



UNCCD COP 11 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2013

The eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 11) opened on Monday afternoon, 16 September 2013, in Windhoek, Namibia.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

Opening the session, Don Koo Lee, former Minister of Korea Forest Service and COP 10 President, highlighted the Rio+20 outcome on a land degradation neutral world (LDNW) as a significant achievement. Noting this illustrates the international community's recognition that urgent action is needed, he expressed optimism that COP 11 would make progress on a target-setting approach within an institutional setting.

Delegates then elected Uahekua Herunga, Minister of Environment and Tourism of Namibia, as President of COP 11.

President Herunga observed that COP 11 will benefit from being hosted in a country committed to addressing desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), underscoring that a target-setting and science-based approach is essential to finding lasting solutions.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Luc Gnacadja welcomed participants and noted that Namibia's current drought exemplifies the challenges the UNCCD must address moving forward. Reflecting on his tenure, Gnacadja noted the UNCCD's progress on mobilizing science for policy development on DLDD; advancing of measurability and monitoring; enhancing of advocacy and outreach; improving the dialogue between science and policy; and improving the UNCCD's institutional setup. He reiterated that achieving a land degradation-neutral world is key to achieving progress on a host of other issues, including the water-energy-food nexus and eradication of extreme poverty. He expressed hope for guidance to enhance the scientific base of the Convention, a target-setting approach, and monitoring action programmes at all levels.

Ireland, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION, noted that one third of Namibia's population is currently food-insecure, in part because of the current prolonged drought, and described EU development assistance to help address this problem. He explained the EU expected progress in three key areas: achieving a land degradation-neutral world; strengthening the science on DLDD issues by reforming and strengthening the CST; and strengthening the Convention in a cost-effective manner to achieve maximum impact. He further indicated that monitoring and reporting frameworks should be simplified to facilitate their use.

Burkina Faso, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, said the UNCCD is at a critical juncture, citing as reasons: a shrinking financial base; the completion of the current Executive Secretary's term; Canada's withdrawal from the Convention; poor progress towards the target of having 80% of national action programmes (NAPs) completed by 2014; and the low level of support from developed countries for NAP preparation.

India, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, emphasized, *inter alia*, the need to strengthen the regional coordination mechanism for an effective implementation of the Convention, as well as financial and capacity building support to country parties for the alignment of their NAPs by December 2014. He expressed concern about the low allocation of funds to the land degradation focal area under the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) vis-à-vis the other two Rio Conventions, as well as the limited funding for the Asia Pacific region. While acknowledging progress made in raising the profile of DLDD issues in various fora, he underlined the need to seize the momentum and take the necessary steps towards land degradation neutrality, and expressed his support for the Changwon Initiative in this regard.

Antigua and Barbuda, for the Latin America and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), expressed concerns about the appointment of the new UNCCD Executive Secretary and requested an explanation from the UN Secretary General on the reasons for reconsidering the appointment of Paula Caballero. He said GRULAC opposed the alleged arguments of geographical



imbalance in the leadership of the three Rio Conventions and a supposed lack of transparency during the selection process. He stressed that there are neither rules nor precedents in the UN system forbidding one region from holding the position of Executive Secretary in multiple conventions simultaneously. He also lamented: insufficient attention to his region's needs and priorities in the UNCCD context; the timeliness and availability of translations of UNCCD documents; and the need for more streamlined and concise texts for national level discussions. He urged the UNCCD to focus on making the case for the economic feasibility of the use and value of drylands, in order to attract new and additional resources.

Emphasizing the role of global monitoring in reaching the goals of Rio+20, Armenia on behalf of the CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES, voiced concern about recommendations on some indicators that do not allow for differentiation of land degradation characteristics among countries, and said this should be addressed by strengthening scientific research across regions.

The Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa on behalf of civil society organizations (CSOs), lamenting the escalation of land degradation, called for greater financial support of CSOs to enhance their role in raising awareness and capacity building, and to halt the decrease in the number of participating CSOs. Citing drivers of land degradation, including land grabbing, agribusiness and mining, she called on a significant increase of GEF funding to facilitate greater CSO involvement in the UNCCD.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS OTHER THAN THE PRESIDENT

COP 11 President Herunga invited delegates to consider the document on adoption of the provisional agenda and organization of work (ICCD/COP(11)/1). COP 11 adopted the provisional agenda with minor amendments. He then invited delegates to elect the vice presidents of the COP 11 Bureau. The COP elected: Mamadou Honadia (Burkina Faso) and Uahekua Herunga (Namibia) for the Group of African States; Choi Young Tae (Republic of Korea) and Heimata Louisa Karika (Cook Islands) for the Group of Asian States; Ashot Vardevanyan (Armenia) and Dalia Gudaitiene Holiman (Lithuania) for the Group of Central and Eastern European States; Thiago Cavalcanti (Brazil) and Mariano Espinoza (Costa Rica) for GRULAC; and Thomas Tichelmann (Ireland) and Christine Dawson (USA) for the Group of Western European and Other States. Christine Dawson (USA) was also elected as Vice President of COP 11.

The COP then established a Committee of the Whole (COW) and elected Chenchu Norbu (Bhutan) as chair. The COP allocated several COP agenda items to the COW, including: review of the Strategy; programme and budget; governance

and institutional arrangements; follow-up on the outcomes of Rio+20; and the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification (2010-2020).

Delegates also adopted the document on accreditation of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and admissions of observers (CCD/COP(11)/20rev.1) without comments.

IN THE CORRIDORS

COP 11 opened on a note of cautious optimism with several delegates observing that difficult decisions with regard to institutional arrangements had been settled at COP 10, offering delegates a chance to focus on important substantive issues. That was in the morning however, before opening statements by some member states who were concerned over the selection process of the new UNCCD Executive Secretary. As presaged in GRULAC's remarks, regional divisions over the selection of the Executive Secretary, among other issues, resulted in the inability of the G-77 to agree on a common opening statement.

Highlighting the mid-term evaluation's observations that progress on aligning NAPs to the Strategy has been slow, some called for further refinement of progress and impact indicators, while others cautioned against overlooking efforts already made by some countries to adapt the existing monitoring framework to better fit their unique local contexts. In particular, it was noted that serious efforts are needed to bridge the UNCCD's persistent financial deficit, which was compounded by Canada's withdrawal from the multi-year workplan for 2014-17, without creating additional strains on countries' budgets.

On the status of discussions on the science-policy interface within the CRIC and CST, one participant expressed hope that a new proposal by the Ad Hoc Working Group to further discuss the options for the provision of Scientific Advice (AGSA) would enable the COP to reach agreement on a science-policy interface geared to the knowledge needs of the UNCCD.

However, the day ended where it began, with delegates discussing the formal announcement from UN Headquarters in New York that Monique Barbut (France), former Chief Executive Officer of the Global Environment Facility, had been named the new UNCCD Executive Secretary.