



THE THIRD CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION 15-26 NOVEMBER 1999

The Third Conference of the Parties (COP-3) to the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) opens today in Recife, Brazil. Deliberations for the two-week event are expected to take place in Plenary sessions, a Committee of the Whole (COW), the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), an Interparliamentary Round Table and dialogue sessions organized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The CST is tentatively scheduled to meet from 16-18 November, during which time it will consider the survey and evaluation of networks, benchmarks and indicators, traditional knowledge and early warning systems, among other topics. The COW is scheduled to meet throughout the two weeks to consider the programme and budget, an additional regional implementation annex and annexes containing arbitration and conciliation procedures, outstanding rules of procedure, procedures and institutional mechanisms for the resolution of questions of implementation, and a report on the Global Mechanism. A Special Segment on Convention implementation in the African region will take place from 22-24 November. The Interparliamentary Round Table will convene from 22-23 November to discuss the contribution parliaments could make to implementation. Two afternoon dialogue sessions organized by NGOs will take place on 24 and 25 November.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CCD

The CCD was adopted on 17 June 1994 and was opened for signature in October 1994 in Paris. It entered into force on 26 December 1996. To date, 159 countries have ratified or acceded to the CCD. The Convention recognizes: 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. The core of the CCD is the development of national and subregional/regional action programmes by national governments in cooperation with donors, local populations and NGOs.

NEGOTIATION OF THE CONVENTION: In 1992, the UN General Assembly, as requested by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), adopted Resolution 47/188 calling for the establishment of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the elaboration of a convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa (INCD). The INCD met five times between May 1993 and June 1994, during

which delegates drafted the Convention and four regional annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean.

THE INTERIM PERIOD: Pending the CCD's entry into force, the INCD met six times between January 1995 and August 1997 to hear progress reports on urgent action taking place in Africa and interim measures in other regions and to prepare for COP-1. The preparations included discussion of the Secretariat's programme and budget, the functions of and administrative arrangements for the Global Mechanism, and the establishment of the CST. Although considerable progress was made, especially on scientific and technological cooperation, some important issues, such as the size and membership of the COP Bureau, questions about the host institutions and some functions of the Global Mechanism, remained unresolved at the end of the INCD.

COP-1: The First Conference of the Parties (COP-1) met in Rome, Italy, from 29 September to 10 October 1997. The CST held its first session simultaneously on 2-3 October. The COP-1 and CST-1 agendas contained primarily organizational matters. Delegates selected Bonn, Germany, as the location for the Permanent Secretariat and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the organization to administer the Global Mechanism. At the CST's recommendation, the COP established an *ad hoc* panel to oversee the continuation of the process of surveying benchmarks and indicators and decided that CST-2 would consider linkages between traditional knowledge and modern technology. One Plenary meeting was devoted to a dialogue between NGOs and delegates. Delegates subsequently adopted a proposal that Plenary meetings at future COPs be devoted to similar NGO dialogues.

COP-2: The Second Conference of the Parties (COP-2) met in Dakar, Senegal, from 30 November to 11 December 1998. The CST met in parallel to the COP from 1-4 December. Delegates approved arrangements for the institutional linkage between the Convention and the UN Secretariat and the headquarters agreement with the German Government, where the Secretariat moved in early 1999. The COP approved adjustments to its budget and adopted the outstanding rules of procedure concerning bureau members, but retained bracketed language regarding majority voting absent consensus. Eastern and Central European countries were invited to submit to COP-3 a draft regional implementation annex. The CST established an *ad hoc* panel to follow-up its discussion on links between traditional and modern knowledge. Delegates considered, but deferred to COP-3, decisions on the Secretariat's medium-term strategy, adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding between the COP and IFAD regarding the Global Mechanism, and the G-77/China proposal to establish a Committee on the Review of the Implementation of the Convention.

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RECENT MEETINGS

Several meetings were convened over the past year to follow-up on COP-2 decisions and/or prepare for COP-3.

MAYORS FORUM: On 11-12 June 1999 the Cities of Bonn and Rome, the CCD Secretariat and IFAD convened the second "World Forum of Mayors on Cities and Desertification" in Bonn as a follow-up to the recommendations of the 1997 Rome Forum, which met in conjunction with COP-1. Over 100 mayors and local authorities, mainly from affected developing countries, gathered to call for more effective involvement in the implementation of the CCD. Proposals and discussions are included in the draft proposal of a Cities Against Desertification Programme (CADP). CADP's objectives are to: promote partnerships between local authorities to combat desertification; promote and facilitate an exchange of information, knowledge and experiences, and technology among cities to combat desertification at the local level; and develop and test various instruments and procedures for combating desertification at the local level.

