

UNCCD COP 15 Highlights: Wednesday, 18 May 2022

Tense negotiations related to draft decisions on drought, budget, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the mobilization of resources for implementation of the Convention were the main focus on Wednesday. Delegates of the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 15) met throughout the day behind closed doors and in informal discussions in the corridors to conclude draft decisions under the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC) and the Committee of the Whole (COW). In the evening, during the final CRIC session, delegates approved eight draft decisions of the CRIC and adopted its report.

Beyond the decisions on securing additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms, other draft decisions included: integration of Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG 15) and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality (LDN); development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity building to further the implementation of the Convention; and improving procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP.

Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention

During the fifth and final meeting of the CRIC, Chair Andrew Bishop presented, and the CRIC adopted without comment, eight draft decisions relating to:

- effective implementation of the Convention at national, subregional and regional levels: review of the report of the CRIC on its nineteenth session (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.1); integration of SDG 15 and related target 15.3 into the implementation of the Convention and LDN (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.2); and development and promotion of activities for targeted capacity building to further the implementation of the Convention (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.3);
- improving the procedures for communication of information as well as the quality and formats of reports to be submitted to the COP (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.6);
- securing additional investments and relations with financial mechanisms: report by the GEF on the financing of programmes and projects concerning desertification, land degradation and drought (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.8); and report by the Global Mechanism (GM) on progress made in the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the Convention (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.7); and
- procedural matters: work programme, date and venue of CRIC 21 (ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.5 and ICCD/CRIC(20)/L.4).

Angola, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, welcomed the outcome of the session, acknowledging the sense of solidarity and constructive spirit during discussions, and support received. He lamented that drought had not received the attention it deserved, highlighting Africa's belief that a legally binding instrument would be the best way forward.

Panama, on behalf of the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), acknowledged progress relating to capacity building, reporting methodologies and tools,

such as the geospatial platform. She encouraged additional efforts to stimulate the production of better datasets to support decision making at all levels. She called for timely development of funds for Umbrella projects and strengthening of the LDN Fund.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UN (FAO), expressed readiness to continue supporting, *inter alia*: the implementation of integrated landscape management and land resource planning approaches to promote sustainable land management; knowledge platforms for sharing lessons and best practices to promote capacity building across sectors and levels; drought preparedness initiatives; collaborations to combat sand and dust storms; and the strengthening of capacity on applying the technical guide on integrating the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) into the implementation of the UNCCD and LDN.

Adoption of the report of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention: CRIC Vice-Chair and Rapporteur Hussein Nasrallah (Lebanon) presented a summary of the outcomes of CRIC, and the parties approved the report of CRIC without comment.

Organizational matters: Election of officers other than the Chair of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention: The CRIC approved the election of four Vice-Chairs for its twenty-first and twenty-second sessions: David Payang (Cameroon); Abduvokhid Zakhadullaev (Uzbekistan); Karima Lince (Panama); and Baptiste Astrade (France).

Chair Bishop thanked all delegates for the successful conclusion the committee's work, noting it moved the needle in key priority areas including the implementation of voluntary LDN targets and the drought initiative, and operationalization of the LDN Fund.

Chair Bishop gavelled the CRIC to a close at 8:57 pm.

In the Corridors

For Wednesday, a day devoted largely to stringing together the interlinked contact group meetings, the Sofitel lobby became a small respite for delegates dashing between contact group and informal meetings. The scene lived up to what the Great Green Wall, subject of today's Rio Conventions Pavilion, hopes to offer the world: a "cool corridor" of safe spaces exemplifying to the rest of the world truly people-centered solutions. With the air conditioning switching on and off, some quipped whether the heat was the real accelerator for progress, evidenced by sweaty faces eager to wrap it up, whatever 'it' was.

Although the outcome of one contact group was needed to progress another, there was an overall sense of cordiality. However, in the coolness of the corridor was the confession: "There is an elephant in the room, and her name is drought." The tension over the possibility of a legally binding global mechanism on drought "feels like a Cold War" to some, in the way it is not only dividing groups, but even parties within groups. Discussions on whether a new legally binding instrument on drought would be better than tackling drought through already existing mechanisms kept the issue in brackets.

The delayed resumption of the CRIC meeting in the evening signaled, at least, that efforts to work through drafts in contact groups means being able to quickly move through decisions in the CRIC and the COP.