

NINTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UN CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION: 21 SEPTEMBER-2 OCTOBER 2009

The ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will convene in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 21 September-2 October 2009. In addition to the work of the COP, parties will also convene the eighth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 8), and the ninth session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 9). The UNCCD First Scientific Conference will meet from 22-24 September, in conjunction with CST 9, to consider the theme "biophysical and socio-economic monitoring and assessment of desertification and land degradation, to support decision-making in land and water management." A special high-level segment on fostering the implementation of the 10-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention will be held on 28-29 September, with ministerial-level roundtable discussions. The agenda items that delegates will address include: four-year work plans and two-year work programmes of the CRIC, CST, Global Mechanism (GM) and the Secretariat; the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) assessment of the GM; the Terms of Reference of the CRIC; the CST's operation; the communication strategy; arrangements for regional coordination mechanisms; impact indicators and performance indicators; and the budget.

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 UN agencies, 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 adopted during 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. The UNCCD entered into force on 26 December 1996.

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. 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.

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 a long-negotiated Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding the GM. It decided to establish an *ad hoc* working group to review and analyze 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, on the CST's recommendation, 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. Delegates adopted the fifth regional Annex for Central and Eastern Europe, began the work of the *ad hoc* working group to review UNCCD implementation, initiated the consideration of modalities for the establishment of the CRIC, submitted proposals to improve the CST's work, and adopted a decision on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council initiative to explore the best options for GEF support of UNCCD implementation.

COP 5: COP 5 met from 1-13 October 2001, in Geneva, Switzerland, and the CST met in parallel from 2-5 October. Delegates established the CRIC, adopted modalities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the CST, and supported a proposal by the GEF to designate land degradation as another focal area for funding.

CRIC 1: CRIC 1 convened in Rome, Italy, from 11-22 November 2002. Delegates considered presentations from the five UNCCD regions. 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. Among other agenda items, delegates designated the GEF as a financial mechanism of the UNCCD, identified criteria for the COP 7 review of the CRIC, decided that a comprehensive review of the Secretariat's activities would be undertaken by the JIU, and requested the Secretariat to facilitate a costed feasibility study on all aspects of regional coordination. 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, 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 a programme and budget for the 2006-2007 biennium, and reviewed the recommendations in the report of the JIU review of the Secretariat's activities, 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 intersessional 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 regions other than Africa. The meeting also addressed how to improve information communication and national reporting, reviewed the 2006 International Year for Deserts and Desertification, 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 (the Strategy) attracting the most attention. The CRIC decision requesting the Secretariat, in consultation with the GM, to revise the format of national reports and the CST decision to convene future sessions in a conference-style format contributed additional efforts to reform the UNCCD. Decision 3/COP8 on the ten-year strategic plan called on CRIC 7 to review a number of multi-year work plans as well as to review the format of reports. Delegates also requested the JIU to conduct an assessment of the GM for presentation to COP 9. COP 8 delegates did not reach agreement on the programme and budget, however, and an Extraordinary Session of the COP convened at UN Headquarters in New York on 26 November 2007, to conclude this item. The final decision amounted to a 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.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

CST S-1 AND CRIC 7: The first Special Session of the CST (CST S-1) and CRIC 7 convened in Istanbul, Turkey, from 3-14 November 2008. The two-day CST S-1 session considered preparations for CST 9, elements of the Strategy related to the CST, the CST's four-year work plan and two-year costed work programme, and advice to the CRIC on measuring progress on the Strategy's Strategic Objectives. CRIC 7 considered: the work plans and programmes for the Convention's bodies; the format of future meetings of the CRIC; and indicators and monitoring of the Strategy and principles for improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and format of reports submitted to the COP. In addition, delegates also engaged in three interactive dialogues addressing: UNCCD Strategic Orientations; the Terms of Reference and programme of work of the JIU on the assessment of the GM; and the national reporting process. Delegates also conducted a number of informal consultations related to COP 9 agenda items, including: Regional Annex meetings to consolidate proposals for regional coordination mechanisms; CST Bureau and scientific and technical correspondent consultations to develop a questionnaire regarding indicators; and Secretariat-led consultations on its draft communication strategy and possible efforts related to water issues.

REGIONAL ANNEX MEETINGS: In preparation for COP 9, five meetings of the Regional Implementation Annexes convened in 2009 as follows: Latin America and the Caribbean, Montevideo, 29 June-3 July; Northern Mediterranean, Rome, 8-10 July; Asia, Bangkok, 13-17 July; Central and Eastern Europe, Banja Luka, 22-24 July; and Africa, Tunis, 27-31 July.