STAP WORKSHOP ON LAND DEGRADATION INTER-LINKAGES: The STAP Workshop on Land Degradation Inter-linkages was held in Bologna, Italy, from 14-16 June 1999. Forty independent experts and UN agency representatives including the GEF, UNEP, UNDP and CCD attended. The Workshop aimed at further delineating interlinkages of land degradation with GEF focal areas, particularly climate change, biodiversity and international water issues, with a view to increasing GEF's support to activities related to land degradation. Some highlighted the need for a policy decision to mainstream desertification/land degradation control projects in the GEF portfolio.

AD HOC PANEL ON TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE: Based on a CCD COP-2 decision, an *Ad Hoc* Panel of ten experts, chaired by Jean-Claude Bomba (Central African Republic), convened in Matera, Italy, from 15-18 July 1999 to identify successful experiences and conclusions relating to threats and other constraints confronting traditional knowledge, strategies for integrating traditional knowledge with modern knowledge and mechanisms for promoting and exchanging successful approaches. The Panel proposed that the COP identify and support local processes of innovation in natural resource management and include them as starting points in the implementation of national action programmes. They suggested, *inter alia*, that the COP: facilitate a compilation of research and information on traditional knowledge in databases and develop procedures for their compilation; develop and promote adequate methodologies and procedures that ensure action-oriented research is carried out as a truly horizontal dialogue to promote bottom-up development approaches to combating desertification; monitor and follow-up the mechanisms by which reciprocity between traditional and modern knowledge is being addressed and promoted; evaluate how the networks created by the CCD are incorporating traditional knowledge; and reappoint the present panel to develop appropriate criteria, methodology and mechanisms for implementing these activities.

ANNEX IV COUNTRIES: Ministers and focal points for the Annex IV countries (the Northern Mediterranean region) met in Lisbon, Portugal, from 17-18 June 1999 to discuss progress in their respective National Action Programmes. They also considered elaborating a Regional Action Programme and enhancing cooperation with other regions. An expert group was established to prepare Terms of Reference for the Annex IV Regional Action Programme.

ASIA - AFRICA TECHNICAL WORKSHOP ON EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS: Forty-five experts from Africa, Asia and international, regional and subregional organizations met in Beijing, China, from 22-23 July 1999 for the Asia - Africa Technical Workshop on Early Warning Systems (EWS). Participants

discussed inter-regional cooperation in the areas of combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. They recommended that the CST integrate a perspective on active linkages between the regional implementation annexes and foster inter-regional cooperation in its overall work programme. African country Parties were encouraged to identify an institution or a set of institutions that can act as African regional focal points in inter-regional EWS cooperation and to participate in the establishment of a scheme for promoting inter-regional cooperation to enhance EWS through standardization of data, capacity building, training and research.

ASIAN THEMATIC PROGRAMME NETWORK:

National focal points, experts and representatives from international organizations, subregional organizations and NGOs gathered in Beijing, China, on 26-27 July 1999 to participate in the launching meeting for the Asian Thematic Programme Network on Desertification Monitoring and Assessment for Asia (TPN1). Participants agreed that the overall objective of TPN1 would be to enhance desertification monitoring and assessment capacities in Asia through the establishment of a network that will harmonize data management, analytical methods, capacity building and research in the use of new information technologies and space-based technologies to enable decision making for sustainable development. Priority activities are to include: a survey of desertification monitoring and assessment capacities, constraints and opportunities in Asia; preparation and publication of a TPN1 newsletter to make available relevant scientific information; launching of an interactive TPN1 web site; and making available maps for the Asian region showing the extent of desertification in the region.

REGIONAL MEETING OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES: The Latin American and Caribbean Parties to the CCD gathered in Lima, Peru, from 9-12 August 1999 for their Fifth Regional Meeting. Issues discussed included projects for the implementation of the Regional Action Programme (RAP), the Global Mechanism, traditional knowledge and practices, the harmonization of public policies to combat desertification and the newly established Regional Coordinating Unit.

Regarding RAPs, participants took a decision requesting the Chair of the Regional Meeting to discuss with different UN agencies financial support for projects approved under the RAP and calling on the Global Mechanism to take steps during COP-3 to include RAP projects in its budget for 2000. They requested the Global Mechanism to ensure financing of the implementation of the Platform of Cooperation between Africa and Latin America. On technology, traditional knowledge and practice, they requested COP-3 to extend the mandate of the CST's panel of experts. Participants also adopted the project on Harmonization of Public Policies to Combat Desertification, as presented by the Secretariat, with a number of specifications.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

OPENING PLENARY: COP-3 is expected to commence at 3:00 pm. Following the election of the President of the COP, opening statements are expected from representatives of a number of UN organizations, NGOs, and the CCD Executive Secretary. Delegates are then expected to adopt the agenda, elect officers, including the CST Chair, adopt the organization of work, establish a COW, and consider admitting observers.