



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



**International Treaty
on Plant Genetic Resources
for Food and Agriculture**

Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda

TENTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

Rome, Italy, 20–24 November 2023

Report of the Chair

Note by the Secretary

At its Ninth Session, the Governing Body re-elected Ms Yasmina El Bahloul (Morocco) as the Chair of the Tenth Session of the Governing Body. The Governing Body noted that the re-election of Ms Yasmina El Bahloul as Chairperson, and of the Vice-Chairpersons, was approved as an extraordinary measure to provide for continuity and the timely advancement of the International Treaty activities in view of the one-year, abbreviated timetable until the Tenth Session of the Governing Body.

In this document, the Chair reports on various activities she undertook in her capacity as the Chair, and on certain tasks delegated by the Governing Body to the Bureau of the Ninth Session, as well as on other significant developments affecting the International Treaty since the Seventh Session of the Governing Body.

Guidance Sought

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

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Tenth Session of the Governing Body takes place 14 months after our ninth meeting in New Delhi. This short intersessional period enables the Governing Body to reset its meetings to correspond with FAO's biennial calendar. The Financial Rules of the Governing Body provide that the financial period of the Treaty shall be two calendar years, coinciding with the financial period of FAO. By meeting in November 2023, the Governing Body returns to the normal biennial cycle of its sessions, which was disrupted by the COVID-19 global pandemic that necessitated the postponement of the Ninth Session of the Governing Body from 2021 to 2022.
2. Looking back, the Governing Body will have held three sessions in the arch of three years, as we had to hold a special Session by the end of 2021, also due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. This would not have been possible without the enduring resilience and commitment of my fellow Bureau Members and the Secretariat, and I would like to start my report by thanking them for their continuous support. Extraordinary times require extraordinary people like them.
3. My Bureau colleagues for the Tenth Session are Ms Sabnam Shivakoti Aryal (Asia Region), Ms Kim Van Seeters (Europe Region), Ms María Antonella Parodi (Latin America and the Caribbean Region), Mr Ali Chéhadé (Near East Region), Ms Christine Dawson (North America Region) and Ms Alison Curran (Southwest Pacific Region). Mr Joaquin Salzberg (GRULAC) also served in the Bureau.
4. As at the time of the publication of this Report, the Bureau has met four times in the twelve months following the Ninth Session of the Governing Body. While the time since the Governing Body last met in India may be short, a lot has happened. The intersessional bodies of the Governing Body were very active with developments on many fronts. A number of fora in the United Nations have taken important decisions on biodiversity protection, and on benefit-sharing arising from the use of genetic resources and Digital Sequence Information (DSI) on genetic resources. The outcomes of the Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-15) of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) are particularly relevant, in particular the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. For this reason, the Bureau, as reported below, decided the following theme of this Tenth Session: From Seeds to Solutions, Safeguarding our Future: Working together with the Global Biodiversity Framework for Sustainable Food Systems.

II. PROVISION OF ADVICE ON MAJOR WORK TRACKS

5. During the exceptionally short intersessional period, the main task of the Bureau was the provision of advice to the Secretary for the swift preparation of the Tenth Session in November 2023. The support of the Secretary was fundamental to enable the Bureau to rapidly transition from the finalization and publication of the Report of the Ninth Session of the Governing Body and related Resolutions to the planning of the Tenth Session, including its agenda, documentation and the scheduling of the intersessional processes.
6. Our first meeting of the Bureau took place two months after GB-9. As follow up actions from our meeting in India, we took note of the processes of finalization, translation and posting of the report of the Ninth Session and the Resolutions in all official languages. I also recall that the Ninth Session of the Governing Body had requested the Secretary, under the guidance of the Bureau of the Tenth Session, to update the provisional Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW), based on the decisions made at its Ninth Session. I am pleased to report that the MYPOW was published on the Treaty website in early 2023 following the provision of inputs on the finalization of the MYPOW by the Bureau at its first and second meetings and through electronic exchanges.
7. By the end of 2022, the dates of major intersessional processes for the Tenth Session of the Governing Body had been finalized and were published on the web so that relevant representatives, delegates and stakeholders could mark their calendars accordingly. I want to thank my fellow Vice-Chairs for ensuring that nominations for the subsidiary bodies from the respective Regions were submitted to the Secretary on time. It is worth noting that Bureau facilitated the designation of the Co-Chairs and the identification of technical experts of the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ACSU). We also took note of the dates for the Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights and worked together with the Secretariat in the identification of participants per region from developing countries to participate in the event. The Bureau also received regular updates on the

intersessional processes and the outcomes of the discussions by the subsidiary bodies. Finally, the Bureau noted the importance of identifying dates and venues for the regional preparatory meetings for the Tenth Session of the Governing Body.

