



Note to Correspondents No. 2

22 October 1999

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Fifth Session of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

25 October – 5 November 1999, Bonn, Germany

Practical information for journalists about COP 5

1) How the conference is organized

COP 5 is a United Nations conference that is being held at the seat of the secretariat of the Climate Change Convention. The UN team includes the Convention secretariat based in Bonn as well as interpreters, security officers, and conference support staff from Geneva. Unlike previous climate change COPs, there is no host government, although the Government of Germany is providing various forms of support.

2) How the conference functions

An intergovernmental meeting is a structured but flexible conversation amongst as many as 180 governments. COP 5 will follow an agenda and an established set of procedures and customs; nevertheless, it is difficult to predict exactly when any given agenda item will come up or an anticipated decision will be made.

The COP Plenary is the centerpiece of the two-week conference. It will meet on Monday the 25th for the opening formalities (including an address by Chancellor Schroeder) and to adopt the agenda. The COP will resume in Plenary again on Tuesday the 2nd for the high-level segment. On Friday the 5th the COP will conclude the conference by adopting the decisions and the report of the session. The Plenary may also hold a meeting to adopt some decisions or address other business between the 25th and the 2nd if so decided.

The COP's two subsidiary bodies – SBI and SBSTA – will divide up the agenda items and work out the details for the COP. They will meet from Tuesday the 26th through Monday the 1st. During this middle phase of the talks, negotiators will discuss draft texts and hold many private and small-group discussions. It becomes more challenging to determine exactly where the debate stands. The subsidiary bodies conclude by passing their draft decisions back up to the

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COP for final discussion and adoption. These multiple layers of negotiation give governments the freedom to be more flexible and to explore a range of options without being held to positions that in the end they cannot accept.

A 48-hour high-level segment for ministers and heads of delegation will take place from 2 to 4 November. The ministers' speeches offer useful insights into national concerns and objectives.

It is difficult to predict just how and when a COP will end. The Kyoto COP spilled over into an extra unscheduled day, COP 4 finished at breakfast time on the following Saturday, but COP 1 and COP 2 ended before 18:00 hours on the final day. The most likely scenario is that ministers and delegates will work late Thursday night and into the morning hours of Friday to finalize key political decisions for adoption by the COP on Friday afternoon.

3) Press conferences

All press briefings are posted in the press room and listed in the daily journal. There are normally many press conference at climate change COPs. The President of the COP, the chairmen of the subsidiary bodies, and the Convention's Executive Secretary will brief the press several times, including an opening briefing on Monday the 1st, plus one or two stock-taking briefings, and a final briefing on Friday the 5th. These briefings will normally be scheduled at the end of the morning meeting, at 13:15.

In addition, delegations (the US, the European Union, the G-77, etc.), UN and other inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), and non-governmental organizations representing environmental and business interest will hold briefings in the official press briefing room and other locations. Finally, note that Special Events, typically held during lunch and after 18:00, can be an extremely useful source of technical and political information.

4) Official documents and unofficial materials

Journalists can obtain official documents from the press center. The provisional agenda (document 1 together with doc. 1/add. 1) is particularly useful, as is the advance (and thus incomplete) version of the participants list (a final updated version is distributed near the end of the conference). Official documents can also be accessed via the Internet at terminals in the conference center. Note that some documents issued during the meeting are only distributed to delegates. Aside from official documents, you can refer to the press kit, the daily Earth Negotiation Bulletin (which summarizes the previous day's proceedings), and the daily journal (the current day's schedule).

5) Interviews

UN meetings differ from many private sector events in that the conference organizer does not have a definitive list of participants with hotel and other contact information. Governments are free to send any delegates they choose, even after the meeting has already started. Some governments, NGOs, and IGOs may have offices or exhibits in the conference center. A good time to catch people is as they leave the room at the end of a meeting. The press team can also help you make contact with delegates. If all else fails, local embassies may be able to assist.