

Trade central to sustainable use of biodiversity-based resources, meeting told

The central role of trade in safeguarding environmental biodiversity while enhancing livelihoods – especially in developing countries – was highlighted at an event on the sidelines of the eighth session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on February 5 in New York.

The event, called “Sustainability at the intersection of trade, environment and development”, was jointly organized by the UNCTAD, the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild and Flora (CITES) and the Organization of American States (OAS), and brought together high-level participants from the trade and environment sectors.

Sustainable use and environmental conservation could also be the basis for the enjoyment of other basic rights such as the right to a healthy environment, social justice, economic welfare and rule of law, **Ms. Claudia de Windt** of the OAS Secretariat said.

Mr. Juan Carlos Vasquez, on behalf of the CITES Secretary-General Mr. John E. Scanlon, said that seven billion people consumed biodiversity-based products every day in the form of medicines, food, clothes, furniture, perfumes and luxury goods.

With globalization, the consumption of biodiversity-based products was growing at an unprecedented rate, placing sustainability at the centre of the debate. This had to be made visible and understandable to the general public and policy-makers, Mr. Vasquez said.

As an example, Mr. Vasquez presented the story of the Andean vicuña, a rare mountain mammal related to the llama and alpaca.

In the 1960s, vicuñas had been hunted to near extinction before being protected under CITES in 1975. By 1987, some populations had recovered so significantly that trade in vicuña wool was permitted. By 2012, the number of vicuñas had increased to over 450,000 so that now the species was soundly managed and local communities benefited directly from the trade in highly valuable vicuña wool.

Chairing the meeting, **Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra**, Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations, said that biodiversity must be mainstreamed in future sustainable development goals.

Mr. Bonapas Onguglo, the Head of Trade, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development at UNCTAD told the meeting that the three pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – could not be unbundled: on the contrary they should be coherently integrated in the development agenda beyond 2015.

Furthermore, international trade can enable the conservation, sustainable use and benefit-sharing of biodiversity-based resources in many different ways, Mr. Onguglo said. For example, UNCTAD’s BioTrade Initiative had been a clear response to the UN’s Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and a key way of advancing the biodiversity targets.