



Earth Negotiations Bulletin

A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

Vol. 4 No. 66

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Monday, 7 August 1995

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INCD

The Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) was formally adopted on 17 June 1994 and opened for signature at a ceremony in Paris on 14-15 October 1994. This first post-Rio sustainable development convention is notable for its innovative approach in recognizing: the physical, biological and socio-economic aspects of desertification; the importance of redirecting technology transfer so that it is demand driven; and the involvement of local populations in the development of national action programmes. The core of the Convention is the development of national and subregional/regional action programmes to combat desertification. These action programmes are to be developed by national governments in close cooperation with donors, local populations and NGOs.

As of 31 July 1995, the Convention had 107 signatories and had been ratified by four countries. The Convention will enter into force 90 days after the receipt of the 50th instrument of ratification.

While the idea of a convention to combat desertification was discussed during the UNCED preparatory process, it was only in Rio where language was adopted requesting the General Assembly to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee for the purpose of negotiating a convention. The General Assembly, during its 47th session in 1992, adopted resolution 47/188 calling for the establishment of the INCD, with the aim of finalizing the Convention by June 1994.

The organizational session of the INCD was held in January 1993. At that meeting, delegates elected Bo Kjellén (Sweden) Chair of the Committee, elected the remaining members of the Bureau, adopted the rules of procedure, set the schedule of meetings and established two working groups.

FIRST SESSION

The first session of the INCD was held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 24 May - 3 June 1993. The first week of the session focused on the sharing of technical information and assessments on various aspects of drought and desertification. The information-sharing segment provided an opportunity for scientists, technical experts, delegates and NGOs to share relevant experiences and learn more about the scourge of desertification and its global dimensions. The second week focused on the structure and elements to be contained in the Convention. Delegates also exchanged ideas about the Convention and its objectives. Negotiations stalled in Nairobi over the issue of related regional instruments, while still giving priority action to Africa.

SECOND SESSION

The second session of the INCD met in Geneva from 13-24 September 1993. The Committee considered the compilation text of the Convention prepared by the Secretariat and agreed on the future programme of work of the Committee, including the elaboration of regional instruments for Africa, Asia and Latin America. At the conclusion of the second session, the two working groups completed their discussion of the Secretariat's compilation text and identified areas of convergence and divergence.

THIRD SESSION

The third session of the INCD was held in New York from 17-28 January 1994. At this session the two working groups focused on the draft negotiating text of the Convention that was prepared by the Secretariat. By the end of the two-week session, the working groups were able to complete at least one and sometimes two readings of each draft article. The Committee also discussed the regional instrument for Africa for the first time. After an initial discussion of the nature of this instrument and its relationship to the Convention as a whole, delegates requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft text for consideration at the fourth session.

FOURTH SESSION

The fourth session of the INCD was held in Geneva from 21-31 March 1994. The two working groups continued negotiating the draft text of the Convention. By the conclusion of the session the substantive problems that remained included: the need for an article on principles in the text; all matters related to financial resources and mechanisms; categories of countries; subsidiary bodies; reservations or exceptions open to the Parties; and the obligations of a withdrawing Party.

During the session, delegates also formally considered the Regional Implementation Annex for Africa. The Asian and Latin American regional groups also produced their own draft regional implementation instruments. Although these annexes were not discussed in detail, initial reaction was positive.

FIFTH SESSION

The fifth session of the INCD was held in Paris from 6-17 June 1994. During this session, delegates worked through many long nights to negotiate the remaining bracketed text in the Convention and to finalize four regional implementation annexes for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Northern Mediterranean. They also adopted resolutions that recommended urgent action for Africa and interim arrangements for the period between adoption of the Convention and its entry

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into force, which could take at least two years. There were times during this session that delegates thought they would never reach agreement on the financial provisions of the Convention. After three all-night sessions capped by a closing Plenary that did not even begin until 4:00 am, the Convention was finally adopted.

SIXTH SESSION

The sixth session of the INCD was held in New York from 9-18 January 1995. While this session was more of an organizational session than anything else, it served two important purposes. First, the Committee reached agreement on the work programme for the interim period and the mandates of the two working groups and the Plenary, which will carry out the post-agreement negotiations that will push forward the development of the Convention and its implementation. Second, it alerted delegates, the Bureau and the Interim Secretariat to some of the challenges that lie ahead. These challenges include: reaffirming the equal status of the Convention with other environmental conventions; implementation of the resolution on urgent action for Africa; raising awareness; popular participation; preparation for the first Conference of the Parties; scientific and technical cooperation during the interim period; and funding.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

RATIFICATION UPDATE: As of 31 July 1995, the Convention had 107 signatories and four ratifications. The four countries that have ratified the Convention are Mexico, Cape Verde, Egypt and Senegal. Ten countries have signed the Convention since the conclusion of INCD-6 in January: Ecuador, Panama, Honduras, Chile, Mauritius, Turkmenistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Jordan, Rwanda and Swaziland.

WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION: As part of the campaign to combat land degradation, the 49th United Nations General Assembly designated 17 June as "World Day to Combat Desertification." On the first anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, the Interim Secretariat for the Convention, in collaboration with a number of international, academic, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, staged a series of international events to raise awareness on the issue of desertification.

In Geneva, the Interim Secretariat held a press briefing and co-sponsored a policy dialogue on desertification and energy consumption with the International Academy of the Environment. The policy dialogue explored means to combat desertification through the use of alternative energy sources, as well as more energy-efficient technologies at the household and community levels.

The Secretariat also commissioned the preparation of "Down to Earth: A Simple Guide to the Convention to Combat Desertification." This report examines why the Convention is necessary and what is distinct about it. The 32-page report provides information on the issues and strategies for combating desertification.

In Nairobi, UNEP Executive Director Elizabeth Dowdeswell honored eight individuals or projects that made an outstanding contribution to combating desertification with the first-ever "Saving the Drylands" awards. UNEP received 80 submissions of success stories in desertification control. Three of the eight winners, in Australia, Namibia and Senegal are on privately-owned land where the individual farmer has developed the techniques for the immediate benefit of his own family. Nevertheless, the proven experiences have had a great multiplier effect through replication elsewhere. The other five activities took place on community-owned land in Senegal, China (2),

India and Pakistan where community members participate in all stages of development and share the benefits.

Among numerous other activities, UNSO sponsored a seminar on desertification in New York. UNESCO sponsored an exhibition on desertification and held a public meeting on desertification in collaboration with the French NGO, SILVA, and the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS). IFAD held a seminar on drought and desertification as well as an IFAD-NGO Forum on Land Degradation and Poverty. IGADD held an exposition on drought and desertification, produced a pamphlet on IGADD Convention-related activities and produced an illustration of the Convention provisions for schools.

DESERT MARGINS INITIATIVE: An International Planning Workshop was held in Nairobi from 23-26 January 1995, in Nairobi to launch research programmes under the auspices of a collaborative Desert Margins Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa. The 80 Workshop participants, drawn from various sectors, agreed on an overall objective: "to promote innovative and action-oriented dryland management research to arrest land degradation" in sub-Saharan countries. The Initiative will initially be implemented in the affected areas of Botswana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Namibia and Niger.

OTHER MEETINGS: A regional conference on desertification for the northern Mediterranean was held in Almería, Spain from 26-28 June 1995. Sub-regional consultations were held by the CILSS and IGADD member countries, from 24-28 July 1995 in Dakar, Senegal and 1 to 3 August in Asmara, Eritrea, respectively. The African meetings considered strategies for the preparation of the sub-regional action programme areas called for in the CCD Regional Implementation Annex for Africa.

The OAU, in collaboration with UNSO held a Workshop on 18-20 July 1995 in Nairobi, Kenya aimed at initiating discussion on possible structures and processes for establishing national desertification funds (NDFs), as provided for in Article 21.1.d of the CCD. The multi-sectoral workshop considered various aspects of the NDFs, including purpose, scope and operational modalities such as the legal, governance and funding aspects.

NGO ACTIVITIES: A meeting for European NGOs was held on March 6 in Brussels, Belgium, to inform the NGOs about INCD-6 and to coordinate activities in the field of awareness raising on desertification. At the meeting Denis Peter from the European Commission announced that a conference on desertification is planned by the Commission's DG XII in Spain in 1996.

During a two-day information and awareness raising meeting held on 6-7 June by the Senegalese government, NGOs were invited to carry out a study on NGO/CBO participation in the NAPs. The methodology and mechanism NGOs presented was accepted, as well as was the idea of a national desertification fund.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

BUREAU MEETING: The INCD Bureau will meet this morning at 10:00 am to discuss the programme of work for the session.

PLENARY: Plenary will convene at 3:00 pm. The session will be opened by INCD Chair Bo Kjellén. In addition to adopting the agenda and organization of work (A/AC.241/32), the Plenary is expected to hear statements from representatives of INCD member countries, Heads of UN Agencies and Kjellén. The Executive Secretary of the Interim Secretariat, Hama Arba Diallo, will then introduce the documents prepared by the Secretariat for this session.