



CCD COP-6 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 25 AUGUST 2003

The Sixth Conference of the Parties (COP-6) to the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) opened on Monday afternoon, 25 August in Havana, Cuba.

In an opening ceremony, delegates heard statements from the President of Cuba's National Assembly and the CCD Executive Secretary. In the opening Plenary delegates elected the COP-6 President and other officers including the Chairs of the CST and CRIC, and adopted the agenda and the organization of work. Parties also considered accreditation of observer organizations.

OPENING CEREMONY

COP-6 opened with a musical and theatrical ceremony. Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, President of the National Assembly, stressed his country's commitment to combating desertification and supporting the CCD Secretariat in order to ensure success for COP-6. He hoped the final outcome of the meeting would be marked not only by good intentions, but also by concrete commitments. He outlined the impact of desertification and drought in developing countries, noting that these are closely linked with underdevelopment, poverty and environmental degradation. He said desertification is an economic, social and environmental problem that "tests human survival." He noted that despite a "very obvious ecological debt," there are few commitments on the part of developed countries to comply with their responsibilities under Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration on common but differentiated responsibilities. He outlined successful efforts by Cuba to combat soil erosion and degradation since 1959, and underscored the role of governments and civil society in combating land degradation to improve the quality of life.

In his opening statement, Hama Arba Diallo, CCD Executive Secretary, expressed his appreciation to the Cuban Government for hosting COP-6, and commended the Cuban experience in dealing with rural poverty. He also thanked other governments, UN agencies and NGOs for contributing to the session. He highlighted the WSSD and other processes that "converge" to provide Parties with "the building blocks of a credible implementation process," and singled out the importance of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) becoming a financial mechanism of the CCD. Finally, he lauded the CCD's "quasi-universal" membership.

OPENING PLENARY

COP-5 President Charles Bassett (Canada) opened COP-6 and requested the observation of a minute of silence for Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special UN Representative to Iraq, and the other UN staff members who lost their lives in the attack on the UN office in Iraq on 19 August 2003.

Noting that the WSSD recognized combating desertification as a major contribution to the reduction of poverty, he stressed that there is scope for action to reduce poverty and prevent environmental degradation, and to create opportunities for the poor to enjoy safer, healthier and more prosperous lives. He said delegates would work toward better defining the partnership between the CCD and the GEF in order to provide Parties to the CCD with the necessary tools to reach effective results. Emphasizing the need to shift from policy advocacy and institution building to implementation, he noted that political will should result in the integration of desertification issues with broader development planning so that national and international resources could be accessed and used more effectively.

Delegates then elected Rosa Elena Simeón Negrín, Cuba's Minister for Science, Technology and the Environment, as President of COP-6, by acclamation. President Simeón Negrín expressed hope that COP-6 would make real progress towards creating a better world, and emphasized that present unsustainable consumption patterns, especially in the developed world, must be reversed. Expressing confidence in the ability of humans to overcome the most difficult of obstacles, she drew attention to the fact that: 54 countries are poorer today than in the 1990s; 1.2 billion people live in absolute poverty; 1.3 billion people live on fragile land that does not provide them with stable livelihoods; food distribution continues to be unequal; and natural resources are depleted.

CCD Executive Secretary Hama Arba Diallo noted that COP-6 provides the context to assess the progress of implementing the CCD, and expressed hope that Parties will take appropriate measures to translate into action the political commitment to address desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. He noted that the ultimate goal is to provide affected countries with the basic means necessary to implement the CCD, and said that conditions in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas are degrading in many countries.

Observing that climatic and anthropogenic factors increase desertification and drought, he said that they must be countered by a more effective implementation of the CCD. He noted that some 30 African, 16 Asian, and seven Latin American and Caribbean



countries have finalized their NAPs. He said the Secretariat has focused on assisting affected developing countries in the elaboration of their NAPs, preparation of the national reports submitted to CRIC-1, and development of a wide range of activities pertaining to SRAPs and RAPs. He noted that several developing countries continue to rely on the voluntary contributions channeled by the Secretariat. He said the Secretariat provided assistance for all affected countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean to participate at CRIC-1. Executive Secretary Diallo noted that the Secretariat has, *inter alia*, supported African countries in preparing for donor consultations aimed at concluding partnership agreements, and facilitated the preparation of project proposals on combating desertification under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA: President Simeón Negrín noted that the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) had requested the COP to include an item on the need for, modalities for, costs involved in, and feasibility and possible terms of reference of the regional coordination units as a separate agenda item. Parties adopted the agenda (ICCD/COP(6)/1) with the oral amendment.

