UN biodiversity meeting ends with agreements

October 29 2010

American actor Harrison Ford, who has been on the board of Conservation International for more than 15 years, speaks during a reception for the participants to the conference of the U.N. Convention on Biodiversity in Nagoya, central Japan, Wednesday, Oct. 27, 2010. (AP Photo/Kyodo News, Nozomu Endo)

(AP) -- Participants at a U.N. conference say representatives have reached agreements to protect at least 17 percent of land areas and 10 percent of oceans by 2020.

Overcoming divisions between rich and poor countries, delegates to the 10th meeting of the U.N. Convention on Biodiversity also agreed on a system to share access to and the benefits of genetic resources - a key

sticking point.

The agreements were reached in the early hours Saturday morning in Nagoya, southwest of Tokyo, after hours of debate in the final session of two weeks of talks.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

TOKYO (AP) - Delegates from more than 190 countries struggled Friday to break a deadlock on setting ambitious goals to protect animals, plants and ecosystems, raising the prospect that the two-week U.N. meeting might end in failure.

The biggest sticking point, participants said, was a division between developing and industrial nations over working out a system to fairly share genetic resources, such as medicine extracted from plants - long a sore point for poorer countries.

Delegates to the U.N. Convention on Biodiversity meeting, held in Nagoya, southwest of Tokyo, have agreed on most goals, attendees said, but have failed to reach consensus on the most contentious targets.

One of the conference's key goals is to set measurable targets that will slow or halt the rate of extinctions and damage to ecosystems from pollution, overexploitation and habitat destruction. Scientists warn that unless action is taken to prevent such biodiversity loss, extinctions will spike and the intricately interconnected natural world could collapse with devastating consequences, from plunging fish stocks to less access to clean water.

Government ministers gathered Friday afternoon to try to hammer out final agreements and avoid the kind of collapse that befell last year's

U.N. climate talks in Copenhagen. The concluding session that was supposed to end at 6 p.m. stretched into the evening hours without a deal, participants said.

"It's a race against the clock to get something agreed upon," said Nathalie Rey, an oceans policy adviser with Greenpeace International. "Everybody's saying we can't go home empty-handed. So there's real pressure to make this happen."

Decisions at the conference must be reached by consensus, meaning any country can block agreements.

Host nation Japan proposed a compromise text Friday to break a logjam in the prickly area of sharing genetic resources, called access and benefits-sharing, or ABS, in U.N. parlance .

"I have produced a draft of a protocol by fully addressing the position of each country," Japanese Environment Minister Ryu Matsumoto told the plenary session.

Developing nations and indigenous peoples argue they haven't benefited from the bounty of their resources, such as native plants, that have been developed into drugs by wealthy Western drug companies.

The African group warned early Friday morning that if there were no agreement on access and benefits-sharing, there would be no overall agreement, said Sonia Peno Morena, biodiversity policy officer at the International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN.

In trying to set up a fair system, the two sides were still bogged down in defining key terms, determining compliance issues and whether the protocol would be retroactive, she said.

"Everything hinges on ABS," said Rey. "Once the ABS agreement has been made, then hopefully the rest will fall into place."

Delegates were also unable to agree on how much of the world's oceans to designate as protected, which could range from a marine sanctuary to areas where sustainable fishing is allowed. The draft text contained three figures - 6 percent, 10 percent and 20 percent.

Concerns about how to pay for executing such targets was also an obstacle, attendees said.

Attempting to kick-start the stalled talks, Japan on Thursday offered $2 billion to help developing nations reach the goals set by the conference - and make the meeting a success.

"There have been high expectations," said Peno Morena. "They don't want Nagoya to be compared to Copenhagen."

More information: Nagoya meeting site: http://www.cbd.int/cop10/ Convention on Biological Diversity site: http://www.cbd.int/

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Citation: UN biodiversity meeting ends with agreements (2010, October 29) retrieved 26 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2010-10-deadlocked-nature-nears.html

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