

**Bureau of the Conference of the Parties  
to the United Nations Convention to  
Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**

**Buenos Aires, 20 March 2007**

**Report of the Bureau Meeting**

1. The President of the Seventh Session of the COP convened a meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNCCD. The meeting was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina on 20 March 2007 in the sidelines of the Fifth Session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 5).

**I. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the Agenda**

2. The meeting started at 9.30 a.m. with a welcoming remark by Mr. Michael Andrew acting President of the Bureau. The representative of Kenya conveyed the message of Hon. Prof Kivutha Kibwana, Minister for Environment and Natural Resources of Kenya and President of the Bureau, who expressed regret not being able to attend the meeting due to State functions that required his presence in Kenya.
3. The Bureau adopted the agenda taking into account an amendment made by a Bureau member

**II. Status of CRIC5 Activities**

4. The secretariat recalled activities undertaken prior to CRIC5, including the elaboration and/or update of national reports on the implementation of the Convention and the regional inputs, which were prepared through regional and/or sub regional peer review meetings.
5. More than eighty reports were received from affected country Parties from regions other than Africa. In addition, more than twenty reports were received from developed countries, international and regional organisations and institutions on measures they have taken to support the implementation of the Convention.
6. In order to contribute to the ability of affected Asian, Latin American, Caribbean and Central and Eastern European countries to address land degradation, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and its Implementing/Executing Agencies have been called upon to support capacity building for the elaboration of national reports and country profiles. In accordance with its mandate the secretariat compiled, synthesized and analysed the reports.
7. The chair of CRIC.5 reminded that the Buenos Aires Conference completes the third reporting cycle on the implementation of the Convention. He referred to the

preparation of the conclusions and recommendations of CRIC5 and thanked all regions for their contributions.

8. He informed on his intention to consult widely on the draft decisions to be considered at CRIC6. He expressed hope that the group who helped in the finalisation of the draft report of the Committee would continue assisting him in the preparation of the draft decisions, which will be based on the conclusions and recommendations of CRIC5.
9. The President of the Bureau thanked CRIC Chair for his report and his critical role in ensuring a successful outcome of CRIC5. Some Bureau members commented on CRIC5 proceedings and referred to a need for an enhanced and multifaceted support to affected countries so as to enable them to fully implement their action programmes at country levels. It was also mentioned that in future CRIC sessions, stronger reference should be made on the findings of the national reports and synthesis made available by the secretariat.
10. The Chair of CRIC responded to some queries and said that the report of the Committee combines elements from the national reports and discussions in the plenary room. He also recalled that the CRIC process is only at its third cycle and there are rooms for improvement to fully reflect all expectations.

### **III. Follow-up of Decision 23/COP.7**

11. The secretariat reported on actions taken to date to implement decision 23/COP.7. These include the following:
  - a) **Implementation of the audit recommendations**
12. The Bureau was informed on the fact that financial rules and regulations are fully adhered to; the secretariat has entered into an agreement with UNFCCC to undertake procurement services with the aim of tightening internal controls and further reducing staff costs; the recruitment of an internal auditor by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services will be finalized by the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2007. With the assistance of the UN Office in Geneva the secretariat has established a task force to develop by mid 2007 an internal policy on anti-fraud and corruption policy.
  - b) **Actions taken to prevent Budget overrun in 2006-2007**
13. The secretariat informed that it undertook an in-depth review of the financial requirements with the aim of prioritising costs. Bureau members were also informed that the capacity of the UNCCD administrative and financial services has been reduced to a level, which is likely to hamper the ability of the Unit to service the work of the secretariat. In terms of expenditures the secretariat has remained within the approved budget, and as of 31 December 2006 was at 91% of the approved budget. It is anticipated that if the current exchange rate of the Euro vs. the dollar remains close to the level it was in December 2006, there will be no budget overruns in the 2006-2007 biennium.

