implementation of the Paris Agreement (PA) and its work programme (PAWP). Developing countries on the other hand underlined the urgency for climate action and the need to maintain the political momentum of the intergovernmental process through the annual meetings.

On the participation of non-Party stakeholders, while some developed countries highlighted the importance of providing space to non-Party stakeholders to promote their contributions in helping achieve the PA goals, developing countries expressed the view that

while the participation of non-Party stakeholders were welcome, there should be no doubt that it is the Parties who have legal obligations to undertake actions and should therefore have the final say in the decisions they take.

Agenda of the next UNFCCC session

The next UNFCCC session is to be held from 2-13 December, where three of the governing bodies will meet, viz. the COP, the CMA and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP), along with the two subsidiary bodies - the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and SBI.

Discussions in relation to the agendas of the governing bodies became contentious with proposals from the Secretariat to improve the efficiency of the process¹.

According to the note by the Executive Secretary, “With most elements of the PAWP now having been adopted, the CMA will need to develop a new agenda for its second session. The secretariat suggests that this could also be an opportunity to update the agendas of the COP and the CMP so that they better address the outcomes of the Paris and Katowice Conferences that relate to work under the COP and under the CMP with a view to developing agendas that are relevant, well structured, concise and forward-looking”.

The Secretariat in its note also proposed the following criteria to increase “efficiency”:

- “removing items that are traditionally referred orally to the subsidiary bodies and are standing items on their agendas;
- exploring ways to conclude the consideration of items that have been held in abeyance for several years;

¹ Document FCCC/SBI/2019/6 (Page 6)

- exploring ways to conclude the consideration of items that have repeatedly failed to reach a consensus on an outcome; and
- not including items that have not had matters for consideration at recent sessions”.

During the discussions on the issue, the **European Union (EU)** said that there was scope for streamlining the agendas and encouraged the Secretariat and the COP Presidency to make further advances in the area. The EU also encouraged the Secretariat to pursue its ideas.

Egypt for the **Africa Group** wondered what was driving such proposals as “removing or concluding items that did not reach consensus”. It said that this was not the appropriate way to proceed, adding that just because Parties could not agree on something, did not mean those Parties who had proposed the agenda items could be by-passed. Egypt said that there were rules that dictated when an agenda item could be reviewed or deleted and these rules should be followed.

Egypt also referred to the items proposed for CMA provisional agenda (that was annexed to the note by the Executive Secretary) and expressed surprise that the issue of adaptation had been omitted from the agenda entirely, and asked if the issue was being omitted entirely from the Convention and the PA altogether. It proposed that the CMA agenda follow the structure of the PA (which includes adaptation).

(According to the Executive Secretariat’s note, the possible elements of the proposed provisional agenda of the CMA include: opening of the session; organizational matters; reports of subsidiary bodies; public registries under the PA; the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage; matters relating to finance; development and transfer of technologies; capacity-building under the PA; report of the forum on the impact of the implementation of response measures; cooperative implementation under the PA [relating to the Article 6 market mechanisms and non-market approaches]; administrative, financial and institutional matters; the special needs and special circumstances of Africa under the PA; the high-level segment; and other matters).

China also expressed caution over the removing of agenda items without the consensus of Parties. **Saudi Arabia** said it was not in a position to support removal of items from the agendas.

Frequency of COPs and governing bodies

Ahead of the Bonn session, the UNFCCC Secretariat had also prepared a synthesis report on the submissions of Parties on the ‘views on the frequency and location of sessions of the governing bodies after 2020 and their budgetary and other implications’².

According to the synthesis report, **Switzerland** in its submission noted that with the adoption of the PAWP, climate change processes had reached a level of “maturity” that was similar to other environmental agreements that meet on a “biennial or triennial cycle”. Switzerland also stated that “the frequency of COP sessions needs to be consistent with the **new regime** while taking into account the cycles established by the PA.” (Emphasis added).

(Several developing countries expressed concerns to TWN that the term “new regime” was misleading and should not be used, as everything that was being done under the PA was to enhance the implementation of the Convention and there was no “new regime”).

Switzerland’s proposal, as reflected in the synthesis report, includes different options such as COPs being held twice or thrice in five years, starting in 2028, with a leader’s event every five years coinciding with the global stocktake (to assess the collective progress of Parties in implementing the PA goals).

The synthesis report also states that according to some Parties, making the cycle of the COP sessions less frequent than annual “would ensure an effective process while avoiding unnecessary burdens on Parties and the secretariat”.

