



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FOURTH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION: MONDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2000

The Fourth Conference of the Parties (COP-4) to the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) opened today in Bonn, Germany. Delegates met informally in their regional groups in the morning and convened in an afternoon session for the official opening of the Conference. Opening statements were delivered by the CCD Executive Secretary, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Mayor of Bonn and the President of COP-3. The first Plenary meeting of the COP convened to elect the President of the session. It was then briefly suspended to allow the regional groups time to complete their nominations for the COP Bureau. As the groups were unable to complete their work, the meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

### OPENING CEREMONY

In his welcoming statement, Hama Arba Diallo, CCD Executive Secretary, said that this was the first time a session of the COP was being held in the host country since the relocation of the Secretariat in early 1999. He said that COP-4 should constitute a defining step to move the implementation of the Convention from reporting to assessment to bring actions down to earth to address the concerns of the millions of people threatened by poverty and land degradation.

José Sarney Filho, Minister of Environment of Brazil, who served as COP-3 President, noted with concern the unsustainable actions that characterize the behavior of the world economy. He stated that despite technological progress, world poverty was increasing. He said the current situation is aggravated by the failure of the sixth COP of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which he said disrupted the foundation of the hope and implies that future generations are not in the plans of the world leaders. He urged Parties to revive the spirit of the 1992 Rio

Conference, noting that it was fundamental to make progress at COP-4, to at least prepare the populations living in fragile environments to cope with more adverse conditions. Sarney Filho recalled the Recife initiative, which proposes that COP-4 adopts a declaration of commitments and urged the various governmental institutions, NGOs and multilateral agencies to participate actively in formulating the declaration and making it one of the main goals of the Conference. On the functions of the financial mechanisms to support national plans to combat desertification, he called on the GEF to seriously examine opening a window to give financial support to projects specifically linked to the CCD.

Harri Holkeri (Finland), President of the 55<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly, assured delegates of the Assembly's support to the CCD. He noted that the CCD is important because it focuses on areas where balance has to be reached between the needs of humans and ecosystems, and that dry ecosystems support the poorest of the poor. Holkeri recalled that the UN Millennium Summit resolved to prioritize the eradication of poverty, which affects 1.2 billion people. He also noted that cooperation and partnership are key solutions to sustainable development and highlighted the work of the UNDP related to dryland management, as an example of mainstreaming action against desertification. He also noted the efforts to seek synergies between the Rio conventions and applauded the recent review of cooperation between the GEF and the conventions. Holkeri was pleased to note that more than thirty National Action Programmes (NAPs) have been prepared by affected countries and underlined that cooperation between different ministries is important in such processes. He finally noted that the developing countries' commitment to fulfilling their obligations under the CCD should galvanize the interest of the international community.

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The Mayor of Bonn, Bärbel Dieckman, welcomed COP-4 participants to the city, which is also the location of the CCD Permanent Secretariat. She noted that the presence of the German President clearly indicated the importance Germany attaches to this Convention.

Johannes Rau, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, officially opened COP-4 at 4:00pm. Noting that some developed countries were practicing eco-colonialism, he urged them not to shirk their responsibilities for short-term gains, to be self-critical enough to admit their failure to combat poverty and realize development in developing countries, to stick to the 0.7% GDP target for development assistance despite short-term difficulties in realizing it, and to undertake their responsibility to provide the best technology, financial assistance, transfer of know-how and rules to assure competition. Rau noted that environmental destruction was one of the causes of the 30 of the 85 wars and armed conflicts in the world that occurred between 1994 and 1997, a trend that is likely to continue, but could be reversed if developing countries respect human rights, reduce social economic disparities, tackle corruption and strengthen democracy. He said this goal can be achieved by ensuring people on the ground are involved in decision-making.

#### **PLENARY**

In his opening statement, COP-3 President Sarney Filho (Brazil) underscored four areas needing attention at COP-4: strengthening of the Global Mechanism (GM) to enable more decisive support to the CCD; consideration of the best procedures for the regular review of CCD implementation; strengthening the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) to effectively support the COP and assist affected countries; and to include in the COP-4 outcomes, the need for special emphasis on drought and desertification in the Rio+10 process.

**ELECTION OF COP-4 PRESIDENT:** COP-3 President Filho reported consensus on the nomination of Zambin Batjargal, Head of Mongolia's delegation, to the post of COP-4 President. Delegated elected him by acclamation as the 4<sup>th</sup> President of the UNCCD COP.

In his opening remarks, President Batjargal (Mongolia) noted that desertification remains a significant issue to many people, especially in terms of its effects on the livelihoods of those in the affected areas. In a bid to resolve their problems and to attain food security, he hoped for cooperation and support in efforts to combat desertification and international cooperation to enforce such policy objectives.

President Batjargal thereafter suspended the meeting for two hours to allow for a meeting with the regional chairs to discuss the nominations to the COP Bureau. This issue was not resolved, and the Plenary was adjourned for the day at 6:50pm.

#### **IN THE CORRIDORS**

The COP Plenary adjourned without finishing its business for the day, following procedural wrangling. This resulted in the cancellation of the first session of the Committee of the Whole (COW) that was planned for 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Although there was agreement on the Asian Presidency for COP-4, regional groups failed to constitute the Bureau as there were more nominations than positions. Some delegates expressed surprise at the unprecedented CCD attempt by one regional group to nominate three candidates for two seats. This issue needs to be resolved before the COW and the CST can start their work on Tuesday. The Chairs of the regional groups met on Monday evening to continue consideration of the issue.

The early adjournment had one benefit, however. All participants were consequently able to attend and enjoy the food and drinks outside the Plenary Hall at a reception hosted by the CCD Secretariat. This allowed delegates to interact informally, which some said contributed to developing a constructive and conducive atmosphere for the work in the days ahead.

#### **THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY**

**COP PLENARY:** The COP will convene at 10:00 a.m. in the Plenary Hall to adopt its agenda, elect its officers and hear statements by heads of various UN bodies, related organizations and NGOs. Expected speakers include representatives of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) that hosts the Global Mechanism of the Convention, and the Convention on Wetlands.

**THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE:** A COW is expected to be established by the COP and is expected to meet immediately following the Plenary session.

**THE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY:** The CST is expected to meet after the Plenary session, and in parallel with the COW.

*Full coverage of COP-4, including photos and Real Audio, is available at <http://iisd.ca/desert/cop4>*

*On Sunday, 24 December, the ENB will publish a summary report of COP-4, including a brief analysis. Visit the website for your free copy.*