**c) Measures taken to deal with currency fluctuations**

14. The secretariat recalled that immediately after COP-7, letters were sent to the Parties advising them of the contributions payable in both USD and Euro, as was instructed by the COP. Many have made their payments in Euro, but since the budget was approved in USD, this has not shielded the current budget from the adverse effects of currency fluctuations. It has, however, helped in increasing reserves available under the core budget.
15. The secretariat also informed on the result of the consultations with the UN Office in Geneva (UNOG), regarding the possibility of having the current management system report in Euro. It reported on further consultations between representatives of the EU and UNOG. The response of UNOG is that maintaining the books of account and reporting- in Euro will contravene the current United Nations regulations and therefore for policy reasons it will not be possible for UNOG to accommodate the COP decision on financial and accounting system.

**d) Improving on Budget presentation**

16. The secretariat informed that observations and suggestions of COP on how to improve budget presentation are taken into account and these will be reflected in the budget proposals for the biennium 2008 - 2009.

**e) Implications of result based planning, programming and budgeting**

17. The secretariat recalled COP request to seek technical assistance in preparing a report on result based planning, programming and budgeting for review at COP.8. In this regard, Bureau members were informed that the consultancy Department of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services will provide technical advise, possibly together with a consultant having deep knowledge of result based management. The secretariat would welcome any voluntary contributions to facilitate the recruitment of such an expert.

**f) Use of Reserves to finance activities approved in the budget**

18. The secretariat has continued to ensure that budgeted activities are undertaken in a timely manner by making use of the reserves while awaiting receipt of contributions. This also applies to payments made to the Global Mechanism (GM) for its operations. It was also reported that as of 31 January 2007, about 60.3 % of the outstanding contributions (for the years 2001 – 2006) are due from one Party, who views its contribution to the core budget as voluntary. As it seems that sending notification letters does not help much in collecting this outstanding contribution, the secretariat sought the guidance of the Bureau on how to proceed regarding this Party's outstanding contributions.
19. At the invitation of the President several comments were made, which include the following: the budget issue should be considered as a whole, and not only part of the decision related to the move to Euro accounting. The budgetary problems of the Convention have different aspects, and while the move to the Euro is meant to fend

off budgetary implications of the exchange rate fluctuations, these must be taken within the context of other budgetary constraints of the Convention. Specific comments were made by a Bureau member who recommended to accelerate the recruitment process of the internal auditor. On measures taken to deal with the currency fluctuation the same Bureau member advised to contact the Barcelona Convention. The secretariat is also invited to inform the Bureau on voluntary contributions received in the supplementary Funds of the Convention. One Bureau member advised to have the issue of currency fluctuation revisited at COP8. He said that the Barcelona Convention is a Regional Treaty and its institutional linkages to UNEP are different from those of the UNCCD with the United Nations Headquarters (UNHQ). He invited Parties to be very cautious on measures being contemplated so that the existing institutional arrangements will not be put in jeopardy. Other comments focused on the problem of the arrears. One Party reiterated through a Bureau member that it views its contribution to the core budget as voluntary. CST Chair informed about difficulties to ensure a proper follow up of relevant COP decisions due to lack of predictable financial resources. He would like therefore that a specific CST budget line could be established under the core budget.

20. The secretariat responded to some questions and informed as follows:

- *On the adverse effects of the currency fluctuation:* The secretariat did its level best with regard to the Euro accounting decision. UNOG has responded clearly on the current UNHQ policy on financial and accounting system. Changing currency without the approval of the UNHQ could have implications of higher costs than efforts to address the costs of the depreciation of the US Dollar.
- *Assessed contributions to the core budget:* The secretariat reminded that the budget of the Convention is the result of negotiation among Parties. Efforts are made to continue collecting assessed contributions. However if a Party does not feel bound to pay its dues it is the responsibility of the secretariat to inform the Bureau and Conference of the Parties for their consideration as appropriate. Through the President, the secretariat made an appeal for Bureau members to call on Parties, which have not done so to pay their outstanding contributions to the core Budget.

