

COP10: One step forward, two steps back

The bright skies over Nagoya have changed to clouds. Rain starts. This fits well with the mood of the conference. The optimistic voices heard at the opening ceremony, the happiness of many delegates to meet again is in the past. Now there are serious concerns for the success of this important summit. For wherever you look at the issues on the negotiation table, more problems are appearing than being resolved. It certainly feels like one step forward and two steps back. For instance today saw conflict on marine protected areas, led by Brazil and Mexico, and also Australia and New Zealand. They want responsibility of the High Seas to be entirely off CBD's agenda. Under this pressure the initially strong position of the EU is wavering. BirdLife is working with other environmental organizations to make strong interventions against these new moves. Turning to the CBD strategy: passages of text that were already agreed and resolved after lengthy meetings before COP10 are now being reopened. For Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) there were tiny steps forward. Nevertheless the EU and some developed countries continue to block a comprehensive settlement that would deliver equitable sharing of benefits that the developing countries ask for. Many negotiators say that at the current pace of progress an agreement on ABS will not be achieved by the end of COP10. Everybody knows this would jeopardise the success of the whole meeting. Last night at 10 PM I was in a 'Contact Group' listening in on tough negotiations on the finances. The co-chairs of the Contact Group from India and Switzerland were trying to broker fairly over the many details to clarify. And these are small details to be resolved before the big issue over the transfer of money from North to South can be addressed. But at this early stage there are significant differences of opinion between the leaders of the developing countries (where the representatives of Brazil, the Philippines and Kenya are particularly vocal) and the industrialized countries (above all representatives of the EU, Canada and Japan). It is now already important to sound the alarm bells across the world so that the ministers travelling to this summit next week hear loud and clear the need for compromise and for an agreement by the time this meeting closes on 29th October.