UNCCD COP 10 HIGHLIGHTS  
MONDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2011

The tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 10) opened on Monday afternoon, 10 October 2011, in Changwon, Gyeongnam, Republic of Korea, with a welcoming ceremony. COP 10 delegates then participated in an afternoon opening session, during which they elected Bureau members and heard opening statements by the COP 10 President, UNCCD Executive Secretary and regional and interest group representatives.

WELCOMING CEREMONY

During a welcoming ceremony, filmmaker Yann Arthus-Bertrand, Goodwill Ambassador for the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), introduced delegates to his documentary film on desertification. The film presented messages from heads of UN multilateral environmental agreements and UN departments on the role and importance of drylands, the need to preserve soil as natural capital, and the need to build a land degradation-neutral world. The film was followed by an artistic presentation with music played on gayageum – traditional stringed Korean instruments – and an interpretive painting dedicated to the COP 10 theme “Care for Land, Land for Life.”

Suh Kyu-yong, Minister for Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Republic of Korea, welcomed delegates to COP 10, highlighting the Republic of Korea’s success story in land restoration and green economic growth. COP 10 participants were also welcomed by Kim Du Kwan, Governor, Gyeongsangnam-do Province, who expressed hope that COP 10 will specifically address the desertification-poverty cycle.

OPENING SESSION

José Cueva, Director of Soil Conservancy, Argentina, opened COP 10 on behalf of Argentina’s Secretary of Environment Juan José Mussi, President of COP 9. He urged parties to make a concerted effort to achieve the Convention’s objectives, on behalf of the most vulnerable communities on the planet. Cueva then led the Plenary in welcoming the election of Don Koo Lee, Minister of Korea Forest Service, as President of COP 10.

COP 10 President Lee noted that the Republic of Korea is the first Asian country to host a UNCCD COP, highlighting COP 10’s slogan, “Care for Land, Land for Life,” he lamented the low profile of drought, land degradation and desertification (DLDD) on the international agenda. He urged parties to be bold, ambitious and creative in tackling the unresolved methodological and institutional issues. He further noted that the Changwon Initiative aims to make a contribution in this regard by mobilizing additional resources and launching the Land for Life Awards to encourage sustainable land management.

Thanking the Government and people of the Republic of Korea for their hospitality, Luc Gnacadja, UNCCD Executive Secretary, noted that DLDD “corrodes the three pillars of sustainable development” and outlined several of the topics to be addressed by COP 10. He highlighted, among other things: refining the reporting system; agreeing on the approach for the mid-term evaluation of the Strategy; discussing messages to convey to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, or Rio+20); considering quantifiable medium- and long-term targets; and organizing international, interdisciplinary scientific advice to the UNCCD. He also announced that the President of the UN General Assembly would present to COP 10 the outcomes of the high-level meeting held in New York in September on DLDD.

STATEMENTS BY REGIONAL AND INTEREST GROUPS:

Argentina, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, supported the creation of an intergovernmental scientific panel on DLDD, and proposed that Rio+20 call for its establishment. He applauded advances in the performance review and assessment of implementation system (PRAIS), and called on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to pursue its support of PRAIS. He noted the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on the assessment of the Global Mechanism (GM), and said the G-77/China was prepared to make a decision at COP 10 that may allow parties to overcome the problems of coordination that “undermine the effectiveness and efficiency” of implementation of the Convention.

Poland, on behalf of the EU and its member States, acknowledged the work done by the Secretariat and the GM to provide the basis for COP 10 discussions, including the interactive dialogues with civil society organizations (CSO). She highlighted the importance of improving PRAIS for better reporting and reduced reporting burdens on countries; the participation of all stakeholders in the development of the terms of reference for the mid-term review of the Strategy; linking the knowledge management system to other processes outside of UNCCD; refining the indicators; assessing the resource implications of COP decisions and setting priorities; and the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative.
Algeria, for the AFRICAN GROUP, emphasized that: the current drought in the Horn of Africa requires vigorous actions; the UNCCD is the only international convention that can provide practical and simple solutions to rehabilitate degraded soils and natural resources in drylands; and the costs of inaction should not continue to be ignored. He assured that the alignment of National Action Plans (NAPs) to the Strategy is well underway in Africa and congratulated the Secretariat for its efforts in this respect. He emphasized that sustainable use of land should be the cornerstone for eradicating poverty and supporting the green economy in the context of sustainable development. He expressed support for: the integration of the GM within the Secretariat structure; the creation of an independent, interdisciplinary body to provide scientific advice; and the Changwon Initiative.

Iran, on behalf of the ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION, stressed the need for further coordination and cooperation between the GM and the Secretariat, and strengthening of regional coordination mechanisms. He supported measures to reinforce the alignment between the NAPs and Regional Action Plans, to provide capacity building to affected country parties in the implementation of the Convention, and to establish a permanent scientific platform for scientific advice.

Speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), Costa Rica drew attention to the effects of DLDD in dry semi-arid and humid areas and highlighted relevant regional activities in this regard, including the Latin American Initiative on Science and Technology and ongoing work in preparation for Rio+20. Noting the need for adequate financing, he called for accelerating the mobilization of transparent and equitable resources for regional-level activities. He also highlighted the role of PRAIS in generating policy-relevant data and the need to strengthen benchmarking of impact indicators.

Ukraine, on behalf of CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES, noted COP 10’s relevance for the Rio+20 process. He called for the UNCCD to become the primary instrument for combating DLDD globally and for synergies with other Rio Conventions and institutions at all levels. While welcoming the strengthened relationship between UNCCD and the GEF, he called for further simplification of procedures for accessing GEF funds. He noted that national and regional reports are an important tool for awareness raising on DLDD. He stressed the need to enhance the functioning of the GM in order to achieve the strategic goal on mobilizing financial resources and noted the region’s support for the creation of an intergovernmental, interdisciplinary scientific panel.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) said it agrees with the findings in the JIU’s report regarding the inconsistencies and flaws in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the COP and IFAD. She explained that IFAD’s role is to house the GM, while the GM’s oversight and governance remain the responsibility of the COP, and said IFAD remains willing to review the MOU.

Future Forest, on behalf of CSOs, stressed the need for greater cooperation among CSOs and governments, and increased participation of CSOs in the UNCCD. He highlighted the efforts of CSOs in addressing DLDD, including through natural resource management activities, harnessing rural renewable energy and supporting women’s empowerment. CSOs recommended that the UNCCD: take the lead on advancing synergies among the Rio Conventions; take further efforts to address drought; and increase partnerships with stakeholders to improve management of transboundary resources. He also urged parties to consider the issue of “large scale land grabbing” in dryland areas in the Strategy, and provide sustainable funding for addressing land degradation.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS: COP 10 President Lee invited delegates to consider the document on adoption of the provisional agenda and tentative schedule of work (ICCD/COP(10)/1). ARGENTINA suggested including an item on adopting COP 10 decisions after the adoption of the COP 10 report, and moving the discussion on the modification of the rules of procedure from the Committee of the Whole (COW) to the Plenary. JAMAICA suggested reversing the order of discussion on the programme and budget and the follow-up to the assessment of the GM, and reconvening the COW on Friday 14 October in the morning. UNCCD Executive Secretary Gnacadja noted the open dialogue with CSOs on Friday morning, and suggested that the COP Bureau could consider adjustments to the schedule of work. COP 10 adopted the provisional agenda with the amendments suggested by Argentina and the tentative schedule of work.

COP 10 President Lee invited delegates to elect Vice Presidents and Chair of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). The COP elected Khalidia Abdel Kader (Algeria), Bongani Masuku (Swaziland), B.M.S Rathore (India), Ogtay Jafar (Azerbaijan), Peter Molnar (Hungry), Pedro Garcia Britto (Dominican Republic), Sonia Gonzales Molina (Peru), and Franz Briwetwes (Austria) as Vice-Presidents. Lee noted that the consultations are still ongoing for the second Bureau member from the Western European and Others Group, as well as for the post of Rapporteur. Delegates elected Antonio Rocha Magalhães (Brazil) as CST Chair. Regarding the Chairperson of the CRIC, President Lee reminded delegates that Chencho Norbu (Bhutan) had been elected as CRIC Chair for its 9th and 10th sessions. Delegates then established a Committee of the Whole (COW), and elected Philbert Brown (Jamaica) as its Chair.

Delegates also adopted the document on accreditation of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, admission of observers (ICCD/COP(10)/28 and ICCD/ COP(10)/28/Add1), without comment.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Delegates filing into the Changwon Exhibition Conference Center for the COP 10 opening session expressed satisfaction with the hospitality they had already experienced and many extended compliments to the host Government and its people for the organization of the conference venue, from their reception at the airport to the cultural performances inside and outside the Conference Center.

As they commenced their two weeks of deliberations on the COP 10 agenda, participants indicated a number of expectations from this Conference. Many delegates focused on the benefits that would accrue from successful efforts to measure the size of the problem and the costs of desertification, land degradation and drought, and looked forward to learning more about efforts related to the study of the economics of land degradation and to discussions related to the refinement of the impact and performance indicators. Participants also anticipated, among other topics, discussions related to the organization of scientific advice to the UNCCD, a framework for the mid-term review of the Strategy, and institutional coherence, particularly as it relates to the follow-up to the assessment of the GM.