#### **IV- 1. Follow-up to the Joint Inspection Unit report and Strategy Development to foster the implementation of the Convention: Status of the activities of the IIWG**

21. The Chair of the IIWG reported on the progress achieved in the formulation of a ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the Convention. He informed that in line with the terms of reference (TORs) for the Group two IIWG meetings were held in May and July 2006. A third IIWG meeting is scheduled in late April 2007. The meetings held succeeded in drafting an outline of what a strategic document would look like in terms of a vision/mission of the Convention. The IIWG members also discussed on the objectives of the strategy, first as a general overview and then as a more detailed listing of the possible content of each objective. A team of consultants is currently servicing the Group and assist in the drafting of the strategic document. A version of the working draft of the strategic plan has been circulated during the CRIC.5 session as document ICCD/CRIC(5)/INF.6.

22. The Chair invited all Parties through the Bureau members to review the draft text of the strategy and make comments or suggestions by 9 April 2007. He informed that his intention remains to complete the work of IIWG and transmit the report to the UNCCD in early June 2007.
23. The President of the Bureau thanked IIWG Chair for his comprehensive report. Some Bureau members informed that countries in their respective regions are currently reviewing the document tabled at CRIC5 and their comments will be sent to the IIWG Chair.

**IV- 2. Improving the Procedure of Communication of Information  
as well as the Quality and Format of Reports to be submitted  
to the COP: Status of the Activities of the AHWG.**

24. The secretariat recalled decision 8/COP.7, which established the Ad Hoc Working Group on improving the procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports to be submitted to the COP (AHWG).
25. Bureau members were also informed that in line with decision 8/COP7, the objectives of the exercise are: (a) to clarify and standardize terms and issues targeted in current reporting with a view to their eventual application in the new formats of reports; (b) to provide guidance to the COP on simplified, consistent reporting procedures and formats for reports; and (c) to facilitate a more substantive assessment of the implementation of the Convention at national level through the review of reports by Parties and observers.
26. The Group members submitted to the secretariat prior to CRIC 5 documents describing technical issues experienced in the national reporting process, and suggestions for improvement. The AHWG members have solicited contributions from all country Parties of their respective regions to prepare such submissions.
27. The members of the AHWG were invited to participate and take advantage of the regional meetings of affected country Parties in preparation for CRIC 5, with the aim of discussing relevant issues with the assistance of regional coordinators. The regional preparatory meetings took place between July and August 2006 in Panama City, Bangkok and Bonn respectively. In addition, the AHWG convened its first meeting in the margins of CRIC 5 on Saturday 17 March 2007, to consider various issues including: review of the preliminary deliberations of CRIC 5 on agenda item 7; consideration of other inputs, including preliminary outcome of the Inter-sessional Intergovernmental Working Group (IIWG); programme of work of the Group between CRIC 5 and COP 8.
28. The secretariat informed that AHWG will take into account the outcomes of CRIC 5, as presented in the report of the Committee. In order to facilitate progress and timely completion of work a technical meeting of the AHWG will be convened between CRIC 5 and COP 8, at a time and venue to be decided by the Group. It is expected that the final draft of the AHWG report, including its findings and recommendations will be agreed upon at that meeting. The final version of the AHWG report will

subsequently be submitted through the secretariat to CRIC 6.

29. It is expected that CRIC 6 will review this report and make recommendations in the form of draft decision(s) on improving the procedures for communication of information, as well as the quality and format of reports, for the consideration and final decision by COP 8.

