

A Brief History on the Convention on Biological Diversity

A Prelude to Change

There were many steps that led to the United Nations process to the development of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Four that were key are:

- The declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 1972; *Stockholm Declaration*
- UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, 1982
- The World Charter for Nature, 1982
- Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; *Our Common Future*

1. The **Stockholm Declaration** stated:

“Man is both creature and moulder of his environment, which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth. In the long and tortuous evolution of the human race on this planet a stage has been reached when, through the rapid acceleration of science and technology, man has acquired the power to transform his environment in countless ways and on an unprecedented scale. Both aspects of man’s environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights – even the right to life itself.”

2. This was developed further in the **World Charter for Nature** which emphasized:

“Mankind is a part of nature and life depends on the uninterrupted functioning of natural systems which ensure the supply of energy and nutrients, civilization is rooted in nature, which has shaped human culture and influenced all artistic and scientific achievement, and living in harmony with nature gives man the best opportunities for the development of his creativity, and for the rest of recreation...”

and

“Every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to man, and, to accord other organisms such recognition, man must be guided by a moral code of action, Man can alter nature and exhaust natural resources by his action or its consequences and, therefore, must fully recognize the urgency of maintaining the stability and quality of nature and of conserving natural resources...”

3. **Our Common Future**, often called the “Report of the Brundtland Commission” observed these ideas and sought to develop a mechanism that would support them yet deal with humanity’s ongoing and increasingly severe impacts on the Earth. It coined the term “sustainable development” which sought to describe a means by which humanity could learn to live sustainably within the Earth’s resources, yet continue to develop its industries, economies and social structures to its own betterment.

This rapidly growing understanding by the world community of its place in nature, its unsustainable behaviour and its increasing vulnerability to environmental, economic and social collapse stimulated a global willingness to meet and assess its place in the order of life and its impact upon its “home place”. The need was found to begin of the CBD.

4. The **UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations** provided a very distinct and important consideration to the “message” evolving through the environmental debate as it brought forward for the first time the importance of standard setting at a global level with respect to the rights and concerns of indigenous peoples. A direct result of this workshop is the ongoing development of the UN Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Increasing awareness of the issues and plight of the worlds of indigenous peoples and the potential importance of their role in the conservation and sustainable management of global resources became an important element of the CBD.

A Chronology of the Convention on Biological Diversity

1990-1992

The world’s nations gathered to discuss the creation of protocol and finally agreed to develop a convention to deal with the complexities of human sustainability.

Key issues and understandings that developed included:

- Accepting a global scale that humanity is rapidly outstripping its ability to live sustainably on Earth
- Recognition that conservation and the sustainable use of the world’s resources needed to be better understood and balanced
- Values described through conventional global economic systems were inadequate to deal with the complexities of conservation and sustainable practice and they were ineffectively linked to scientific knowledge that described ecosystems and their functions
- Recognition that other “world views” held primarily by indigenous peoples offered insights and understanding that would significantly advance humanities ability to deal with the problems identified
- Recognition of the holistic nature of the problem, and the need to build new mechanisms to deal with conservation and sustainable use of world resources.

Parallel to the negotiations on the CBD was the development of Agenda 21. Far more complex and definitive in its recommendations it became a driving force in understanding the problems faced. Agenda 21 has become a watershed document that most nations of the world recognize as a basis for meeting their obligations to the CBD. Unlike the CBD, Agenda 21 is not a legally binding agreement. Chapter 15 deals specifically with biodiversity.

June 1992

The **Earth Summit** in Rio de Janeiro saw the signing of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

November 1992

The first meeting of countries after the Earth Summit. Held in Costa Rica and co-sponsored by Canada, it began the discussion of where nations had to go to implement the CBD.

December 1992

Enough nations had signed and ratified the CBD to establish it as a legally binding international convention.

December 1994

First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Nassau Bahamas

November 1995

Second Meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Jakarta Indonesia

Highlights:

- Informal discussions relating to the meaning and implications of Article 8(j) agreement that Article 8(j) would be brought forward formally at the 3rd meeting of the CoP
- Significant organization by indigenous peoples at the CoP.

November 1996

Third Meeting of the Conferences of the Parties, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Highlights:

- Formal presentations from indigenous organizations to the CoP
- Canadian Delegation and some others included indigenous peoples
- Agreement by the CoP to hold an “inter-sessional” meeting in Madrid on Indigenous Knowledge and Biological Diversity.

November 1997

Workshop on Indigenous Knowledge and Biological Diversity, Madrid, Spain

Highlights:

- First meeting between nations and indigenous peoples discussing common concerns for biodiversity and the environment
- Creation of a “friends of the chair” role as a mechanism to overcome the UN Rules of Procedure and allow full participation of indigenous peoples in the organization and management of the meeting
- Recognition that the role of indigenous peoples with regard to the implementation of the CBD needed to be enhanced and strengthened
- Development of a report for submission to the CoP containing over 200 items and issues of concern to indigenous peoples needing resolution through the CBD
- Formation of the “Indigenous Caucus” to review and assess deliberation in progress and to respond whenever possible to issues of concern to indigenous peoples
- Participation at the workshop of over 300 including more than 30 aboriginals from Canada, 14 of whom were on the Canadian delegation.

May 1998

Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Bratislava Slovak Republic

Highlights:

- Creation of an “ad-hoc intersessional open-ended working group on article 8(j) and related articles” to report directly back to the CoP at its meeting in 2000. Its mandate is to review and assess the report of the Madrid Workshop and to make recommendations on its findings
- Decision of the CoP to examine the “Rules of Procedure” with a view to improving the role of indigenous peoples and other groups in the deliberations of the CoP
- Decision of the CoP to request WIPO to review its regime of work and take into consideration the issues of indigenous knowledge as they relate to intellectual property rights and protocols
- Canadian Delegation had 2 aboriginal members.

As a direct result of the request to WIPO a Fact Finding Mission was established to look into the issues of intellectual property rights as they affect indigenous knowledge. This Fact Finding Mission has visited Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. It will be visiting the United States and Canada at the middle and end of November.