

UNCCD COP 9 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2009

The ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) opened in Buenos Aires, Argentina, during an afternoon plenary meeting on Monday, 21 September 2009. The first plenary meeting of the two-week session heard statements from the outgoing and incoming Presidents of the COP and representatives of regional groups, UN agencies and intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations.

OPENING PLENARY

José Antonio González Martín, on behalf of the COP 8 President, Elena Espinosa Mangana, Spain's Minister of Environment, Rural and Marine Areas, welcomed delegates to COP 9 and noted that the global economic crisis poses new challenges for the UNCCD. He congratulated the first Scientific Conference held under UNCCD auspices and noted the Convention is on the right path to "scientific excellence," providing useful knowledge to anticipate future changes and early warning. He highlighted that delegates have been called to consider the functions of the Global Mechanism (GM) and Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC). He also noted support for the UNCCD 10-year Strategic Plan (the Strategy) by other UN bodies like the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

Delegates then elected Homero Bibiloni, Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina, as President of COP 9. Bibiloni welcomed participants and shared his concerns about the consistent worsening of the situation of poor people exposed to floods and droughts around the world. He noted this is an historic moment in the Convention, with a ten-year strategy ahead and a decade of experience, to turn to on-the-ground implementation. He called for moving from negotiating documents to providing solutions to poor farmers in developing countries. He also called for renewed compromise with an austere approach to assigning funds, strictly defined central priorities, and consideration of future generations.

Sergio La Rocca, Under-Secretary of Planning and Environmental Policy of Argentina, conveyed the personal support of Argentina's President to a positive outcome to the meeting.

Luc Gnacadja, UNCCD Executive Secretary, recalled that the UNCCD is the only international instrument that addresses sustainable land and water management. He stressed that the convergence of energy, food, financial and economic crises must not deter further action to combat desertification. On institutional arrangements, Gnacadja stressed that "we can't be doing the same thing, in the same way, and expect new results." He said COP 9 must advance the Strategy by creating an improved institutional setting. He emphasized the need to deliver a minimum set of indicators to assess and monitor progress in implementing land management programmes at the national and local levels. He expressed hope that the UNCCD's first Scientific Conference would provide relevant advice.

STATEMENTS BY PARTIES, AGENCIES AND

OBSERVERS: South Africa, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, noted the support for the UNCCD by the G-8 at its July 2009 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy. She said she looked forward to the Global Environment Facility's fifth replenishment, particularly for the land degradation focal area. She stressed the need to enhance the UNCCD's effective implementation by its institutions, and urged uptake of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on the GM. She supported the proposed budget and said "the time is right" to establish regional offices in the regions.

Sweden, for the EU, highlighted sustainable land management's vital contribution to mitigating climate change and adapting to its consequences in drylands. She said the meeting should reinforce the potential of the UNCCD through the effective implementation of the Strategy and added that institutional issues should not distract delegates from this goal. She looked forward to the contribution of the first Scientific Conference and lamented that the dialogue with civil society was not scheduled earlier in the agenda.

Chad, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, said African governments have adopted national action programmes (NAPs), but noted multiple challenges in implementing them. He highlighted the importance of operational complementarity, clarity for the roles of the Secretariat and the GM, long-term indicators and benchmarks, adoption of a realistic programme and budget, and synergies among multilateral environmental agreements.

Myanmar, for the ASIA GROUP, said NAPs need to be reoriented with the Strategy and requested that this activity be included in the next biennium's activities. He said the Asia Group supports a permanent regional office in Asia to ensure regional coordination among stakeholders. He stressed

the linkage between climate change and desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) and expressed hope that this issue would be deliberated during the high-level segment and forwarded to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. He said all major documents should be translated into Arabic, and highlighted the importance of the issue of dust and sand storms for this region.

Guyana, for the LATIN AMERICAN and CARIBBEAN GROUP, stressed that the regional implementation annexes are a significant part of the UNCCD, and stated that regional meetings and consultations are critical for the Convention. He said his Group: would like to make the CRIC a permanent subsidiary body with a specific mandate, in line with provisions of the Strategy; was concerned about the organization of the first Scientific Conference and the limited participation of scientists from the region; proposed electing the new CST Chair in the opening plenary rather than at the conclusion of the CST, as recommended by the CST Bureau; and recalled that the Scientific Conference is supposed to be part of the CST.