#### **IV- 3. Committee on Science and Technology**

30. The Chair of the CST reported on the activities of the subsidiary body. He recalled that the effects of climate variations and human activities on land degradation were selected to be amongst the priority themes of CST in this biennium. Moreover, work on benchmarks and indicators were to be the most urgent CST activity to be undertaken in 2006-2007.
31. He informed that a meeting of both the CST Bureau and the CST Group of Experts (GoE) is scheduled to take place in April 2007 to deliberate on the work programme and the reports to be submitted to COP.8.
32. He also informed on the outcomes of an international workshop on climate and land degradation organised jointly by the secretariat of the CCD and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). The workshop was successfully convened from 11–15 December 2006 in Arusha, at the invitation of the Government of Tanzania, and a report of its outcome will be submitted to COP.8.
33. CST Chair briefed the Bureau on the follow up activities of various COP decisions including a request to review the functions and work of GoE (Decision 15/COP7); a request to develop guidelines on utilizing benchmarks and indicators in the preparation of national reports and benchmarks and indicators inclusion in the country profiles (Decisions 4/COP.7 & 17/COP.7); a request to assess the need for a UNCCD Fellowship Programme (Decision 15/COP7); a request to carry out the work programme on Early Warning Systems by integrating relevant benchmarks and indicators and monitoring and assessment components (Decision 18/COP.7); a request to pay particular attention to meeting the knowledge needs of African country Parties, including local communities, to combat desertification and poverty and to manage land sustainably by applying a mixture of traditional knowledge and modern technology, including information technology (Decision 1/COP.7); a request to consult with the GEF, its STAP and its implementing and executing agencies, to facilitate coherence and consistency in the elaboration of a compendium of benchmarking approaches for sustainable land management, to support the standardization of UNCCD relevant benchmarks and to strengthen related information systems and processes that should devolve to and assist African country Parties in monitoring the implementation of the Convention (Decision 1/COP.7); a request to assist in establishing standardized format for biophysical and socio-economic indicators to be used in the formulation of country profiles ( decision 8/COP7); and a request to establish an e-mail network for distribution among the experts on the roster of independent experts, of information on the CST and GoE activities, the IYDD and progress made in the implementation of the Convention ( Decision 13 / COP7).

34. On all these activities the CST Chair informed that necessary actions are being taken in liaison with the CST Bureau members and other relevant stakeholders to finalise the documents for submission to COP8.
35. The CST Chair made also three recommendations as follows:
  - i) The next CST chair should be elected at the end of COP sessions not at the beginning;
  - ii) It is estimated that 4 working days would be necessary to cover all issues on the CST programme of work at COP8;
  - iii) Follow up of CST activities deriving from COP decisions should be supervised through an intersessional CST Bureau meeting to be funded through a budget line in the core budget of the Convention.
36. Some Bureau members reiterated the pivotal role of CST in the UNCCD process and expressed support on recommendations made by the CST Chair. One Bureau member informed however that he would like to seek the view of his group on the same recommendations. Another Bureau member advised that CST should establish close working relationships with regional Thematic Programmes Networks (TPNs) as they relate to science and technology.
37. The secretariat informed that it will look into the possibility of having 4 working days devoted to CST session at COP8 taking into account the fact that more than 2 official meetings cannot take place at the same time.

#### **IV- 4. Information on the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD)**

38. The secretariat reported on the activities undertaken on the occasion of the IYDD. International meetings took place on major desertification-related issues, addressing strategic areas such as the role of women, youth, civil society and on the subject of forced migration. Awareness-raising was also achieved through the photo exhibition at the UNHQ in New York and the Desert Nights Film Festival, which took place in Rome focusing not only on land degradation, but underlining as well the magnificence of the world's deserts and their unique cultural heritage.
39. At national level: the secretariat reported on the receipt of various information concerning activities organized by some 60 country Parties and various non-governmental organizations in the context of the International Year. The activities organized by the countries include a wide range of events to help raise knowledge on the impacts of desertification and necessary measures to be taken at country level. The secretariat made available at CRIC 5 a document (ICCD/CRIC(5)/10), which provides detailed information on the steps taken towards implementing the General Assembly resolution 58/211 on IYDD. The secretariat also announced that it will assess and analyse the outputs produced during the IYDD with the view to listing the different recommendations made and submitted for consideration at COP 8.
40. The Global Mechanism informed on support being provided to translate in various languages a BBC world series on land degradation.

### **V-1. Overview of the Preparation of the Eighth Session of the Conference of the Parties**

41. The secretariat recalled decision 31/COP.7, which accepted the generous offer of the Government of Spain (GoS) to host the Eighth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 8) in autumn 2007. Bureau members were informed that the secretariat has initiated consultations with the GoS in early 2006 in close liaison with the Conference Services Division of the UN Office in Geneva (UNOG).
42. The GoS proposed on 22 February 2007 that COP 8 could take place in Madrid from 3 to 14 September 2007. The secretariat communicated the proposal to the President of COP 7 for consideration.
43. At the invitation of the President a representative of the Government of Spain made a presentation on arrangements being made in Madrid for the organization of COP8.
44. The Bureau expressed its sincere gratitude to the GoS and welcomed the proposal to organise COP8 from 3 to 14 September 2007 in Madrid. The secretariat is requested to continue working collaboration with the GoS with a view to finalizing the necessary preparations for the Conference.