The synthesis report also notes that the **Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC)** held the view that consideration of the frequency of sessions should be postponed until 2028 and called on the Secretariat to prepare “an information note on the implications of any change in the frequency of COP sessions on fulfilling the mandates and commitments of Parties under the PA and the outcomes of its work programme”.

The **Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)** held the view that discussions on the frequency of meetings could be postponed until after 2030, “given the critical importance of the 2020-2030 period”, the synthesis report stated.

Egypt for the **Africa Group** in its submission³ said that the COP shall be held once every year unless the COP decides otherwise. The Africa Group in their submission stated that “notwithstanding the agreement on substantial parts of the PAWP in COP 24, much

² Document FCCC/SBI/2019/INF.1

³ Document FCCC/SBI/2019/INF.1/Add.1

work remains to be done for the PA to become fully operational”. The group recommended that Parties should continue with the current approach of annual sessions.

Referring to the submissions, Parties had an interesting exchange during the Bonn session.

Egypt referred to the forthcoming UN-Secretary General (UN-SG) Summit on Climate Action in September 2019 in New York, and said that the UN-SG Summit was a result of the outcomes of Paris and Katowice under the UNFCCC, stressing that it was not UN-SG summits that led to the outcomes. It said that the UNFCCC is the core multilateral process that deals with climate change and discussions on decreasing its frequency would send out a wrong message to the world that the UNFCCC is no longer relevant. The challenge of climate change has not ended by adopting the PA, Egypt said, and added that much remains to be done.

Maldives for the **AOSIS** provided examples of mandates from the various decisions adopted lasting up to 2030, and added that the momentum of the intergovernmental process needs to be maintained given the scale of the challenge at hand. Maldives referred to the Special Report on 1.5°C (1.5 SR) by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to underscore the urgency of climate action and for the need to engage in the issue.

Costa Rica for the **AILAC** said that it was critical to ensure that the commitments of Parties under the PA and PAWP are not undermined and also referred to the 1.5 SR to say that ambition must be scaled up over the next 10 years to ensure that the PA’s objectives are met. Costa Rica added that frequency was instrumental to keep the political momentum ongoing. Referring to their submission, it said that the discussion on frequency must be deferred until 2028.

China said that the frequency of further sessions was closely related to governance matters under the UNFCCC and the PA. It reminded Parties that when the PA and the PAWP were negotiated, the assumption was that COP would convene every year and if the frequency was changed, it would impact several processes. To increase efficiency, China suggested to have shortened duration of meetings and said maybe it could perhaps be a week-long COP instead of the duration lasting two weeks.

According to the **EU**, given the divergences of views on the topic of frequency, there should be in depth discussions on the issue, adding that it would be important to discuss ways in which the UNFCCC process could be improved to better fit with enhanced

ambition and implementation. The EU said Parties should think about making the ambition cycle the driving issue in the schedule and time allocation of meetings. It added further that at certain moments, Parties would need stronger political involvement, which should be considered as well.

The **United States** encouraged Parties to think about increasing the “efficiency” of the process, and added that while Parties may discuss the issue further, they were unlikely to reach consensus on the issue.

Switzerland referred to its submission in its intervention and said that while annual COPs had played an integral role in providing guidance, following the adoption of the PAWP, the focus would turn to technical work and implementation in each country and that post 2020, one must have a “broader perspective”. It said that it agreed with AILAC and AOSIS that climate action and ambition must be rapidly scaled up, but having yearly meetings would not measure effectiveness and lowering the frequency would reduce the financial burden on Parties and the Secretariat.

Participation of observers

In relation to participation of observers and non-Party stakeholders, the **EU** said an outward-looking approach or encouraging more special sessions where international organisations get a space to promote their contributions in helping to achieve the PA goals would be very useful. It also called for the involvement of non-Party stakeholders, especially youth in the process.

Egypt for the **Africa Group** said it was not against having different stakeholders in the process and welcomed non-Party stakeholders’ engagement, but that should not undermine the fact that the UNFCCC is a Party-driven process where Parties undertake legal obligations through decisions. Since decisions are the legal obligation of Parties, they should have the final say in the decisions, it elaborated further.

China said that while it welcomed the engagement of non-Party stakeholders in the process, it should be recognised that the process is inter-governmental, and this should be preserved. It also called for effective, balanced participation and said that Parties should think about enhancing the participation of non-Party stakeholders from developing countries to strike a balance in their participation. **Saudi Arabia** also echoed similar sentiments as China and Egypt.

Edited by Meena Raman

