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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INCD

Desertification affects about one-sixth of the world's population, 70 percent of all drylands, and one-quarter of the total land area in the world. The most obvious impact of desertification, in addition to widespread poverty, is the degradation of 3.3 billion hectares of the total area of rangeland, decline in soil fertility and soil structure, and the degradation of irrigated cropland.

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 non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

As of 19 January 1996 the Convention had 115 signatories and as of 26 January it had been ratified by 24 countries. The Convention will enter into force 90 days after the receipt of the 50th instrument of ratification.

NEGOTIATION OF THE CONVENTION

While the idea of a convention to combat desertification was discussed during the UNCED preparatory process, it was 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.

At the organizational session of the INCD in January 1993, delegates elected Bo Kjellén (Sweden) Chair of the Committee. 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 second week focused on the structure and elements to be contained in the Convention. Delegates also exchanged ideas about the Convention and its objectives.

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.

The third session of the INCD was held at UN Headquarters 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. Progress was made in shaping the Convention and in identifying the areas of convergence and divergence. The INCD also discussed the regional instrument for Africa for the first time.

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

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 reach agreement on the remaining bracketed text in the Convention and to finalize the four regional implementation annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, 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 into force, which could take at least two years.

POST-AGREEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

SIXTH SESSION: The sixth session of the INCD was held at UN Headquarters in New York from 9-18 January 1995. While this session was mostly organizational, 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. Second, it alerted delegates, the Bureau and the Interim Secretariat to some of the challenges that lay 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 (COP); scientific and technical cooperation during the interim period; and funding.

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SEVENTH SESSION: The seventh session of the INCD was held in Nairobi from 7-17 August 1995. Delegates reviewed the status of ratification and implementation of the resolution on Urgent Action for Africa, as well as actions in other regions. The Working Groups also began their work. Working Group I, chaired by Mourad Ahmia (Algeria), addressed four issues: identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism; designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning; draft financial rules of the COP, its subsidiary bodies and the Permanent Secretariat; and programme and budget. Working Group II, chaired by Takao Shibata (Japan), addressed: organization of scientific and technical cooperation; draft Rules of Procedure for the Conference of the Parties; and procedures for communication of information and review of implementation. There was also some debate about the periodicity and length of future sessions of the INCD. Some developed countries did not think that the INCD needed to meet twice a year for two weeks at a time. Others felt that it was necessary to meet twice a year so as not to lose momentum.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

RATIFICATION UPDATE

It has now been nearly 16 months since the Convention was opened for signature. As of 19 January 1996, 115 countries had become signatories to the Convention. By 26 January 1996 the following 24 countries had ratified the Convention: Mexico, Cape Verde, the Netherlands, Egypt, Senegal, Ecuador, Lesotho, Finland, Togo, Tunisia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Peru, Sudan, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Niger, Mauritius, Bangladesh and Burkina Faso.

AWARENESS-RAISING DAYS

The CCD Secretariat, in collaboration with the host country and UNDP, has held a series of awareness-raising days to inform people about the Convention. Since 3 April 1995, awareness-raising days have been held in Cape Verde, Eritrea, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Egypt, Ethiopia, Senegal, Benin, Morocco, Niger, Zambia, Sudan, Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Togo, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Tunisia. Additional awareness-raising days were scheduled to take place in Mozambique, Madagascar, the Central African Republic and Algeria in January 1996.

50TH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The 50th United Nations General Assembly began its consideration of Agenda Item 96(a), "Environment and Sustainable Development: Implementation of Decisions and Recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development," on Monday, 30 October 1995. In connection with this item, the General Assembly had before it a number of documents, including the report of the Secretary-General on desertification and drought (A/50/347), and a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the reports of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification (INCD) on its sixth and seventh sessions (A/50/74 and Add.1).

The resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly decides that: the INCD will continue to prepare for the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention and, for this purpose, will have two sessions in 1996, each of up to two weeks duration. The eighth session is to be held in Geneva from 5-16 February and the ninth session in New York from 3-13 September. The resolution also decides to convene the tenth session of the INCD in New York from 6-17 January 1997 and,

pending the entry into force of the Convention, to convene as necessary a further session in 1997, of up to two weeks duration. The exact date and venue shall be determined at a later stage. Upon entry into force of the Convention, a session of the Conference of the Parties will be convened in the second and third weeks of June 1997 or, alternatively, in the second and third weeks of August 1997. The exact dates and venue will be determined at a later stage.

The resolution also: requests all countries, the UN system, appropriate scientific and business communities, trade unions, relevant NGOs and other interested groups to take action for the prompt implementation of the Convention and its relevant regional annexes upon entry into force; urges all countries and relevant actors to take actions to implement the resolution on Urgent Action for Africa; decides that the work of the INCD and the Interim Secretariat will continue to be funded through existing UN budgetary resources; and urges States and interested organizations to contribute to the Trust Fund for the Secretariat and the Special Voluntary Fund for the participation of developing countries. The resolution welcomes the arrangements concluded between the Interim Secretariat and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to support activities in affected developing countries and invites the Interim Secretariat to conclude similar arrangements with other relevant organizations, such as UNDP, UNEP, FAO and UNESCO.

DOCUMENTS BEFORE INCD-8

- **A/AC.241/42** — Adoption of the agenda and organization of work
- **A/AC.241/43** — Identification of an organization to house the Global Mechanism
- **A/AC.241/44** — Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning
- **A/AC.241/45** — Financial rules
- **A/AC.241/46** — Programme and budget
- **A/AC.241/47** — Scientific and technical cooperation
- **A/AC.241/48** — Draft rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties
- **A/AC.241/49** — Procedures for communication of information and review of implementation
- **A/AC.241/50** — Procedures to resolve questions on implementation
- **A/AC.241/51** — Procedures for conciliation and arbitration
- **A/AC.241/52** — Review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds
- **A/AC.241/9/Add.10** — List of non-governmental organizations recommended for accreditation

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

BUREAU MEETING: The INCD Bureau will meet at 10:00 am to prepare for the session.

OPENING PLENARY: The eighth session of the INCD will be opened by the Chair of the Committee, Bo Kjellén at 3:00 pm. The Plenary will hear statements from representatives of INCD member countries, Heads of UN Agencies and the Chair of the Committee. After these statements, the Executive Secretary will introduce the documents prepared by the Secretariat. The Secretariat will also report on the status of signatures and ratifications. The Committee will also review document A/AC.241/9/Add.10 on the accreditation of non-governmental organizations.