

UNCCD COP 8 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 2007

The eighth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 8) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) opened at the Palacio de Congresos in Madrid, Spain, on Monday, 3 September 2007. Following a welcoming ceremony under the aegis of the Crown Prince and Princess of Spain, the first plenary meeting of the two-week session heard opening statements from representatives of regional groups, UN agencies and organizations, and non-governmental organizations.

OPENING CEREMONY

COP 8 was called to order at 12:03 pm. In his opening remarks, Grégoire de Kalbermatten, the Convention Secretariat's Officer-in-Charge, welcomed the Prince and Princess of Asturias, paid tribute to former UNCCD Executive Secretary Hama Arba Diallo, and said COP 8 is a defining moment in the UNCCD's evolution given recent climatic events and progress in developing the UNCCD implementation strategy.

David Mwiraria (Kenya), President of COP 7, paid tribute to Diallo. He highlighted the ten-year strategic plan and the programme and budget for 2008-2009 as two of the most important items to be addressed at COP 8.

Alberto Ruiz Gallardón, Mayor of Madrid, welcomed participants to Madrid and elaborated the city's model to combat desertification, which aims to improve the quality of life, enhance the efficient use of water and increase Madrid's green areas.

Cristina Narbona, Minister for the Environment of Spain, noted that her country has doubled its ODA and increased its support to Africa, and committed to further support affected countries in their efforts to combat desertification. She called for exploring new financial instruments and initiatives for furthering implementation of the Convention at COP 8.

Felipe de Borbón, Prince of Asturias, welcomed participants to Spain, detailed Spain's longstanding efforts to combat land degradation, and described the local and global links in the causes of, and solutions to, the desertification problem.

OPENING PLENARY

COP 7 President Mwiraria declared open COP 8. Delegates elected Minister Narbona as COP 8 President by acclamation. Officer-in-Charge de Kalbermatten presented an overview of the Secretariat's work since COP 7. He acknowledged

Chair Moore's role in making CRIC 5 a success and said the Secretariat looks forward to enhanced cooperation with the Global Mechanism (GM).

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK: COP 8 President Narbona invited delegates to consider the document on Adoption of the agenda and organization of work (ICCD/COP(8)/1 and Corr.1), and noted two changes proposed by the Bureau: a new sub-item to add under item 14 (IYDD) on the decade of deserts and combating desertification (2010-2020); and a renamed agenda item 10 (regional coordination units, RCUs). The agenda was adopted as orally revised.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS OTHER THAN THE PRESIDENT: President Narbona invited delegates to elect nine vice-presidents and a chair of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). The COP elected Sem Shikongo (Namibia), Siddarth Behura (India), Khaled al-Sharaa (Syria), Jiří Hlavacek (Czech Republic), Yurie Kolmaz (Ukraine), and Mary Rowen (US). The Secretariat noted that the Latin America and Caribbean Group had nominated Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay, but the representatives' names had not yet been presented to the Bureau. Uganda said Tunisia would provide the name of the African Group's second representative. Delegates elected William Dar (The Philippines) as CST Chair, and noted that Franklin Moore (US) had been elected to chair CRIC 5 and 6.

Delegates then established a Committee of the Whole (COW). President Narbona noted that the Bureau had changed the COW's programme of work to allow more time for discussion of agenda item 9 (follow-up of the JIU and strategy development). Discussion of this agenda item and agenda item 6 (RCUs) will begin on Tuesday morning, 4 September, and discussion on the programme and budget will begin on Friday, 7 September.

ACCREDITATION OF ORGANIZATIONS AND ADMISSION OF OBSERVERS: Delegates adopted the document on Accreditation of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, admission of observers (ICCD/COP(8)/14 and Add.1) without comment.

STATEMENTS BY PARTIES, AGENCIES AND OBSERVERS: In their opening remarks, delegations paid tribute to the work of former Executive Secretary Diallo. Many also emphasized their desire to work together cordially and constructively during COP 8.

PAKISTAN, on behalf of the G-77/China, said that the Group is happy with the progress made in the UNCCD. He welcomed the work done by the Intersessional Intergovernmental Working Group (IIWG), supported the GM as a useful tool, and expressed the belief that the improved Secretariat will enhance UNCCD implementation. He appealed to developed countries to fulfill their obligations by providing adequate financial resources to developing countries, and invited the GEF to strengthen its focal area on land degradation and allocate more resources in the next replenishment. He also called for parties to adopt the programme and budget of the Secretariat for 2008-2009. He highlighted the importance of integrating UNCCD implementation in climate change adaptation programmes. With the ten-year strategic plan in place, he said he believed that COP 8 will be an historical conference.

