

SEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION AND FIRST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OF THE UN CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION: 3-14 NOVEMBER 2008

The seventh session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 7) of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is convening in Istanbul, Turkey, back-to-back with the first Special Session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST), from 3-14 November 2008. After an official opening session and regional consultations for Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Mediterranean and Central Eastern European country parties, the CST session will commence its work on 5 November. The CST will consider its draft, costed two-year work programme and four-year work plan. It is also expected to consider ways to measure progress in the implementation of the objectives of the ten-year strategic plan, which was adopted in September 2007 by the eighth Conference of the Parties (COP 8), and to present methodological suggestions for how to assess the plan's overall implementation. The CRIC will begin its work on 7 November, with a focus on: multi-year programmes of work prepared for the Secretariat, the Global Mechanism, a Joint Work Programme between both organizations, the CRIC and the CST; national reporting issues related to the drafting of new guidelines; and the future format of CRIC sessions.

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 and entered into force on 26 December 1996. Currently, it has 193 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 Global Mechanism (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 on 26-29 August. Delegates designated the GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD, identified criteria for the COP 7 review of the CRIC, and decided *inter alia* on the: activities for the promotion and strengthening of relationships with other relevant conventions and international organizations, institutions and agencies; ways to enhance the effectiveness of the CST; 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. Discussion on the regional coordination units ended without the adoption of a decision. The CST considered land degradation, vulnerability and rehabilitation, among other issues. An Intergovernmental Intersessional Working Group (IIWG) was established 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 intersession work was forwarded to COP 8 for its consideration.

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, 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, early warning systems, and financial resource mobilization. The meeting also addressed how to improve information communication and national reporting, reviewed the 2006 International Year for Deserts and Desertification (IYDD), and conducted a Global Interactive Dialogue with stakeholders on investments in rural areas in the context of combating land degradation and desertification.

COP 8: The eighth session of the COP convened in Madrid, Spain, from 3-14 September 2007. UNCCD parties also attended CRIC 6 from 4-14 September, and CST 8 from 4-7 September. The COP approved 29 decisions, with the decision on the ten-year strategic plan attracting the most attention. The CRIC decision to ask the Secretariat, in consultation with the GM, to revise the format of national reports as well as the CST decision to convene future sessions in a conference-style format contributed additional efforts to reform the UNCCD's implementation mechanisms in the coming decade. The ten-year strategic plan called for a number of progress reports on multi-year work plans to be made at CRIC 7, in addition to its review of the format of national reports. COP 8 delegates did not reach agreement on the programme and budget, however, and an Extraordinary Session of the COP (ESCAP) convened at UN headquarters in New York on 26 November 2007, to conclude this item. The final decision amounts to 4% euro value growth in the budget for the biennium 2008-2009, with 2.8% to be assessed from all parties and 1.2% to be provided as a voluntary contribution by the Government of Spain.

HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE: Based on a COP 8 decision, the UNCCD Secretariat organized a High-Level Policy Dialogue under the theme "Coping with today's global challenges in the context of the Strategy of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification," which convened on 27 May 2008, in Bonn, Germany. The Dialogue's purpose was to facilitate a targeted exchange from a number of stakeholders on the ten-year strategic plan and to foster awareness of and buy-in among relevant policy and decision makers. The Dialogue was organized under three topics: policy development; mobilizing for a forward-looking strategy; and responses to emerging challenges. The discussion included comments about national implementation, funding, and science, technology and economics related to desertification, land degradation and drought.