



CCD COP-7 HIGHLIGHTS THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2005

Delegates met in the seventh session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) to discuss: the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA); liaison with international organizations and the scientific community; future programme of work; creation of *ad hoc* panels of experts; and other matters. Consultations in contact groups continued. The contact group created by the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention considered draft decisions on: strengthening the Convention implementation process in Africa; consideration of necessary adjustments to the elaboration process and the implementation of action programmes; improving the procedure for communication of information and the quality and format of reports to the COP; and mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention. The contact group on the programme and budget created by the Committee of the Whole convened throughout the day to continue their discussions on the budget. Deliberations continued in the contact group on regional coordination units (RCUs).

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Chair Viorel Blujdea (Romania) opened the meeting.

MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT: The Secretariat introduced document ICCD/COP(7)/CST/9 on the MA, containing a summary report for decision makers.

The contributing authors of the MA presented the report entitled "Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Desertification Synthesis," describing: causes of desertification; linkages between desertification, climate change and biodiversity loss; and policy approaches to the prevention and reversal of desertification. Presenting future development scenarios, the presenters said that desertification is likely to continue in the next 50 years, and a globally proactive ecosystem management approach would lead to relatively less pressure on drylands. They also emphasized that addressing desertification is crucial to meeting the Millennium Development Goals, especially poverty reduction.

In the ensuing discussion, delegates asked questions on a number of issues, including: data acquisition; identification of information gaps; and linkages between desertification and human migration. NORWAY stressed that the CCD could benefit from the MA, especially regarding indicators and benchmarks.

LIAISON WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY: The Secretariat introduced documents ICCD/COP(7)/5 and Add.1. Two issues

were addressed under this agenda item: the ongoing joint work programme on biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands, between the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the CCD, and the outcomes of the Viterbo Workshop on "Forests and Forest Ecosystems: Promoting Synergy in the Implementation of the Three Rio Conventions," organized by CCD, CBD and UNFCCC.

OTHER MATTERS: Two subjects were introduced by the Secretariat under this agenda item: the Secretariat's initiative to establish the UNCCD fellowship programme (ICCD/COP(7)/CST/INF.1), and consideration of ways and means of promoting know-how and technology transfer for combating desertification and/or mitigating the effects of drought, as well as promoting experience sharing and information exchange among parties and interested institutions and organizations (ICCD/COP(7)/CST/INF.2).

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE CST:

The recommendations of the Bureau on this issue contained in document ICCD/COP(7)/CST/4 were presented by the Secretariat. The EU, with a number of other delegations, suggested prioritizing future themes. Specific topics were suggested, including the continuation of work on land degradation, vulnerability and rehabilitation, and on benchmarks and indicators. The proposal to address climate change and desertification received wide support. CUBA suggested adding the vulnerability of small island developing states.

CREATION OF AD HOC PANELS OF EXPERTS: Chair Blujdea opened the floor for discussions on the creation of *ad hoc* panels of experts, as necessary, with their terms of reference. The Secretariat noted that there is no background document on the issue and that relevant information is included in the report of the CST Bureau. ARGENTINA, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, said that the CST should have sufficient means to finance the panels of experts, and the panels should not replace the Roster of Independent Experts, but rather complement their work.

DRAFT DECISIONS: Small drafting groups discussed and finalized draft CST decisions during the afternoon. In closing the afternoon session, Chair Blujdea circulated six draft decisions on: the roster of independent experts; traditional knowledge; improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST; survey and evaluation of existing networks, institutions, agencies and bodies; benchmarks and indicators; and early warning systems. He also announced that more draft decisions would be available



in the morning of Friday, 21 October, and that the Committee would consider the draft decisions in an afternoon session on that day.

CONTACT GROUPS

PROGRAMME AND BUDGET: The contact group on the programme and budget, chaired by Gerardo Guiza (Mexico), met throughout the day.

On the issue of arrears, many developed countries proposed to prepare an arrears payment plan and introduced a paragraph on this issue to be included in the budget decision. A group of developing countries supported making a statement urging countries to rectify the issue of arrears. One delegation said that this issue is irrelevant as contributions are made on a voluntary basis.

Regarding overspending, a group of developed countries requested the Secretariat to give an explanation regarding overspending in the current biennium. The Secretariat cited currency fluctuations, inflation and salary adjustments as the primary reasons. One regional group held that there have been adjustments in fund allocations in order to carry out activities for the implementation of CCD because of the late payment or arrears and currency fluctuations, and therefore it could not be said that there is overspending, as the expenditures are still within the approved budget.

