



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**



The International Treaty
**ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

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Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda
SIXTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY
Rome, Italy, 5 – 9 October 2015
Report of the Chairperson

Executive Summary

At its Fifth Session, the Governing Body elected Mr Matthew Worrell as Chairperson of the Sixth Session of the Governing Body, in accordance with Rule II of the Rules of Procedure of the Governing Body¹. In this document the Chairperson reports, for information, on his activities and major developments affecting the International Treaty since the Fifth Session of the Governing Body.

Guidance Sought

The Governing Body is invited to take note of the Chairperson's Report.

¹ Rule II.1 The Governing Body shall elect a Chairperson and one Vice-Chairperson per FAO region other than the region of the Chairperson (hereinafter collectively referred to as “the Bureau”) and in addition a Rapporteur from among the delegates, alternates, experts and advisers (hereinafter referred to as “representatives”) of the Contracting Parties.

Rule II.3 The Chairperson shall preside at all sessions of the Governing Body and shall exercise such other functions as may be required to facilitate the work of the Governing Body.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The period since the Fifth Session of the Governing Body has been a time of intensive change and progress for the International Treaty. With the Treaty entering a critical transition phase in the form of enhancements of its Multilateral System and the operational launch of the Global Information System, the past two years have been a period of intensive advancement and growth for the Treaty.

2. Throughout this biennium the Bureau of the Sixth Session² has worked to provide guidance to the Secretariat on preparations for this critical Sixth Session of the Governing Body. The successful continuation of the progress of the Treaty will depend on your decisions during this important Session.

3. I would like to thank the Vice-Chairpersons of this Session, my fellow Bureau members, for their dedication to making this Session a success. Through their active contributions and leadership of their regions, this has been a productive Bureau. I would like also to extend my personal appreciation to the Secretary of the Treaty, Dr Shakeel Bhatti, and the Secretariat team for their efforts, professionalism and hard work throughout the biennium.

4. It has been an exciting biennium and I am pleased to share with you an overview of our work and activities in bringing the Treaty forward from the ambitious programme of work adopted at the Fifth Session.

II. MAJOR WORK TRACKS

5. A major task for the Bureau has been to discuss and agree on the agenda for this Session and coordinate the selection of the date with the Secretariat.³ I am pleased to inform you that at this Session the Governing Body can, for the first time, base its work on a structured agenda, with clearly identified Parts of the Session, which should help us use our time efficiently. As a Bureau, we have also provided guidance on the preparation of the documentation for the Session, which we have requested to be shorter and more concise.

6. Given the density of the agenda of the Governing Body, we need to streamline our deliberations as much as possible, particularly now that some of the Treaty systems are stable with daily operations and that we are in an enhancement phase. In consequence, and following the request of the Fifth Session, we have worked to prepare a proposal for the first Multi-Year Programme of Work for the International Treaty (MYPOW)⁴.

7. The Vice-Chairpersons of this Session have facilitated the nomination of experts representing their regions for all the inter-sessional processes and have closely followed the progress made with the preparations for the meetings of the *Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group for the Enhancement of the Functioning of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing* (the Working Group), the *Expert Consultation on the Global Information System (COGIS)*, and the *Ad Hoc Committee on Sustainable Use*. I have also worked closely with the Co-Chairs of the Working Group on how to coordinate the holding of the fourth meeting of the Working Group on

² The Bureau elected at the Fifth Session comprised myself as the Chairperson, and six Vice-Chairpersons: Mr Ahmed Nasser Al-Bakry (Near East Region), Mr Clarito Barron (Asia Region), Mr Saulo A. Ceolin (Latin America and Caribbean Region), Ms Felicitas Katepa-Mupondwa (North America Region), Mr Thomas Meier (Europe Region), and Mr Yacoub Mungroo (Africa Region). During the biennium, Ms Paz J. Benavidez and by Ms Clarissa Nina replaced Mr Barron and Mr Ceolin respectively.

³ The date of the Sixth Session was announced in January 2015 and the official invitation was dispatched on 1 June.

⁴ IT/GB-6/15/22.

2 October 2015 with the Governing Body Session and how to ensure that its work can optimally contribute to the outcomes of this Session.

8. At its Fifth Session, the Governing Body tasked the Bureau of the Sixth Session with launching the third Call for Proposals under the Benefit-sharing Fund. I have been very pleased to lead this process during the biennium. The Bureau has played a very active role in the Call for Proposals and the execution of the third benefit-sharing cycle under the Fund. As a result, we have a significant new portfolio of projects underway. I would like to thank all the donors that have made this possible through their voluntary contributions.

