



THE SIXTH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (COP-6): 25 AUGUST TO 5 SEPTEMBER 2003

The Sixth Conference of the Parties (COP-6) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Mitigate the Effects of Drought in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (CCD) opens today at the Palacio de Convenciones in Havana, Cuba. Deliberations for the two-week meeting are expected to take place in a Committee of the Whole (COW), the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC).

Delegates to COP-6 will consider a number of issues, including: the designation of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) as a financial mechanism of the CCD; the Secretariat's programme and budget for the biennium 2004-2005; feasibility and possible terms of reference of the regional coordination units; activities for the promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies; and follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Outstanding items on the COP agenda include the consideration of rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure on voting in absence of consensus, and annexes containing arbitration and conciliation procedures. The *ad hoc* group of experts considering procedures and institutional mechanisms for the resolution of questions of implementation, arbitration and conciliation procedures will meet on 3 September.

The CST is scheduled to meet from 26-28 August. Issues under discussion will include: the roster of independent experts; survey and evaluation of existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies; enhancement of the usefulness and effectiveness of the CST; traditional knowledge; benchmarks and indicators; early warning systems; the Dryland Degradation Assessment and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment; and the work programme of the CST. The second session of the CRIC (CRIC-2) will meet from 26-29 August to consider the CRIC-1 report, activities of the Secretariat and the progress made by affected country Parties in implementing the CCD, enhanced implementation of the CCD, the Global Mechanism (GM), and financing of the CCD's implementation by multilateral agencies and institutions. It is also expected to adopt the programme of work for CRIC-3.

A number of other events are planned during COP-6. Two half-day sessions have been set aside for an open dialogue between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments on 29 August and 4 September. A special interactive segment is scheduled for 1-2 September, during which Parties will make statements on CCD implementation. The fifth interparliamentary Round Table is expected to take place from 3-4 September.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CCD

The CCD is the centerpiece in the international community's efforts to combat desertification and land degradation. The CCD was adopted on 17 June 1994, opened for signature in October 1994, and entered into force on 26 December 1996. The CCD currently has 188 Parties. The newest Parties to the CCD are the Russian Federation (29 May 2003) and Lithuania (25 July 2003).

CONVENTION OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE: The CCD recognizes the physical, biological and socioeconomic aspects of desertification, the importance of redirecting technology transfer so that it is demand-driven, and the involvement of local communities in combating desertification and land degradation. The core of the CCD is the development of national, subregional and regional action programmes (NAPs, SRAPs and RAPs, respectively) by national governments, in cooperation with donors, local communities and NGOs.

NEGOTIATION OF THE CONVENTION: In 1992, the UN General Assembly, as requested by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, adopted Resolution 47/188 calling for the establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration of a convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa (INCD). The INCD met five times between May 1993 and June 1994, and drafted the CCD and four regional annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean. A fifth annex for Central and Eastern Europe was elaborated and adopted during COP-4 in December 2000. Pending the CCD's entry into force, the INCD met six times between January 1995 and August 1997 to hear progress reports on urgent action for Africa and interim measures in other regions, and to prepare for COP-1. The preparations included discussion of the Secretariat's programme and budget, the functions of and administrative arrangements for the financial mechanism under the CCD, the GM, and the establishment of the CST.

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PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF THE COP: There have been five COP meetings of the CCD: COP-1 in Rome, Italy (29 September to 10 October 1997); COP-2 in Dakar, Senegal (30 November to 11 December 1998); COP-3 in Recife, Brazil (15-26 November 1999); COP-4 in Bonn, Germany (11-22 December 2000) and COP-5 in Geneva, Switzerland (1-13 October 2001).

