



HIGHLIGHTS OF CCD COP-3 MONDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 1999

Delegates to the Third Conference of the Parties (COP-3) to the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) met in Pernambuco Convention Center, Recife, Brazil for a Welcoming Ceremony, during which the Acting President of Brazil, Executive Secretary of the CCD Secretariat, Brazilian Minister for the Environment, Governor of the State of Pernambuco, and Mayor of Recife offered opening statements. Delegates then commenced their work by electing the COP-3 President and Bureau members, establishing a Committee of the Whole, and adopting the agenda and programme of work.

WELCOMING CEREMONY

Roberto Magalhães Melo, Mayor of the City of Recife, noted the relevance of holding COP-3 in a region very much affected by drought and desertification and highlighted that these problems are often caused by people acting unsustainably due to desperate poverty. He stressed the need for more knowledge and political direction to combat the problems of drought and desertification and stated that the COP would provide such an opportunity.

Hama Arba Diallo, CCD Executive Secretary, acknowledged the important role Brazil has played in the desertification and sustainable development process, and stated that its long standing support and effective commitment have laid conditions for early progress in the implementation of the CCD. He emphasized that the CCD is not only about rehabilitating natural resources, but is also a multilateral instrument for reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development. While the Convention does not seek to provide answers to the many issues in the development process, he noted that the Convention's guidelines provide new opportunities to create improved living conditions for people in arid, semi-arid and dry, sub-humid areas. He also underlined the need for partnership agreements to be developed through consultative processes and participatory initiatives within National Action Programmes (NAPs), and stressed the importance of reviewing reports on implementation of the Convention, especially in Africa.

José Sarney Filho, Brazilian Minister for the Environment, reminded participants of the misery that desertification brings to many people around the world. He noted that the UN conferences in Stockholm, Nairobi and Rio, among others, have provided the instruments to combat the threat of desertification, which affects one fourth of the earth. He expressed the hope that this Convention would be an instrument through which desertification could be combated and the affected regions assisted in economic development. Minister Sarney Filho welcomed the meeting's agenda items on indicators of desertification and traditional knowledge. He stressed the need for delegates to take measures to ensure that the Global Mechanism was successful and has the adequate funds to enable countries to implement their respective NAPs.

Jarbas de Andrade Vasconcelos, Governor of Pernambuco, emphasized the importance of all countries coming together in the common struggle to improve the quality of life for people living in some of the driest parts of the Earth. Governor Vasconcelos noted that even though Brazil has great environmental diversity, there are large areas of the country facing desertification and drought, particularly in the northeastern states. He highlighted the challenge of implementing the CCD for reversing the damage caused by desertification in these states and elsewhere around the world. He called for emergency solutions and a programme with defined goals to address the problems and to minimize the debt we have to future generations.

Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the UN General Assembly, noted the commitment of the United Nations to sustainable development and environmental protection. He welcomed the 159 ratifications and accessions to the Convention and noted that additional countries were set to ratify. He highlighted the proactive role of African countries in implementing the Convention and noted the submission by African countries of national progress reports on their implementation of the Convention. He called on other countries to emulate Africa's initiative and improve on it in the interest of progress. As Foreign Minister of Namibia, Gurirab noted the importance of the Convention to his country's actions to combat desertification and assist those people most affected. For this reason, he noted that concrete results were an important element to

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the success of COP-3. He stressed that the Convention's implementation must be linked to adequate funding and technology transfer. He drew attention to the fact that the CCD is the only Convention not to rely on the GEF as its central funding mechanism and said that the Global Mechanism should have the capacity to enable countries to tackle desertification and all its consequences. He observed that there can be no sustainable development or environmental protection, including climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation, if the Earth cannot be protected from desertification and all its consequences. Gurirab called on all countries to ratify the Convention by COP-4.