9. The impact of the Benefit-sharing Fund is reaching a significant global scale as the project portfolio has again doubled from the second to the third rounds. With the approval of the Bureau, we have launched an innovative new financing window for the third round on the co-development and transfer of technologies, which connects with the rapid progress the Treaty is making with the development of the Global Information System and the Platform on Technology Transfer. While helping to build new Treaty systems, it brings scientists and farmers together to address the most pressing needs of farmers who conserve and use plant genetic resources. I appreciate the Secretariat's work in facilitating the innovative and high quality work in the Benefit-sharing Fund to connect the Multilateral System with the Global Information System.

10. At its Fourth Session in 2011, the Governing Body reviewed a synthesis of some of the major information systems on PGRFA and determined the need to set up an inclusive and community-driven consultation process among the global community of users for the effective development of the Global Information System on Plant Genetic Resources (GLIS) established under the Treaty. Furthermore, it called for cooperation with the Clearing House Mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CHM-CBD). As the major outcome of this process, the Governing Body has been presented with a vision and a programme of work for its review and adoption at this Session, and with the terms of reference for the Scientific Advisory Committee to guide its implementation in the near future.

11. During this biennium, I have discussed a number of issues of relevance to the Treaty with the FAO Director-General Dr José Graziano da Silva, who has been very supportive of the Treaty and the decisions of the Governing Body and has assured me of lending FAO's full support to the work of the Treaty Secretariat.

12. The Director-General is also very committed to the expansion of the membership of the Treaty and, among other things, early this year we jointly sent a letter to those countries that have not yet become Contracting Parties. I am happy to report that such communication and other contacts to encourage additional membership are bearing fruit. In addition to Japan and Sri Lanka which became Contracting Parties immediately after the Fifth Session, six other countries have become Contracting Parties in this biennium bringing the total Treaty membership to 136 at present. These include Iraq, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Serbia, Swaziland and Tonga.

13. In October 2014, the Bureau, in consultation with FAO, agreed to renew the term of office for the current Secretary and the proposition to formalize a renewals procedure.

14. Finally, the Bureau also provided guidance and decisions where they were needed to successfully complete or sustain inter-sessional processes requested by the Governing Body, such as the involvement of stakeholders in preparations for the first meeting of the Working Group, the preparation of the fourth Call for Proposals, improved communication with and policy guidance for the Global Crop Diversity Trust, and the identification of interrelations between farmers' rights and other instruments.

III. PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

15. The development and maintenance of strategic partnerships and collaboration with other international instruments and relevant organizations and policy processes has been key to the Treaty's success.

16. The entry into force of the Nagoya Protocol has brought new opportunities for the Treaty. I am pleased to say that the cooperation of our Secretary with the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity has been excellent during this biennium, based on our Memorandum of Cooperation and their Joint Initiative. In addition, Contracting Parties are undertaking initiatives to further enhance the synergies with the Protocol and other conventions in focused areas. In the coming years, additional efforts and resources will be needed to enable an increasing number of our Contracting Parties to join and harmoniously implement the Protocol.

17. We will have the opportunity during this Session to review the reports of other partner organizations and processes like the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA). In relation to the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the collaboration between the Treaty and the Trust has continued to grow during this biennium. I have represented the Treaty in the meetings of the Executive Board of the Trust, and the Chairperson and Executive Director of the Trust have participated in discussions of relevant agenda items at Treaty Bureau meetings. Furthermore, I delivered a statement at the last session of the CGRFA to emphasize the need to further discuss and advance issues of common interest.

18. Contracting Parties have also collaborated and engaged in various initiatives and events, like the Fourth High-Level Round Table on the International Treaty that took place in New York in September last year, that facilitated discussion on how monetary and non-monetary benefits generated from the utilization of germplasm can support agricultural innovation for breeding climate-smart seeds.

19. I would like to take this opportunity to thank H.E. Minister Fuad bin Jafaar Al-Sajwani, Chairman of the High-level Task Force on Resource Mobilization and Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Wealth of Oman, for chairing these important meetings and for leading the High-Level Task Force. I participated in the meetings of the Task Force and note that with his chairmanship and commitment the Task Force has progressed towards a systematic and productive approach of raising awareness about the Treaty's importance and financial needs. One of the major recommendations which the Task Force and Bureau shared during this biennium is the need to make the Benefit-sharing Fund more flexible and more attractive for donors and to reach out to overseas development aid funds, for which more work is recommended in the 2016-17 biennium through the reconvening of the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on the Funding Strategy.