UKRAINE, on behalf of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), said the global role of the UNCCD can be fulfilled only if it addresses all manifestations of land degradation and desertification in all regions. He said he hoped that COP 9 decisions would optimize the work of the GM and the Secretariat, and confirm the role of the CRIC as one of the Convention's permanent subsidiary bodies. He highlighted his expectations for the CST's first Scientific Conference and informed that the CEE would like to establish a regional office to improve regional coordination.

The International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and Dryland Science for Development Consortium (DSD) stressed the need for: strong political will and an enabling policy environment; the application of science at local, national, regional and global levels; and sustainable intensification of agricultural production systems.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) highlighted its support of and contribution to dryland development over its 30 years of operation. He explained that, in cooperation with the GM, IFAD had developed a methodology to account for its activities in relation to the UNCCD, and that this methodology had been adopted by the World Bank and African Development Bank. He said IFAD will support the evolution of UNCCD bodies, including the GM, as discussed at COP 9.

UNDP welcomed progress to make the CST more effective and recalled the support UNDP is giving to African countries through the Integrated Drylands Development Programme (IDDP), with donor support.

UNEP highlighted the links between climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss. He said UNEP encourages countries to see synergies among the three Rio Conventions and stressed the importance of scientific collaboration, joint reporting, holistic approaches to sustainable land management and gender mainstreaming, among others. He mentioned the potential synergies between land degradation and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD), and the GEF-funded Carbon Benefits Project, conducted jointly by UNEP and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF).

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat stated the importance of UNCCD COP 9 and its outcomes for the UNFCCC and recalled the key elements of the post-Kyoto regime to emerge in Copenhagen, including emission reduction, mitigation and adaptation. She mentioned

ongoing national-level efforts to integrate climate change and land degradation, such as the National Adaptation Programmes for Action and the NAPs. She stressed the importance of science to provide a basis for decision making, both for mitigation and adaptation issues.

The GM said the Joint Work Programme between the Secretariat and the GM is growing in substance, quality and quantity, and noted the need for the COP's guidance on the delineation of tasks and roles based on the distinct mandates of the two institutions. He said the institutional setting of the GM and the oversight function of the COP are spelled out in the Convention text. He called for a broad-based process under the UNCCD to identify future financial opportunities for the Convention, such as innovations that the climate change process has developed.

A representative of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) said the bottom-up approach has not materialized, and emphasized the need to involve CSOs in NAP development and implementation. He lamented that only 15 CSOs had received financing to participate in the COP, and said other CSOs had not been able to obtain visas to attend.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK: COP 9 President Bibiloni invited delegates to consider the document on adoption of the agenda and organization of work (ICCD/COP(9)/1/Rev.1). CANADA, supported by NORWAY and the US, said the dialogue with CSOs should take place during the first week. CHINA expressed concern about the CSO dialogue. The Executive Secretary said CSOs would be able to provide their views on each agenda item.

GUYANA asked when the election of the CST Chair would be discussed. ARGENTINA said the CST Chair should be elected during the opening plenary, and that Article 22 would need to be amended if this were to be changed. The Secretariat noted that the organization of work had been endorsed by the Bureau, but the COP could amend it if it desired. BELARUS and the ASIA GROUP supported electing the CST Chair immediately and suspending the function until the end of CST 9.

NAMIBIA, supported by ZIMBABWE, suggested adding water and the framework for water policy advocacy to the agenda. BRAZIL asked for further discussion on how the high-level segment would proceed. The meeting suspended at 6:30 pm without a decision on the agenda.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As delegates left to attend the '*vin d'honneur*' organized by the Argentine hosts, many continued to talk about the inconclusive plenary discussion on the agenda and programme of work. Some pointed out that the Latin American and Caribbean Group had made their position clear on the timing of the election and seating of the CST Chair further to their preparatory meeting in Montevideo. They considered the implications of that Group's concern that the Rules of Procedure should be changed prior to deciding to delay when a newly elected CST Chair presides over the CST. Others highlighted that it makes sense for the CST 8 Chair to remain until the end of the week, so as to preside over CST 9 in order to ensure a successful conclusion to the first Scientific Conference.

Some participants expressed hope that evening consultations will allow a quick adoption of the agenda and programme of work on Tuesday morning, noting that scientists filling the observer section of the plenary hall are eager to open the first Scientific Conference on Tuesday afternoon, as planned.