In the morning, delegates to COP-6 met in a Special High Level Segment to hear statements from Heads of State and Government, and in the afternoon convened in a round table to exchange views on the theme of “The UNCDD as a tool to achieve the Millennium Development Goals as they relate to poverty eradication and food security.” Informal consultations on the programme and budget, the outcomes of the WSSD, and Regional Coordination Units (RCUs) were also held in the afternoon.

**SPECIAL HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT**

COP-6 President Simeon Nigrin opened the Special High Level Segment. Many speakers welcomed the designation of the GEF as a financial mechanism of the CCD, stressed the need to mobilize financial and technical resources, including technology transfer and capacity building, and noted the importance of implementing NAPs. Others identified globalization and neoliberal policies, in particular agricultural subsidies, the IMF and WTO, as major obstacles to eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development in developing countries. Other issues raised in the statements included the: importance of the Millennium Development Goals; outcomes of the WSSD; need to address the causes of land degradation and desertification in Africa; and involvement of civil society and local communities.

In his opening statement, Cuba’s President Fidel Castro Ruz emphasized the importance of education and public awareness in sustainable development and poverty eradication. Presenting examples of Cuba’s literacy and education campaigns, he stressed that the most urgent task is to build universal awareness among adults and children. CCD Executive Secretary Arba Hamma Diallo highlighted the CCD as an important multilateral process that transcends the interests of any country. He said that the CCD is a vehicle to ensure sustainable development for people living in fragile environments. Ibrahim Gambari, representative of the UN Secretary-General, underscored the importance of the CCD, the most broad-based multilateral treaty in the area of sustainable development, in efforts to fight rural poverty and achieve food security.

Blaise Compaoré, President of the Republic of Burkina Faso, highlighted the need to use the CCD to improve the living standards of the poor. He said that despite the “waning” of the enthusiasm that had “sparked” the CCD negotiations, it is possible to combat desertification by sustaining efforts. He called for the mainstreaming of desertification into multilateral and bilateral cooperation in order to support resource mobilization.

Alhaji Yahya Jemus Junkung Jammeh, President of the Republic of the Gambia, noted that the unsustainable use of natural resources leads to further poverty. Stating that poverty, environmental degradation, and unsustainable consumption patterns impact all countries, he said that international cooperation should be regarded as an unifying element to address these challenges. Percival James Patterson, Prime Minister of Jamaica, stressed the need for a global partnership to effectively address desertification, and called on COP-6 to provide a clear understanding of how individual and joint actions, and funding promises will be realized. Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho, said COP-6 marked a turning point for the CCD. He noted that addressing land degradation requires countries to make substantial financial resources available from their national budgets.

Amadou Toumani Touré, President of the Republic of Mali, said that while the struggle against desertification is global, the countries of the Sahel are “at the heart of the battle.” He pointed to the CCD’s role in changing the international community’s perception of desertification, noting that it is a complex development problem. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia, called for adequate financing for the CCD. He underscored the need to promote awareness regarding the linkages between biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation. He noted advances achieved in Southern Africa in promoting the ideals of the CCD at subregional level by focusing on ecosystem management and poverty eradication. Keith C. Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada, highlighted the vulnerability of small island developing States (SIDS) to desertification and land degradation, and called for Parties to support the CCD’s implementation in these countries.

Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, underscored the need for effective land management to avoid deforestation, overgrazing and the negative impacts of the tourism industry. Hugo Chávez Frias, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, reviewed the history of the CCD and noted that many previous COP decisions have not been implemented. He stressed the importance of political will to effectively address the causes of poverty and desertification. He also explained Venezuela’s illiteracy eradication programme.

Robert Gabriel Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, expressed concern over the “unfulfillment” of promises made by developed countries to commit funds to improve the lives of the poor. He highlighted the Zimbabwean land reform programme. Jacob Zuma, Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, called on the upcoming WTO negotiations in Cancún, Mexico, to make headway on the CCD’s implementation. He suggested stronger linkages between NEPAD’s Environment
The High Level Segment was at the center of attention of the 190 Parties to the CCD on Monday, not least through the lively exchange between Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, which raised high-profile international issues. A large number of participants applauded the strong sentiments expressed, including the focus on poverty, third world debt, education campaigns, and the destructive role of the market economy. However, some delegates wondered whether the leaders who came to Havana were using the COP for broader political visions, that went far beyond the topic of desertification.