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INCD HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY 7 AUGUST 1995

The Seventh session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention to Combat Desertification (INCD-7) opened in Nairobi Monday. The afternoon Plenary included adoption of the agenda and organization of work, addresses by the INCD Chair, the Executive Secretary of the Interim Secretariat, and IFAD, and a review of the status of ratifications.

AGENDA ITEM 1: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND PROGRAMME OF WORK

Chair Bo Kjellén welcomed delegates, summarized the organization of work and gave a general summary of progress to date. The Chair described a tentative schedule for INCD-7. He suggested that regional groups defined by the Convention annexes could meet Wednesday morning to discuss the regional annexes and related actions, issues and problems for the interim period and report back to the Plenary on Wednesday afternoon. He also said he hopes to conclude one day early, on Thursday, 17 August. The provisional agenda and organization of work (A/AC.241/32) were adopted.

Kjellén noted that conclusions of the CSD's third session represent a clear political signal that the Convention is integrated with the follow-up to Rio and that it emphasizes connections between dryland issues, land use, food security and socio-economic factors.

He said the INCD has entered a new phase of work in which the working groups will deal with the substantive issue of preparation for the first Conference of the Parties (COP) and the Plenary will consider interim issues, especially urgent action for Africa. He said that discussion of a permanent secretariat and rules of procedure were complex issues that could benefit from the work of other conventions. The global mechanism, articles on scientific and technical cooperation, the bottom-up approach and local participation and action are innovations that give the CCD importance beyond this Convention with respect to development practice and theory.

Kjellén said reports of drought in Africa underline the importance of action in African drylands. He pointed to the role of the Convention in showing the strength of African development and other countries' solidarity with Africa, while

considering other regions. Kjellén said millions of people living in the drylands expect the CCD to lead to real improvements in their conditions. Delegates must not fail them.

Executive Secretary Amb. Hama Arba Diallo reported that 107 States and Regional Economic Integration Organizations have signed the Convention. Five States, Cape Verde, Egypt, Mexico, the Netherlands and Senegal, have already deposited their instruments of ratification with the depositary and a number of countries have initiated the ratification process.

In line with the Committee's decision during the last Session, the Interim Secretariat has compiled seven documents, A/AC.241/33 to A/AC.241/39, covering the issues the Committee intends to address. Each of the documents will be introduced by the Secretariat in the Working Groups when they come up for discussion. Document A/AC.241/40 carries a report on the status of implementation of the resolution on Urgent Action for Africa and on other regions, compiled from information that was provided by governments within the given time limit. Document A/AC.241/41 reviews the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds. The situation regarding both the voluntary and trust funds is worrying.

With respect to the resolution on urgent action for Africa, the Secretariat had facilitated the holding of two regional meetings, in Western and Eastern Africa. Those of Northern and Southern Africa will be held before the end of 1995. At the national level, awareness raising days were held in 13 African countries. During the World Day to Combat Desertification, various activities, including seminars, forums and preparation of publications were undertaken by UN agencies, which activities collaboration between the Secretariat and other UN agencies. Several NGOs, with support from UNEP, held various activities during the occasion.

The Assistant President of the Economic Policy and Resource Strategy Department of **IFAD**, Shigeaki Tomita, noted that the convergence between the Fund's operations for poverty alleviation in dryland areas and the provisions of the CCD implies that IFAD should take a significant role in its implementation. IFAD should therefore pursue innovative programs to assist the poor in fragile ecosystems and, secondly, the Fund should continue to mobilize additional resources. He also pointed out that IFAD had promoted awareness building in various ways. For instance, it has worked together with the

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Interim Secretariat and the Centre for Our Common Future in preparing a simplified version of the CCD. Tomita emphasized that the NAPs (National Action Programs) should not be shopping lists but dynamic plans that continuously evolve as experience is gained. To achieve this, IFAD has launched a financial pilot Technical Assistance Grants Programme to assist African countries in the implementation of CCD, with emphasis on marginal groups. It is important to ensure that finance gets down to the community level. Tomita further noted that the Global Environment Facility (GEF) must go beyond a clearing house function to actively facilitate the participation of financing institutions and the private sector in implementing the CCD.