8. The re-establishment of the Open-ended Working Group on the Enhancement of the Functioning of the Multilateral System provides us the opportunity to make another attempt to an agreement on the much-needed improvements to the operations and functioning of the Multilateral System. While there might be difficult negotiations ahead, with some major outstanding issues, I am optimistic, and I have full confidence that the Co-Chairs of the Working Group will guide the process to a fruitful conclusion. However, I urge Contracting Parties not to miss this historic opportunity on our hands, and exercise understanding and spirit of compromises in order to come to workable agreement on those issues.

9. The Bureau finalised the Provisional Agenda for the Tenth Session and reviewed the main list of working documents. We took note that the length of the Session would be five days on this occasion and discussed modalities for the Session, suggesting that plenary sessions would be live-streamed and, when possible, the major Contact Groups.

10. In preparation for the Session, the Bureau took note of the status of the finances and noted with concern that not all Contracting Parties had been contributing to the Core Administrative Budget. We invited the Secretary to keep up the efforts to engage Contracting Parties to increase the number and level of contributions to the Treaty. The Secretary plans to present a new format for the Core Administrative Budget, to be implemented from the Eleventh Session, to improve clarity and better address the linkage between the budget and the Work Programme. The Bureau took note that the indicative structure of the new format would be presented to the Tenth Session for its consideration.

11. The Bureau also discussed and agreed on the process and timeline to prepare the Capacity Development Strategy, including on the documentation for the Tenth Session. It also took note of the communication strategy and the draft capacity building strategy. We also received an update on the Communication Strategy, and the communication plan was shared with the Bureau before the Session.

III. RENEWAL OF THE SECRETARY OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY

12. At its Ninth Session, the Governing Body requested the Bureau of the Tenth Session to develop a proposal for the renewal and on the term of office of the Secretary, in consultation with FAO, and make recommendations to the Governing Body at its Tenth Session. I am pleased to report that, after consultations, the Bureau recommends the term of office of the Secretary be composed of one term of four years, with the possibility of being renewed once. The proposal is contained in the document, IT/GB-10/23/19.2, Proposal for the renewal and term of office of the Secretary of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

IV. RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS, RELEVANT ORGANIZATIONS AND POLICY PROCESSES

13. I am pleased to report that the Bureau was very active during these past months in discussing and promoting collaboration with other relevant organizations. This was a time of major developments in the multilateral environment and at the United Nations level regarding the need to respond to the biodiversity crisis and accelerate our joint efforts for its conservation and sustainable use, and when new approaches are being explored to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise from the utilization of genetic resources and from digital sequence information on genetic resources. In the following paragraphs, I provide some details on my participation in various relevant meetings and processes of key partners and summarize the advice from the Bureau on international cooperation.

14. The consideration of the outcomes of the COP-15 of the CBD, and of possible implications relevant to the implementation of the Treaty, were considered regularly by the Bureau. A number of Vice-Chairs, including myself, were present at the meeting, which enabled us to meet informally and exchange views regularly about the state of the negotiations. I also participated in various side events relevant to plant genetic resources and was able to meet international partners in the margins of the meeting, including the Deputy

Director General of FAO, Ms Maria Helena Semedo, with whom I exchanged views on a number of relevant issues.

15. The Bureau had the opportunity to discuss the first preliminary considerations of the outcomes of the COP 15 only three days after the meeting had concluded. At our third meeting, the Bureau agreed to focus the theme of the Session on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and with the proposal for the intersessional subsidiary bodies to consider possible implications of the outcomes of the GBF for the work of the International Treaty, in their respective areas of work. I am pleased to report that following such proposal, a rich number of considerations were produced in preparation of the discussions of the Governing Body, and these have been included in the document, IT/GB-10/23/07, *The Role of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture within the Global Biodiversity Framework*.

16. As directed by the Governing Body, I had the pleasure of chairing the International Advisory Panel (IAP) of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, which held a meeting from 11 to 13 October 2022. As you will recall, the IAP's mission is to provide advice and recommendations regarding the operations of the Seed Vault to the three partner organizations: NordGen, the Crop Trust and the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The IAP helps increase transparency and serves as an additional warranty to the depositors from around the world using this facility to back up their seed collections. On this occasion, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited about seventy Ambassadors and Heads of Missions, resident in Norway, for a diplomatic visit to Svalbard to learn more about the Seed Vault's important mission.

