

EIGHTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UN CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION: 3-14 SEPTEMBER 2007

The eighth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 8) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will convene in Madrid, Spain, from 3-14 September 2007. In addition to the work of the COP, UNCCD parties will also conduct the sixth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 6) from 4-7 September 2007, and the eighth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 8) from 4-6 September 2007. Additional events will include a dialogue session with members of parliament, from 8-9 September, and a special segment on 12-13 September, which will feature a dialogue among high-level officials on the theme "Desertification and adaptation to climate change."

As the UNCCD begins its second decade, the COP will address a number of agenda items that could result in a refocusing of the Convention. These items include the arrangements for regional coordination units, programme and budget for 2008-2009, and the follow-up to the Joint Inspection Unit report and strategy development to foster the implementation of the Convention, based on the work of the Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group (IIWG) that was established at COP 7. The CRIC is expected to consider the report of CRIC 5, review the policies, operational modalities, activities and execution of the Global Mechanism's function, and consider reports on the collaboration with the Global Environment Facility. The CST will discuss a report on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST and the effects of climatic variations and human activities on land degradation, among other agenda items.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNCCD

The UNCCD is the centerpiece in the international community's efforts to combat desertification and land degradation in the drylands. The UNCCD was adopted on 17 June 1994, entered into force on 26 December 1996, and currently has 191 parties. The UNCCD recognizes the physical, biological and socioeconomic aspects of desertification, the importance of redirecting technology transfer so that it is demand-driven, and the involvement of local communities

in combating desertification and land degradation. The core of the UNCCD is the development of national, subregional and regional action programmes by national governments, in cooperation with donors, local communities and NGOs.

NEGOTIATION OF THE CONVENTION: In 1992, the UN General Assembly, as requested by the UN Conference on Environment and Development, adopted resolution 47/188 calling for the establishment of an 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 and drafted the UNCCD and four regional implementation annexes for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Northern Mediterranean. A fifth annex, for Central and Eastern Europe, was elaborated and adopted during the fourth Conference of the Parties (COP 4) in December 2000. Pending the UNCCD's entry into force, the INCD met six times between January 1995 and August 1997 to hear progress reports on urgent actions for Africa and interim measures in other regions, and to prepare for COP 1.

COP 1: COP 1 met in Rome, Italy, from 29 September to 10 October 1997. The CST held its first session concurrently from 2-3 October. The COP 1 and CST 1 agendas consisted primarily of organizational matters. Delegates selected Bonn, Germany, as the location for the UNCCD's Secretariat and the International Fund for Agricultural Development as the organization to administer the GM. 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 should consider linkages between traditional and modern knowledge. One plenary meeting was devoted to a dialogue between NGOs and delegates. Delegates subsequently decided that similar NGO dialogues should be scheduled at future COP plenary sessions.

COP 2: COP 2 met in Dakar, Senegal, from 30 November to 11 December 1998. The CST met in parallel with the COP from 1-4 December. Delegates approved arrangements to host the Secretariat in Bonn. Central and Eastern 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 linkages between traditional and modern knowledge.

COP 3: Parties met for COP 3 in Recife, Brazil, from 15-26 November 1999, with the CST meeting in parallel to the COP from 16-19 November. The COP approved the long-negotiated Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding the GM. It decided to establish an *ad hoc* working group to review and analyze in depth the reports on national, subregional and regional action programmes and to draw conclusions and propose concrete recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the UNCCD. In addition, the COP appointed an *ad hoc* panel on traditional knowledge and an *ad hoc* panel on early warning systems.

COP 4: COP 4 convened from 11-22 December 2000, in Bonn, Germany. The CST met from 12-15 December. COP 4's achievements included the adoption of the fifth regional Annex for Central and Eastern Europe, commencement of work by the *ad hoc* working group to review UNCCD implementation, initiation of the consideration of modalities for the establishment of the CRIC, submission of proposals to improve the work of the CST, and the adoption of a decision on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council initiative to explore the best options for GEF support of the UNCCD's implementation.