At COP-5 progress was made in a number of areas, most notably, the establishment of the CRIC, the identification of modalities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST, and the enhancement of the CCD's financial base following strong support for a proposal by the GEF to designate land degradation as a new focal area for funding. Delegates also focused on setting the modalities of work for the two-year interval before COP-6.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

WSSD: The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002. The WSSD adopted the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), which acknowledges the CCD as one of the main tools for addressing poverty eradication, and identifies the need to strengthen the implementation of the CCD to address causes of desertification and land degradation. The JPOI highlights the need for action at all levels to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought and floods through such measures as improved use of climate and weather information and forecasts, early warning systems, land and natural resource management, agricultural practices, and ecosystem conservation. The JPOI also called on the Second Assembly of the GEF to take action concerning the designation of land degradation as a GEF focal area, and to consider making GEF a financial mechanism of the CCD.

GEF: The Second Assembly of the GEF held from 16-18 October 2002 in Beijing, China, adopted the "Beijing Declaration" confirming the GEF's availability to serve as a financial mechanism of the CCD, and approved land degradation, primarily desertification and deforestation, as a GEF focal area. The GEF operational programme on sustainable land management was adopted at the GEF Council meeting on 16 May 2003 in Washington, D.C.

CRIC-1: The first meeting of the CRIC was held at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) headquarters in Rome, Italy, from 11-22 November 2002. The CRIC was established in accordance with decision 1/COP.5 to regularly review the implementation of the CCD, draw conclusions, and propose concrete recommendations to the COP on further implementation steps. CRIC-1 considered presentations from the five CCD regions, addressing the seven thematic issues under review: participatory processes involving civil society, NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs); legislative and institutional frameworks or arrangements; linkages and synergies with other environmental conventions and, as appropriate, with national development strategies; measures for the rehabilitation of degraded land, drought and desertification monitoring and assessment; early warning systems for mitigating the effects of drought; access by affected country Parties, particularly affected developing country Parties, to appropriate technology, knowledge and know-how; and resource mobilization and coordination, both domestic and international, including conclusions of partnership agreements. The meeting also considered information on financial mechanisms in support of CCD

implementation, advice provided by the CST and the GM, and the Secretariat's report on actions aimed at strengthening the relationships with other relevant conventions and organizations.

CRIC-1 adopted recommendations on the programme of work for CRIC-2, noting that CRIC sessions held during the ordinary sessions of the COP will: consider the comprehensive report of the intersessional session; review the policies, operational modalities and activities of the GM; review reports prepared by the Secretariat on the execution of its functions; and consider reports on collaboration with the GEF.

REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETINGS: Several regional meetings were held in 2003 in preparation for COP-6, including the: Second Regional Meeting for Northern Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European and Other Affected Country Parties in Geneva, Switzerland (10-11 July); African Ministerial Preparatory Conference in Cotonou, Benin (30 June to 4 July) and the fourth Africa-Asia Forum on Combating Desertification (24-27 June); ninth Regional Meeting of Latin American and the Caribbean Country Parties in Bogotá, Colombia (17-20 June); and second Asian Ministerial Conference and sixth Regional Meeting of Asian Focal Points in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (7-11 June).

The meetings generated various recommendations and conclusions, with many delegates emphasizing: designating the GEF as a financial mechanism to the CCD; increasing the involvement of the private sector in implementing the CCD; addressing desertification in small island developing States; and supporting implementation of NAPs and promoting international, regional and subregional cooperation. The importance of regional coordination units was also highlighted.

ECOSOC: The 2003 substantive session of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was held from 30 June to 2 July 2003, in Geneva, Switzerland. The session was organized under the theme "promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development." The session adopted a Ministerial Declaration recognizing the important role of rural populations in sustainably managing natural resources, including biodiversity, and in combating desertification and land degradation. The Declaration commits governments to strengthening the implementation of the CCD and to addressing the causes of desertification and land degradation, in order to maintain and restore land, as well as poverty resulting from land degradation.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS: Informal regional group meetings will take place from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm.

OPENING PLENARY: The opening Plenary is scheduled for 3:00 pm in Salle 1. Statements will be made by COP-5 President Charles Basset (Canada) and the newly elected President of COP-6, the host country representative, and CCD Executive Secretary Hama Arba Diallo. Immediately after the opening ceremony, the Plenary will consider organizational matters, including the adoption of the agenda, election of other COP-6 officers, organization of work and accreditation of observers.