20. I have also participated in other meetings and initiatives supported by Contracting Parties. These briefings and personal contacts have allowed me to become more aware of the importance of topics like the implementation of Farmers' Rights and the close connection with conservation and sustainable use.

IV. CONNECTING THE TREATY SYSTEMS WITH THE VALUE-CHAIN

21. During this biennium I have been working, together with the Vice-Chairpersons and the Secretary, to enhance and connect the mechanisms of the Treaty along the value-chain of plant genetic resources. The past Resolutions of the Governing Body have given us concrete guidance on how to further deploy the Treaty systems. Based on this guidance, we have implemented a series of activities to maintain and strengthen the practical relevance of the Treaty systems along

the continuum of adding value to germplasm, with the ultimate goal of contributing to climate change adaptation and increased agricultural production.

22. First, at the upstream stages of *in situ* and on-farm conservation and management, two major achievements have been made. These are: the creation of new information tools for on-farm management of crop genetic diversity under the Treaty's Global Information System; and the allocation of funding for the third round of projects under the Benefit-sharing Fund to support farmers and scientists in the field.

23. The second stage is exchange of germplasm and related data through the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing. Australia has provided funding during this biennium to support economic research on the economics of benefit-sharing, and I have followed with great interest the discussions on the enhancement of the System. Within this process, Contracting Parties and stakeholders are collaborating to develop measures to increase income for the Benefit-sharing Fund. They are also developing additional measures to enhance the functioning of the Multilateral System. Based on the outcomes of the third and fourth meetings of the Working Group, our Governing Body Resolution will be important in sending a strong and positive sign to the users of the Multilateral System, and to build confidence in the ongoing enhancement process.

24. For the third stage, involving data about plant genetic resources, the Treaty is making rapid progress with the development of the Global Information System. There are new, stimulating opportunities related to the fields of genomics, phenomics and other omics that will help us to improve the quality of the data and the services available to plant breeders, farmers and the entire community. The data arising from the analysis of the correlation of phenotypic and genotypic data have a significant impact for research and breeding. Advanced data sets generated from germplasm in the purview of the Treaty need to be available and utilized for the global public good. The Treaty is uniquely positioned to build and offer advanced characterization services and make data available through high quality germplasm information systems.

25. Within the Global Information System, a specific area is dedicated to phenotypic and genotypic data under the "DivSeek" Initiative. Divseek is a community-driven initiative of plant scientists, genebanks and users of plant genomic data to link large-scale sequencing and phenotyping data to publicly available germplasm accessions. DivSeek is facilitated by the Global Crop Diversity Trust jointly with the Secretariat of the Treaty and with the input of other partners, namely the Global Plant Council and the Consortium Office of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

26. At the fourth stage of pre-breeding, breeding and transfer of technologies, the Treaty has facilitated further partnerships and open initiatives among stakeholders under its Programme of Work on Sustainable Use, through the Platform on Co-development and Transfer of Technology and the Public Private Partnerships on Pre-breeding. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the countries and institutions that have been involved for their contribution to the implementation of the Treaty. The third round of projects under the Benefit-sharing Fund is already enhancing the downstream use of plant genetic resources under the Treaty for future food security.

27. At the fifth stage, the Treaty community has flagged the importance of facilitating the material release of innovation, in the form of improved varieties, to farmers in the field. Priority areas for action are a partnership approach to the scaling up of public sector technology, and support for the development of seed release policy and regulatory frameworks. I hope that this important work will continue in the next biennium, through cooperation with technical institutions.

28. I would like to emphasise the critical importance of the fourth Call for Proposals under the Benefit-sharing Fund for the continued success of the Treaty and its further growth, in all areas. Through the combination of its unique systems and tools, the Treaty increases agricultural productivity and provides added value for users and stakeholders through all the stages of the value chain.

29. Finally, I would like to reiterate Australia's commitment to the enhancement and full implementation of all the Treaty systems. I am confident that, with your support and commitment, the Sixth Session will make an important contribution to shaping the international governance and operational architecture for plant genetic resources, not only for today, but for future generations.