### **V- 2. Facilitation of the Participation of the eligible country Parties and NGOs**

45. The secretariat informed on the importance to contribute to the Special Fund for participation, so as to enable a significant participation of representatives from eligible countries and NGOs. It is anticipated that participation of two delegates from the least developed and one participant from the other eligible countries to COP.8 will be financed through the Special Fund for participation
46. The secretariat recalled decision 23/COP.7, which invites Parties, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, to make contributions to the Special Fund, in order to support the participation of developing country Parties, and in particular least developed country Parties affected by desertification and/or drought, particularly those in Africa, in the sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies.
47. Bureau members were informed that the total amount required for the participation of 190 delegates from eligible countries and a minimum of 32 representatives of NGOs amount to USD 1,744.000.
48. The secretariat informed that a notification letter was sent in early January 2007 to all developed country Parties inviting them to make voluntary contribution to facilitate optimum participation at the COP.8.
49. One Bureau member informed that the document on the estimated costs for facilitating the participation of eligible delegates has been forwarded to countries of his group for consideration. The President encouraged all Parties that can do so to contribute to the Special Fund.

## **VI. Succession of the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD.**

50. The President invited the Bureau member who proposed this item on the Agenda of the meeting to introduce the Subject.
51. The Bureau member informed that the Presidency of his group sent a letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations referring to the end of the term of office of the current Executive Secretary in December of this year. He said that the letter underlines the outstanding performance and leadership of the outgoing Executive Secretary. The letter invites the Secretary General to undertake a transparent and consultative process for the nomination of the next Executive Secretary. The Bureau member suggested that candidates for this post should meet important criteria, including high-level political and managerial skills as well as a deep knowledge of sustainable development issues.
52. Another Bureau member underlined the need to closely associate all Bureau members in the consultative process for the selection of the suitable candidate.
53. One Bureau member made a statement and informed that his region has already identified a candidate.
54. Another Bureau member advised that the selection process should take place and conclude in a given time frame so as to avoid a vacuum at that position. He referred to procedures that have been followed recently for the selection of senior UN officials, including at the top level of the secretariat of other Rio Conventions. He also referred to decision 4 / COP1 and stressed the need to maintain the Post at the level of Assistant Secretary-General, taking into account recent developments, which took place in the life of the Convention and the current level of the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on Climate Change. He finally informed that his region has also initiated the identification process of a suitable candidate.
55. Other Bureau members made various suggestions on the way forward referring among others to the role of the Secretary general; a previous resolution of the UNGA; the need to keep the Bureau informed on any development; the principle of a geographical rotation and how it was considered during recent appointments of the Heads of CBD and UNFCCC; and the need to refer to criteria used in other Rio Conventions.
56. In conclusion, the President proposed the following: The President of the Bureau is mandated to send a letter to the Secretary General of the UN inviting him to advise the Bureau on how he intends to carry out the nomination process of the next Executive Secretary taking into account criteria such as political and managerial skills and knowledge of sustainable development issues, particularly combating desertification. It is also agreed that the letter of the President will be copied to all Bureau members.

### **Other Business**

57. At the request of a Bureau member, the secretariat informed that regional meetings prior to COP8 would be facilitated subject to the availability of funds. Some Bureau members stressed the need for such regional events considered essential to harmonise their viewpoints on important issues to be examined at COP8. Given that financial resources may be difficult to mobilise in time for the organisation of all regional meetings, Bureau members advised to explore possibilities to facilitate the organisation of some of these events in Spain back to back with COP8.
58. The secretariat and the Global Mechanism informed the Bureau on the status of the elaboration of their joint work programme.

### **Next meeting**

59. The Bureau agreed that the next meeting will be held prior to COP8. The exact date will be communicated in due time to Bureau members following consultation between the President and the secretariat. One Bureau member advised that 2 or 3 options should be proposed for a meeting date.
  60. The President thanked all Bureau members for their participation and declared the meeting closed at 15:20 p.m.
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