PORTUGAL, on behalf of the European Union, Turkey and Croatia, highlighted the importance of desertification and drought within Europe. He stated that political support for the UNCCD requires a more streamlined and strategic approach, which can be achieved only if the ten-year strategic plan is adopted. He noted that the COP is at a decisive phase and that its institutional framework must be determined. He called for stronger interaction with the other Rio Conventions.

BELARUS, on behalf of Central and Eastern Europe, stated his region's support for the ten-year strategic plan and highlighted the need for significant financial resources. He called for strengthening GEF activities and an enhanced role for the GM in mobilizing resources. He expressed hope that the CRIC will be retained as an institution within the UNCCD and that it will present clear and specific recommendations to the COP. He called for reforms to increase the importance of scientific work carried out by the CST.

UGANDA, on behalf of the African Group, said COP 8 should focus on strategies for enhancing the implementation of the Convention, and should substantially increase resources to the Secretariat. He welcomed the outcomes of the IIWG and the *Ad Hoc* Working Group on national reporting, and suggested that COP 8 mandate the Secretariat to facilitate the production of reporting guidelines, with a view to making them available by COP 9. He also emphasized the importance of the CST's programme of work and arrangements for the RCUs.

PARAGUAY, on behalf of the Latin America and Caribbean Group, complimented the work done by the IIWG, and stressed the need to finance the implementation of the ten-year strategic plan. He supported the modalities suggested in the draft plan including strengthening the CST and CRIC as well as strengthening the regional programmes. He highlighted the need for a sufficient budget for the Secretariat and appealed to all parties to adopt measures related to adaptation to climate change.

MYANMAR, on behalf of Asia and the Pacific, stated that the ten-year strategic plan "opens a way for renewed commitment among stakeholders." He encouraged parties to: identify targets to optimize the reporting and monitoring process and identify bottlenecks; establish an information clearing house mechanism within the Convention; and give the CRIC permanent status. He called for broader collaboration between the Secretariat and the GM and expressed his region's interest in following the issue of results-based management as well as its support for a four-year reporting cycle where all parties submit reports simultaneously.

CANADA implored parties to achieve results and progress at COP 8. He stressed that COP 8 is a pivotal session that represents an opportunity to work together to shift the UNCCD in the direction of measurable progress, which he said was only possible if we "put the past behind us and look forward." He emphasized "quality before quantity" and said the move to a

results-based management approach will be the key. He said support for the ten-year strategic plan and commitment to its adoption will be a critical measure of this COP's success and a determining factor in his country's assessment of the value of future participation.

UN Environment Programme outlined his organization's activities to support UNCCD implementation, including: celebrating the 2006 World Environment Day with the theme of deserts and desertification; developing and implementing projects; and developing indicators on land degradation and desertification. He highlighted the importance of understanding, mitigating and adapting to climate change in relation to combating desertification. The Food and Agriculture Organization suggested measures to improve integration of national action programme activities with government development programmes, and encouraged promoting partnerships for large-scale financing.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reported on a WMO-organized meeting in 2006 on climate and desertification, during which participants offered recommendations to effectively use climate information to better understand how climate influences and induces land degradation. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction highlighted that the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action seeks to build the resilience of communities and countries to hazards such as drought that can weaken livelihoods and sustainable development.

Fundación IPADE, Spain, on behalf of NGOs, noted that desertification is causing poverty and conflicts in countries. She appealed to donors to contribute new and additional financial resources and noted that the implementation of the ten-year strategic plan is the "last chance." IUCN - The World Conservation Union highlighted the need to better understand community management approaches and expressed hope that COP 8 would give "better attention" to civil society involvement.

IN THE CORRIDORS

In their morning meetings, regional groups considered the nomination by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon of Benin's Luc-Marie Gnacadja as the next UNCCD Executive Secretary. Many delegations acknowledged that he is well qualified, having served as Environment Minister, studied at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and acquired significant private sector and managerial experience. However, they were puzzled by the selection process, saying that greater transparency would have been desirable and expressed surprise at the rush to find a new Executive Secretary. Few delegations had heard of Gnacadja or knew that he was in the running until Ban Ki-Moon announced his nomination. Some noted that the appointment of an African was probably inevitable, following Ban Ki-Moon's announcement in July of his intention to abolish the post of Under-Secretary-General and Special Advisor on Africa, which upset the African diplomatic community in New York. Some suggested they would have preferred to see greater regional balance, including within Africa, in the appointment. Despite the procedural flaws, delegates remarked that Gnacadja's appointment may give the Convention a second chance for success because he is not a controversial candidate. Some highlighted that Gnacadja's first challenge will be to re-build the trust that was lost between the Secretariat and parties, especially at COP 7 following contention over the Secretariat's budget.

Meanwhile, after the opening ceremony, star-struck participants enjoyed the presence of the Crown Prince and Princess during a reception. Many stood in concentric circles around the royal couple, content to gawk, while a few took surreptitious photos or even ventured close to shake their hands.