COP 5: COP 5 met from 1-13 October 2001, in Geneva, Switzerland, and the CST met in parallel from 2-5 October. The COP focused on setting the modalities of work for the two-year interval before COP 6. Progress was made in a number of areas, including the establishment of the CRIC, identification of modalities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST, and support for a proposal by the GEF to designate land degradation as another focal area for funding.

CRIC 1: CRIC 1 convened at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization headquarters in Rome, Italy, from 11-22 November 2002. Delegates considered presentations from the five UNCCD regions and addressed seven thematic issues. The meeting also considered information on financial mechanisms in support of the UNCCD's implementation, advice provided by the CST and the GM, and the Secretariat's report on actions aimed at strengthening the relationships with other relevant conventions and organizations.

COP 6: COP 6 met from 25 August - 6 September 2003, in Havana, Cuba. The CST and CRIC met concurrently 26-29 August. Delegates designated the GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD and identified criteria for the COP 7 review of the CRIC, in addition to other decisions, including on: activities for the promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies; and follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The CST discussed improving its efficiency and effectiveness, among other agenda items.

CRIC 3: The third meeting of the CRIC was held from 2-11 May 2005, in Bonn, Germany. It reviewed the implementation of the Convention in Africa, considered issues relating to Convention implementation at the global level, shared experiences, and made recommendations for the future work of the Convention.

COP 7: COP 7 took place in Nairobi, Kenya, from 17-28 October 2005. The CST met from 18-21 October and the CRIC met from 18-27 October. Participants reviewed the implementation of the Convention, developed an MoU between the UNCCD and the GEF, adopted the programme and budget for the 2006-2007 biennium, and reviewed the recommendations in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) of the UN, among other agenda items. A proposal to add an agenda item on the procedure for the selection of an Executive Secretary was not

accepted and discussion on the regional coordination units ended without the adoption of a decision. The CST considered land degradation, vulnerability and rehabilitation, among other issues.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

IYDD: At its 58th session, in resolution 58/211 of 23 December 2003, the UN General Assembly declared 2006 the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD). Conferences and seminars organized by governments and intergovernmental and research organizations were held throughout 2006 in Europe, North America, Africa and Asia, on topics ranging from sustainable land management, to promoting the participation of civil society in the UNCCD, to women and youth and desertification.

DESERTIFICATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL

POLICY IMPERATIVE: This Conference, which convened from 17-19 December 2006 in Algiers, Algeria, concluded the IYDD and focused on policies needed for successful drylands management at the local, national, regional and international levels. Ministers from Arab countries presented a proposal requesting that the UN General Assembly (UNGA) declare 2010-2020 as the decade of deserts and desertification.

Algeria presented this proposal to the 24th session of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (5-9 February 2007, Nairobi, Kenya), which adopted a decision recommending that UNGA declare, during its 62nd session, the decade 2010-2020 as the UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification.

CRIC 5: The fifth session of the CRIC convened in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 12-21 March 2007, to review implementation of the Convention in affected country parties in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Northern Mediterranean and Central and Eastern Europe. Much of the meeting was devoted to panel presentations and discussions on selected topics, such as the promotion of technology transfer and know-how, sustainable land management, early warning systems, financial resource mobilization, synergies with other conventions, rehabilitation of degraded lands, and the promotion of new and renewable energy sources. The meeting also addressed how to improve information communication and national reporting, reviewed the 2006 IYDD, and conducted a Global Interactive Dialogue with stakeholders on investments in rural areas in the context of combating land degradation and desertification.

IIWG: Following a COP 7 decision, an Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group (IIWG) convened four times from May 2006 - May 2007 with the mandate to review the JIU report and to develop a draft ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention. The report of the IIWG's review of the JIU's recommendations and the draft ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention have been forwarded to COP 8 for its consideration.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY RESIGNATION: Hama Arba Diallo, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, resigned effective 19 June 2007, following his election as a member of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso. The UN Secretary-General issued a call for applications in July and conducted interviews for the position during the last week of August. In a letter to the Bureau, dated 1 September 2007, the Secretary-General forwarded his selection of Luc-Marie Gnacadja (Benin) as the new Executive Secretary, for confirmation by the Bureau.