ELECTION OF OTHER OFFICERS: President Simeón Negrín announced the regional nominations for the posts of Vice President of COP-6. The following delegates were nominated: on behalf of the African Group, Mohammed Arrouchi (Morocco) and Bongani Masuku (Swaziland); for the Asian Group, Yi Xianliang (China) and Saad Al Numeiry (United Arab Emirates); for the Eastern European Group, Vladimir Savchenko (Belarus) and Kulauzov Dóra (Hungary); and for the Latin American and Caribbean Group, Ana María Hernández Salgar (Colombia). For the election of CST Chair, President Simeón Negrín noted that the Western European and Others Group had nominated Ricardo Valentini (Italy). She said consultations would continue on the election of the remaining members of the Bureau.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK: President Simeón Negrín requested Parties to consider the establishment of a Committee of the Whole (COW) to address outstanding issues and to recommend decisions for adoption by the COP. The COW would consider: the programme and budget; additional procedures or institutional mechanisms to assist the COP in regularly reviewing the implementation of the CCD; activities for the promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and relevant international organizations, institutions and agencies; regional coordination units; the outcomes of the WSSD relevant to the CCD; rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure; the programme of work for COP-7; and any other matter deemed appropriate. Parties agreed to the establishment of a COW. President Simeón Negrín then proposed Ositadinma Aneadu (Nigeria) to chair the COW. JAMAICA, SYRIA and SWAZILAND expressed their support for the nomination. The US asked under what capacity Ositadinma Aneadu would chair the COW, as he was not one of the candidates nominated for COP-6 Vice President. The Secretariat clarified that the nominee would serve as an *ex-officio* member of the Bureau to assist the President. Parties approved the nomination.

Regarding the current CRIC Chair, President Simeón Negrín said Rogatien Biaou (Benin) would not participate in COP-6 due to ministerial responsibilities. She said that Mohamed Mahmoud Ould El Ghaouth (Mauritania) had been selected for the role of CRIC Chair as a replacement.

ACCREDITATION OF ORGANIZATIONS: Parties approved the intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations proposed for accreditation to the COP.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The international visibility of the session received a strong political push with Fidel Castro Ruz making a personal appearance at the opening ceremony in the Palacio de Convenciones. While the final figures are still to be tallied, the number of Heads of State and Government expected, according to the Secretariat, to descend on Havana, might be around twenty, together with well over 100 ministerial-level representatives, 80 members of parliament, and over 200 NGOs. Some observers remarked that the Cuban authorities are trying hard to provide the best possible arrangements for the 2000 participants assembled in the cream-colored air-conditioned Sala 1. The emerging atmosphere is bound to make an important impact on COP-6, which participants will certainly try to make the "implementation session." Delegates observed that this sentiment was a recurring theme in several statements made on the first day of the conference. However, the COP started with an unexpected impasse over the election and regional representation of Bureau members, with divergent views among African Parties, thus delaying the opening plenary session.

Looking at the next two weeks of deliberations, an observer identified several main issues on the COP-6 agenda: the Secretariat's increased budget for the biennium 2004-5; the development of the Memorandum of Understanding on the designation of the GEF as a financial mechanism of the CCD; and the procedures for the review of the CRIC at COP-7.

Some developing country delegates are eagerly awaiting the high-level ministerial segment and an expected exchange of views regarding the relationship between the implementation of the CCD and the stalled agricultural negotiations at the upcoming Fifth Ministerial World Trade Organisation meeting in Cancún the week following the conclusion of COP-6.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

COP PLENARY: The Plenary will convene in Sala 1 at 10:00 am to hear statements from Parties, United Nations agencies and observers.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (COW): The COW will meet in Sala 1 following the closure of the Plenary. The issues to be considered include the programme and budget for the biennium 2004-5 and the feasibility and possible terms of reference for the regional coordination units.

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (CST): The CST will meet in Sala 4 from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm, and will consider the roster of independent experts, survey and evaluation of existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies, and enhancing the usefulness and effectiveness of the CST.

COMMITTEE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION (CRIC): The CRIC will meet in Sala 1 from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm to consider the report of CRIC-1, the overall review of the activities of the Secretariat and of progress made by affected country Parties, and to review the report on enhanced implementation of the obligations of the CCD.