Spain, speaking on behalf of the EU, said the EU attaches highest importance to the CCD and encouraged speeding the process of entry into force. He said the EU may try to turn in all of its ratifications at once. The INCD should move forward in determining the Secretariat's role in implementation and the form of implementation reports. He said the region can share the experiences of Mediterranean basin countries.

Spain is seeking to lay a basis for coordination of national and regional plans and to begin exchange of scientific knowledge. He said the regional conference in Almeria, 26-28 June, recommended establishing think tanks, and organizing conferences and networks to share information.

SWITZERLAND, speaking on behalf of Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States, members of an informal group within the OECD referred to as JUSCANZ, stated that their respective countries are firmly committed to effectively implementing the CCD. The national authorities are working to bring speedy ratification of the Convention.

On behalf of the NGOs, Jacqueline Nkoyok, Executive Secretary of Confédération des ONG d'Afrique Centrale (CONGAC), urged all governments to sign and ratify the CCD as quickly as possible. She emphasized the importance of the funds of the global mechanism reaching the grassroots level. NGOs and CBOs should be involved in the decision-making processes and development of NAPs, and the necessary resources should be provided for this.

CUBA: In spite of economic constraints, Cuba has initiated activities in conformity with the CCD. The action group to combat desertification and drought has been established to draft the national action programme. This is in the process of being prepared, based on national consultations and research done in the last 10 years, and is expected to be completed by 1996. Environmental education programmes on desertification have been undertaken in the most affected areas and climatic studies initiated. Cuba is prepared to cooperate in scientific and technological matters.

Bangladesh said emphasis should be placed on arresting land degradation in populated areas and that which is caused by anthropogenic changes. The financial mechanism should take into consideration least developed countries facing desertification. The Bangladeshi government has decided to

ratify the CCD and will develop a participatory national action plan.

AGENDA ITEM 4: STATUS OF RATIFICATION

Amb. Diallo said the Secretariat is waiting for communication from countries that have not been able to sign the Convention — three from Africa, three from the OECD group or from other regions of the world, which are in the process of signing the instruments. In addition to the five countries that have already deposited their ratification instruments, the Secretariat has information that Tunisia has completed the national procedures, and that documents are on their way.

The Chair invited brief reports on the national ratification processes and their status. **France** said its ratification procedure has begun and should be completed by the first half of 1996. **Colombia** said the ratification process should be speeded up. **Iran** said its process is underway, and ratification is expected in the coming months. **Peru** expects to ratify by the end of the year. **Germany** said its ratification should be finalized by early 1996. **Portugal** said its objective is to ratify the CCD by year-end.

Morocco's process has started, and it will ratify the Convention at the proper time. **Canada** said he anticipates ratification by the first half of 1996. **Mauritania** expects to ratify the CCD in November 1995. **India** by the beginning of 1996, whereas **Mali** adopted the convention text in November 1994 and expects the ratification to come through any time. **Lebanon** expects to ratify in October this year. In **Kazakhstan** and **Jordan** the ratification processes have started.

THE BUREAU

The Bureau of the INCD met Monday for an abbreviated session, as some members had not arrived in Kenya. The general strategy for the session and the programme of work was discussed. There was general agreement that while it may be possible to negotiate several matters in the short term, some issues such as the location of the permanent secretariat and global financial mechanisms would have to be left to later sessions. The Bureau discussed the operational problems associated with the establishment of small contact groups, as has been done at other convention negotiations. In addition, the Bureau discussed problems related to the funding of developing country delegates, particularly from the Sudano-Sahelian region.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: The Plenary resumes Tuesday morning for the welcome address from UNEP's Executive Director Elizabeth Dowdeswell. Ministers from the Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Kenya and possibly Eritrea, will then make their statements. The Plenary will turn into an informal session for information sharing on the work being carried out by various States and sectors in implementing the resolution on Urgent action for Africa and other interim measures.