The Secretariat provided information on its increased activities. One regional group expressed satisfaction, while another regional group emphasized that there should be a budget and sources of funding for any new decisions by the COP.

On the auditors' report on the Convention's trust funds for the biennium 2002-2003, the Secretariat introduced the document ICCD/COP(7)/2/Add.5(A). Many delegates requested the Secretariat to produce a report on the actions taken in response to the auditors' recommendations. Some delegates suggested annexing the report to the budget decision, while others objected. A few delegations supported including paragraphs on the concrete actions taken by the Secretariat in the budget decision. No consensus was reached. The Secretariat said that it will provide delegations with information on actions taken.

Regarding exchange rate fluctuations, the Secretariat proposed three options to reduce risks of currency fluctuations, including: changing the assessment currency from the US dollar to the Euro; re-costing of the budget for the second half of each future biennium; and establishing a contingency budget. A group of developed countries opposed the re-costing and contingency budget options, but supported the change to a Euro-based budget. However, many other delegations objected to the change. Two additional options were also proposed: that parties that benefited from the exchange rate pay back the difference; or that the EU countries assess and pay in Euros and other countries assess and pay in US dollars. Many opposed these proposals, so consensus was not reached.

DRAFT DECISION FOR THE REVIEW OF THE

CONVENTION: The contact group, chaired by Ositadinma Anaedu (Nigeria), met throughout the day. The group completed a first reading of four draft decisions and was able to consolidate much of the texts, but several issues eluded consensus.

Regarding strengthening the Convention implementation in Africa, debate stalled over whether developed countries and multilateral organizations would be required to make "all" financial information available, and whether to "request" or simply "invite" the GEF to provide support to developing countries' national action programmes.

Regarding the consideration of necessary adjustments to the elaboration process and the implementation of action programmes, including the review of the enhanced implementation of the obligations of the Convention, some countries wished to delete reference to the Group of Experts playing a monitoring role.

On improving procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties, it was suggested by a group of developed countries that all operative paragraphs be replaced by one, calling for the formation of an open-ended informal group to establish standardized national reporting procedures. Others called for more time to consider this proposal. Differences of opinion remained on whether to assess the status of combating land degradation, or land degradation itself.

On the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention, differences remained on the strength of the language to be used in requesting countries to honor commitments made. The CCD's relationship to the GEF remained contentious, with some believing that GEF is outside of the convention and thus can only be "invited" to address the wishes of the CCD, rather than "urged" or "be called upon."

REGIONAL COORDINATION UNITS: Debate in the beginning of the discussions centered on whether Decision 11 of COP-6 has implied the COP's creation/endorsement of RCUs, and whether COP-7 has the mandate to make decision on RCUs. A group of developing countries urged COP-7 to focus on role and operation of RCUs, while a group of developed countries stressed the need to clarify the mandate of COP-7 on this issue.

On the draft decision submitted by Chair Mohammed Ismail (Tunisia), discussions focused on two operative paragraphs, one on the establishment of RCUs as decentralized units of the Secretariat in the three regional implementation annexes in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, and another on the budgetary arrangement for the regional coordinators and administrative assistant of the RCUs. Several developed countries opposed establishing RCUs, warning against financial implications. Many developing countries supported it, and urged COP-7 to approve a proposal for payment of salary costs for RCUs and requested the Executive Secretary to make budgetary arrangements drawing on the core budget.

Chair Ismail referred the above issues to an informal group for further consideration.

IN THE CORRIDORS

On the fourth day of the COP session, with major committee meetings in recess, the pace of the conference slowed down somewhat, with fewer delegates seen in the halls. Some participants jokingly attributed this to Kenyatta Day, a statutory holiday for both Kenyans and UN staff in Nairobi. Most negotiations were carried out in various informal consultations and small contact groups, but little progress was recorded, despite efforts to facilitate the deliberations by providing French and Spanish interpretations. Though the negotiators managed to produce a dozen drafts, some litigious issues kept haunting the delegates, preventing early agreement. On the RCUs, for example, a number of participants thought the difficulties stemmed, in part, from what they saw as the "ambiguous" COP-6 decision on the RCUs' mandate. Another tortuous debate evolved around specific phrases in the draft decision on strengthening implementation of the Convention in Africa, clearly a vital subject for most parties to the Convention. The arguments put forth by some delegations were regarded by several observers with a good deal of consternation, and seen as a retreat from political commitments to the CCD.