Marco Antonio de Oliveira Maciel, Acting President of Brazil, highlighted his country's commitment to the environment and promotion of sustainable development. He said the choice of Recife to host COP-3 is symbolic as it is the capital of one of the Brazilian states most severely affected by desertification. He said the mission and challenge of COP-3 is to ensure that the Convention's objectives are implemented efficiently and emphasized the importance of taking into consideration the serious economic and social consequences of desertification. He called for the involvement of different stakeholders, such as academic institutions and intergovernmental organizations, and stressed the need for technology transfer and allocation of financial resources. He concluded by appealing to nations that have not ratified the Convention, particularly wealthier ones, to do so. He concluded the opening ceremony by launching a new Brazilian commemorative stamp.

PLENARY

Hama Arba Diallo, CCD Executive Secretary, opened the Third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification. COP-2 President, Souty Touré (Senegal), noted with appreciation the activities undertaken since COP-2, including the recent move and installation of the CCD Secretariat in Bonn. He noted the commitment of the implementing bodies of the Convention and said the number of accessions to the Convention indicate that Parties are on the right track to reverse the effects of desertification.

Delegates elected the Brazilian Minister of the Environment, José Sarney Filho, as President of COP-3 by acclamation. President Sarney Filho then introduced agenda item 3, the adoption of the agenda and organization of work (ICCD/COP(3)/1 and Corr.1). CANADA proposed that the inclusion of NGOs in the official programme occur during the first week to ensure that their inputs provide a more meaningful contribution to the COP's deliberations. She said that preliminary discussions with the Secretariat indicate that it might be possible to move one of the NGO sessions to Friday, 19 November. President Sarney Filho stressed that statements during the Special Session should not exceed five-minutes. Delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work.

COP-3 President Sarney Filho announced the nominations for other officers to the Bureau, including the CST Chair, and reminded delegates that the Rules of Procedure call for nine Vice-

Presidents and a Chair of the CST along with the President, and that every geographical region should be represented by at least two members. The nominations were as follows: Pascal Yoadimnadjji (Chad); Koffi Santy Sany Adade (Togo); Khaled Al Sharáa (Syria); Ali Bin Saad Altokhais (Saudi Arabia); Lazea Gheorghe (Romania); Jafarov Ogtay (Azerbaijan); Maria Antónia Masana (Peru); John Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda) (*ex-officio*); Sange de Silva (Canada); and Victor Louro (Portugal). Louro will also serve as Rapporteur. The nomination for CST Chair was Moses Munemo (Zimbabwe).

Delegates agreed to establish a Committee of the Whole (COW) to consider the proposal for an additional annex, outstanding Rules of Procedure, and annexes on arbitration and conciliation procedures, among other issues, and to designate John Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda) as its Chair.

Delegates then considered the documentation regarding accreditation of non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations (ICCD/COP(3)/15 and Add.1). Delegates agreed to accredit one new international organization for accreditation (ECOWAS/CEDEAO, Economic Community of West African States/Communauté économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest) as well as fifty-nine NGOs.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Despite the relatively calm opening of COP-3 late Monday afternoon, the corridors of the Pernambuco Convention Center buzzed with participants speculating about the issues that may dominate deliberations during the coming two weeks. A number highlighted the Secretariat's Medium-Term Strategy, which was first considered at COP-2, as one issue to watch for. Some felt the revised strategy was better than that presented at COP-2 and could serve as a useful starting point for discussions, although others said it still implied that the Secretariat would be taking on activities beyond its mandate. Other participants drew attention to the usual suspect – the programme and budget – but expressed hope that debate on this issue will not distract attention from the more pressing issue of the experiences of implementing the Convention.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: The Plenary is expected to convene at 10:00 am in the Plenary Hall to hear statements from intergovernmental organizations, UN agencies and NGOs.

COW: The Committee of the Whole is expected to commence at 3:00 pm and is scheduled to consider the organization of work and programme and budget.

CST: The Committee on Science and Technology is expected to meet during the morning and afternoon. It is scheduled to begin consideration of the roster of experts, the survey and evaluation of networks, bodies doing work of relevance to the CST, benchmarks and indicators, and traditional knowledge.