17. I wish to recall that the Bureau had to select two candidates, one from Europe and one from GRULAC, by the end of 2022, to fill the vacancies in the Executive Board of the Crop Trust to be appointed by the Governing Body. The Bureau considered the candidates nominated from both Regions to serve on the Executive Board of the Crop Trust as of January 2023, noting their extensive experiences and their high-level profiles. After reviewing the requirements of the position, and in accordance with normal procedures, the Bureau agreed to select and appoint Mr Carlos Furche and Mr Dagfinn Høybråten, and requested the Secretary to confirm their willingness to serve on the Executive Board and inform the Chairpersons of the Donors' Council and the Executive Board accordingly.

18. Other areas of collaboration with the Crop Trust were also advanced in meetings of the Bureau. I have been invited to actively participate in the Global Crop Diversity Summit that the Crop Trust and the Secretariat of the International Treaty are organizing in collaboration. The event 'Empowering Seed Banks to Combat the Climate, Biodiversity and Food Crises' will be held in Berlin, Germany on 14 November 2023. I look forward to providing an oral update on this important gathering at the Tenth Session of the Governing Body.

19. In November, the Secretary informed us that the Secretariat was joining forces with the Crop Trust to mobilise support for Article 15 collections that may be experiencing challenges securing funding for their essential operations. The action responds to Resolution 12/2022, and its objective of the new cooperation was to provide, on a short-term basis, the resources needed to fund essential operations of international collections that have signed Article 15 agreements and are outside of the One-CGIAR governance structure, until the Crop Trust's endowment fund reached an adequate level to fund the collections in perpetuity. The Bureau noted that the Secretariat and the Crop Trust planned to share the operational framework being developed for the joint facility with the Standing Committee on the Funding Strategy and Resource Mobilisation, at its next meeting. Such a process would be in line with the process followed for the establishment of the Emergency Reserve for collections at risk.

20. The Bureau has noted the importance of supporting PGRFA collections at risk and, so, welcomed the initiative of the Secretariat, with the support of the European Union and in collaboration with the Crop Trust, FAO Emergencies and other partners, in the rescue and relocation of a major collection of unique plant genetic material from an active conflict zone in the East of Ukraine, to a safer location in the west of the country.

21. As you will recall, the Secretariat is now hosted by the FAO Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment (OCB), as of June 2020. I am pleased to report that the Bureau met with the recently appointed Director of the Office, Mr Kaveh Zahedi, at the margins of our meeting in June 2023. It was a great opportunity to understand better how FAO is moving forward with its agenda and programmes on climate change and biodiversity and the role that the Treaty plays within such efforts.

22. I also participated in the Special Event “Connecting the Dots” on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and in the follow-up to the GBF. In doing so, I highlighted the Treaty’s role in joining the dots to link nature and agriculture to tackle the challenges of food insecurity, climate change, biodiversity loss and species extinction. It was an opportunity to share information about the plants, and to discuss the GBF and its implications on Treaty implementation at the Tenth Session of the Governing Body. I emphasized the relevance of GBF Target 13 on access and benefit sharing (ABS), noting that the Treaty provides currently the most advanced and operational multilateral ABS instrument. I also noted the need to ensure funding for sustainable use of biodiversity through synchronized global efforts in all sectors, and highlighted the Benefit-Sharing Fund of the Treaty.

23. I had the privilege of attending the Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights, which took place in India in September 2023. During the symposium, I actively engaged in the discussions with participants regarding the implementation of Farmers' Rights as provided in Article 9 of the International Treaty, and contributed to the exchange of ideas and perspectives on this crucial topic.

24. I closely followed the proceedings of the symposium and took a keen interest in the various side events. These side events provided a platform for the presentation of innovative ideas and initiatives aimed at encouraging, guiding, and promoting the realization of Farmers' Rights.

V. CONCLUSION

25. While it was a very short intersessional period, there is much to discuss and achieve at the Tenth Session of the Governing Body. We should contribute to moving forward the agenda of biodiversity at the United Nations level and strengthen our dialogue to follow up on the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

26. In concluding my report, I would like to recall that the Treaty provides the most important platform to unite all Regions in our quest to safeguard the diversity of the plants that feed the world today and would feed future generations tomorrow. We have a unique responsibility, and we should leave behind our differences to work for truly multilateral solutions. The future of food security and sustainable agriculture depends on it.

27. I would like to express my gratitude for having had such an opportunity to contribute to this noble activity as Chair of the Africa Region and Chair of the Governing Body. I am very honoured to have worked closely with my colleagues in the Bureau in a very dynamic, collegial and efficient manner. Thanks to the FAO management and to all the governmental and non-governmental representatives that have supported the Treaty implementation. Meeting so many committed individuals has been inspiring. My great thanks go to the Government of my country, the Kingdom of Morocco and to the African representatives, And a special thanks to Mr Kent Nnadozie and the devoted team of the Secretariat of the International Treaty.