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An informal press guide to COP 8

New Delhi, 23 October 2002 – The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the ultimate authority of the Climate Change Convention and currently comprises 185 states plus the European Community. The New Delhi climate change conference, or COP 8, will run from 23 October through 1 November. More than 4,000 people have been accredited so far, including 1,710 government delegates, 1,960 observers, and 640 journalists.

The official meetings will be scheduled from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. ; some evening meetings are likely as well. The first meeting will be the opening **Plenary** (a meeting of the entire COP where all formal decisions are taken). The Plenary will choose by acclamation a new COP President (H.E. Mr. T.R. Baalu, Environment Minister of India), who will then come to the podium to take the place of the outgoing President of COP 7 (H.E. Mr. Mohamed Elyazghi, Environment Minister of Morocco). After the opening speeches, the delegates will adopt the COP 8 **agenda**. This programme of work is detailed more fully in an annotated agenda.

The President, with advice from the bureau and the secretariat, will decide how to structure the work of the session. At COP 8, much of the work will take place in the COP's two subsidiary bodies. Certain items will also be taken up directly by the Plenary.

The **Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA)** provides the COP with timely information and advice on scientific and technological matters relating to the Convention. It serves as the link between the information and assessments provided by expert sources on the one hand, and the policy-oriented needs of the COP on the other.

The **Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI)** helps with the assessment and review of the Convention's implementation. It plays a key role in examining the national communications and emissions inventories that Parties submit. It also works on administrative, budgetary, scheduling, and other practical matters that are essential to keeping the Convention process on track.

The subsidiary bodies are likely to start their work on the afternoon of the opening day and are scheduled to continue working through Tuesday, 29 October. When they are finished with their work, the subsidiary bodies will forward their proposed decisions to the Plenary for final discussion and adoption. The COP Plenary will hold one or more meetings during the conference to take stock of progress and to discuss its own agenda items. The closing Plenary will take place on Friday, 1 November, and will formally adopt all of the conference decisions.

Working within this larger structure, the President and the Subsidiary Body Chairs may create additional, smaller groups for discussing specific issues. Sometimes these are **open-ended meetings** that are attended by all interested delegates and observers; other times they are closed **drafting groups** or **informal contact groups** involving a small but representative selection of delegates. The President or Chair may also appoint individuals as "**friends of the chair**" to assist in carrying out specific tasks. The aim of all these



mechanisms is to create a process that helps to consolidate different views, reach a compromise, and produce an agreed proposal, often in the form of a written text.

Text that is being discussed but has not yet been agreed is placed in [square brackets]. Once a text is agreed in a small group it may then be discussed and adopted by the Subsidiary Body. It is then forwarded for final adoption to the Plenary of the COP. This multi-layered structure provides flexibility, offers protection against mistakes and misunderstanding, allows countries with very strong interests at stake to play a more prominent role, and – in general – it works.

The **High-Level Segment** will take place from 30 October to 1 November. Over 60 ministers have so far indicated that they will participate. The morning of Wednesday the 30th is expected to begin with statements from the heads and other representatives of United Nations bodies. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee plans to address the meeting at 11h30.

Ministers and heads of delegations will then participate in three roundtables on implementation. The theme for Wednesday afternoon's roundtable is taking stock. Thursday morning will focus on climate change and sustainable development. Thursday afternoon will be dedicated to a wrap-up.

The **official meeting documents** for COP 8 are available to everyone and feature the logos of the United Nations and the Climate Change Convention and a reference number, such as FCCC/CP/2002/1. Pre-session documents are available in all six UN languages and are posted at <http://unfccc.int/cop8/index.html>. In-session documents, which generally reflect the changing state of negotiations, are only distributed on-site. They go by such esoteric names as Conference Room Papers, L docs, Misc. docs and nonpapers. Some in-session documents are circulated only to negotiators.

In addition to the official process, numerous **side events** organized by governments and observers will be held during the conference. These events focus on specific issues and can be of great interest. There will also be a number of **exhibits** throughout the conference center. **Unofficial documents**, such as the Earth Negotiation Bulletin (a daily summary of the previous day's discussions) can also be useful.

The final outcome of the COP is a set of **Decisions** that are contained in the **Report** of the session. A decision is a formal agreement and leads to concrete actions. The future work of the COP is then guided by the Convention text as well as the decisions of the various COP sessions.

In addition to decisions, the COP can produce other, non-binding outcomes. Resolutions are directives that guide, they are opinions rather than permanent legal acts and do not generally become part of the formal body of COP decisions. A recommendation is weaker than a decision or a resolution and is not binding on Parties.